

# Amant

## Learning Resource:

Gala Porras-Kim

### *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape*

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## About this Learning Resource:

This Learning Resource provides a framework for preparing you and a group of young people for your visit to Amant. It offers suggestions for in-gallery activities that respond to the artworks on display, supporting the exploration and understanding of some of the key themes present within the exhibition.

- The activities in this resource can be self-led or co-led with a member of Amant's Visitor Experience team. Co-facilitated visits for groups of young people are available on Thursdays and Fridays during our opening hours, on a first-come, first-served basis.  
**To book your visit, please email [tours@amant.org](mailto:tours@amant.org).**
- This resource is most suitable for young people aged 12-17. Use your expertise to adapt the activities to suit the needs of your group, and to expand the ideas within it in ways most relevant to your teaching.
- We recommend that you review this resource prior to your visit to Amant. Please feel free to reach out with any follow-up questions or suggestions. Further information about the Gala Porrás-Kim exhibition *Precipitation in an Arid Landscape*, including downloadable curatorial guides are available via our website.  
**[www.amant.org/guide](http://www.amant.org/guide)**
- Amant provides materials to accompany this resource, including paper, pencils, and clipboards. Please visit our reception desk for more information
- Each activity in this resource is estimated to last 30-40 minutes, but we encourage you to go at your own pace.

## About the Artist:

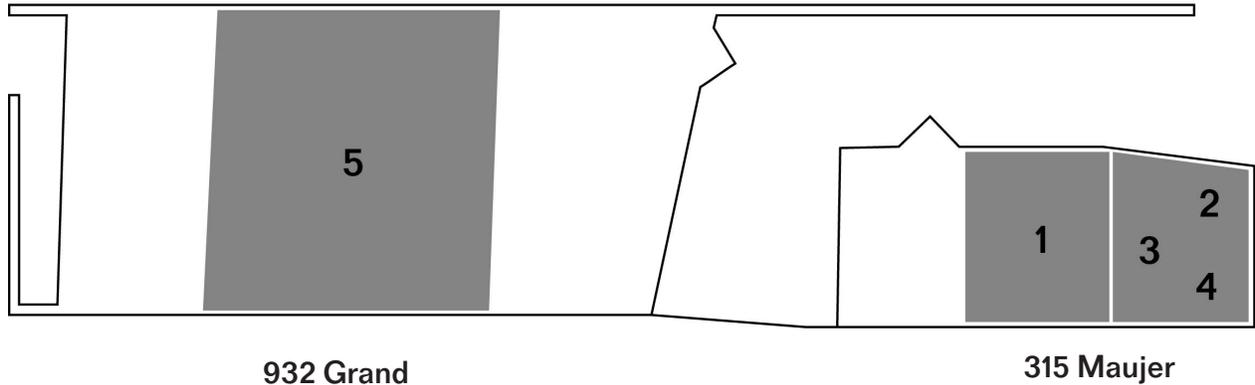
The work of Colombian born, LA-based artist Gala Porrás-Kim (b. 1984) offers new perspectives on the objects and geographical areas defined as 'cultural heritage', such as the artifacts found in museum collections or archaeological sites that are designated as 'World Heritage' by UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization].

She is especially concerned with the changes in meaning and value that occur when artifacts are removed from their original habitat and given a new purpose: as objects of study and display in Museums or other institutions. Often spending many months researching the history of specific cultural artifacts within museum collections, such as the British Museum in London or the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, Porrás-Kim raises questions surrounding institutional practices related to object conservation, ownership, and display, and suggests alternative methods for understanding and caring for the objects in a way that better reflects the context from which they came.



Gala Porrás-Kim asks:  
If the objects in museums could speak,  
what would they say?  
And to whom?

## About the works on this exhibition



### On view at 315 Gallery

In this exhibition, each of our three gallery spaces displays a collection of artworks dedicated to a different research project undertaken by Gala Porrás-Kim.

Each project is based on a specific archeological site or museum.

**1)** In our first gallery at 315 Maujer you will find *Asymptote Towards an Ambiguous Horizon* (2021), consisting of twelve graphite drawings, alongside a topographic model and sound installation, that offers various interpretations of Gobekli Tepe, a Neolithic temple situated in present-day Turkey and built over 12,000 years ago.

The rediscovery of this site in 1963 called into question the prevailing story of humanity up to that point. By predating the agricultural turn, the site led archaeologists to dispute the accepted idea that the development of farming was the primary reason for why homo sapiens transitioned from small, hunter-gatherer groups into larger, settled communities. Porrás-Kim is interested in exploring the uncertainty surrounding such grand theories of civilization and how our fundamental understanding of human history continues to be written and re-written.

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On display in the second gallery in 315 are three separate groups of artworks:

- 2) *Proposal for the Reconstituting of Ritual Elements for the Sun Pyramid at Teotihuacan* (2019).
- 3) *Rehearsal for Surveying the Ruins* (2017).
- 4) *Leaving the Institution Through Cremation is Easier than as a Result of a Deaccession Policy* (2021).

Each of these groupings includes a mixture of visual and material forms to represent a set of questions or interventions posed by Porras-Kim in relation to a different artifact or heritage site, including the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, Mexico's most visited archaeological monument; *La Mojarra Stela 1*, a 8-ft tall slab inscribed with early glyphs held at the Anthropology Museum of Xalapa, Mexico; and the preserved remains of Luzia, the earliest known evidence of a human population in the Americas, that were partially destroyed by a fire at the National Museum of Brazil in 2018.



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On view at 932 Gallery

5) At our largest gallery at 932 Grand you will find the exhibition's namesake, *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* (2021), a project comprised of several works that investigate the historical and legal facts surrounding the dredging and subsequent removal of objects from the Sacred Cenote, a water-filled sink-hole located in Chichen Itza, one of Mexico's most important archaeological sites built by the ancient Mayans around 600 AD.

Seven large drawings displayed on the walls contain intricately detailed depictions of the cenote artifacts that remain held within the collection of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University. These sacred objects, made of materials including ceramic, jade, copal, obsidian, and shell as well as human remains, were originally deposited in the cenote as part of ritual offerings to the Mayan rain god Chaac and remained well-preserved by the water until their rediscovery and subsequent removal in the early 20th century.

Situated in the forefront of these works is a quartz-like slab of copal, a natural gum resin frequently used by the Mayans in the fabrication of their ceremonial offerings, mixed with dust from the Peabody's storage facility where the objects currently remain. Subtly located on the ceiling directly above this sculpture is an air vent from which a drop of rainwater falls every 30 seconds on to the copal below. For Porras-Kim, this is her way of intervening on behalf of the objects by symbolically re-connecting them to Chaac, as was originally intended.



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In 932 gallery you can also find a transparent circular room that houses primary and secondary documentation charting the initial archaeological expedition and excavation of the artifacts, the circumstances surrounding their journey to the Peabody Museum, along with the subsequent years of protracted, and sometimes controversial, negotiations regarding their partial repatriation to Mexico.

Much of this centers on the original letters sent between Edward H. Thompson, the archaeologist who led the initial expedition in 1894 and eventually dedicated his life to the study of the Mayans, and the curators at the Peabody.

Mounted on the exterior of this room is a formal letter addressed to Jane Pickering, the current director of the Peabody, in which Porrás-Kim, taking on the role of mediator on behalf of Chaac, suggests some alternative methods of care for the artifacts that remain in the museum's collection. As with the other works present in the exhibition, Porrás-Kim returns to her central question: Can objects speak? And if so, for whom, and for what purposes?



**To know more about the historical context of each work you can download the exhibition guide in our website: [www.amant.org/guide](http://www.amant.org/guide)**

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## Activity #1: Reenactment

### Key Words:

*Archive*: a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people.

*Reenactment*: a dramatic recreation of an event from the past.

*Repatriation*: the process of returning an item of cultural value to its owner or place of origin.

### Materials:

Script - ***please ask a visitor representative for copies.***

Props (only for tours co-facilitated by a member of the Amant team)

### Duration:

30 – 40 min

### Description:

In this workshop we are going to reenact the letters and documents displayed within the documentation room as part of *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* by Gala Porras-Kim. By embodying this archive, we will attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the story that informs this archive, the journey of the objects that are currently located at the Peabody Museum, and the relationships between the people involved in their excavation.

### Activity:

- Participants: Max. 15
- Each participant takes one script. Decide who is going to read each character following the list provided at the beginning of the script. Some characters can be read by more than one person, in that case, follow the numbers after each name.
- There is a prop assigned to some characters.
- Start reading the script following the numbers.

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- What do you think about how these objects were extracted and taken out of Mexico? Do you think this was important in regards to their conservation?
- Talk about repatriation, where do you think these objects should be? Consider their conservation in relation to their purpose and their origin.
- Where should these objects belong today?
- Can you propose any alternative methods of learning about the past without preserving objects in museums?

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## Activity #2: Mediating with the rain

### Key Words:

*Conservation*: the preservation of art and objects of cultural heritage by museum and research institutions.

*Provenance*: the history of legal ownership of an object.

### Materials:

Copies of the letter from Gala Porras-Kim to Jane Pickering, paper, pencils.

- ***please ask a visitor representative for copies.***

### Duration:

20 min

### Description:

Through this activity we will discuss the role of contemporary museums in relation to the preservation and exhibition of objects whose origin comes from ancient civilizations. Based on *Mediating with the rain*, an artwork by Gala Porras-Kim, a letter she wrote to the director of the Peabody museum, we will propose alternative practices could be develop in order to extend new ways of caring and maintaining the object's original functions.

### Activity:

- Ask someone to read the letter from the artist Gala Porras-Kim to Ms. Jane Pickering, director of Harvard's Peabody Museum. Copies of the letter will be distributed.
- Spark the conversation: let's rethink the idea of preservation. Do you think these objects should be preserved according to current methods of conservation or, should we let them follow their natural course?
- The artist suggests diverse ways of mediating with the rain. Take five minutes to imagine another intervention that could be implemented by the museum to allow these artifacts to regain some of their original function and purpose. Write it down or draw your idea and share it with the class.

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- Who do you think should be involved in taking decisions on how to exhibit and preserve these objects?
- Why do you think Gala is making these suggestions to the director of the museum, Jane Pickering? (Read the last part of the letter again if needed)
- Do you agree with Gala when she mentions that the objects were probably never meant to leave the cenote? Why or why not?
- Do we agree or disagree with the idea that these objects should not be preserved forever?
- Who or what in your opinion should “own” these objects?

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## Activity #3: Cabinet

### Key Words:

*Object*: a material thing that can be seen, touched and fulfills a function.

*Classification*: the action or process of classifying something according to shared qualities or characteristics.

### Materials:

Color pencils, objects

Cabinet template - *please ask a visitor representative for copies.*

### Duration:

30 – 40 mins

### Description

*Cabinet* is an activity that invites us to reflect on the role that objects play in our daily life. Through the making of a collective drawing, we will represent our own cabinet of contemporary objects. During the process, we will make our own classifications, and discuss the importance and function of these objects as if we were museum conservators of the future. We will take the time to analyze and observe in detail these objects to carefully represent them through drawing.

### Activity

- Start by choosing an object you are carrying with you. Why is this object important to you? What function does it fulfill in your daily life?
- With all the objects on the table, we will decide categories for them, these could be by their use or materiality. Following these categories is how we will decide to display them on our cabinet.
- Use a pencil and draw your object's silhouette over the paper provided.
- Take a closer look to your object, which materials is it made of? Use color pencils to represent your object's materiality and condition. Add as many details as you can.
- Once you finish, write down the label of your object. Include name, materiality, year it was made and a little description of its function.

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- How long do you think these objects will last? Think about ceramic jars versus plastic bottles.
- How do you think these objects would look in the future? Would we still need them? Would they be as important as they are today?
- Which kind of society are we describing through these objects?