

Pocha Nostra Manifesto:

for a "post-democratic" era 2020

A note from La Pocha headquarters: This document has been extracted from various Pocha Nostra "manifestos" and "anti-manifestos" from the last 23 years. Due to the spooky 'Trump Effect,' it has been distilled to its minimum/maximum. Still in permanent progress, it will hopefully give to our beloved collaborators, followers, producers, and curators currently working with us, a strong sense of who we are and how we work. If you wish to reprint it, simply ask us for permission.

Please use it in any way you wish and most importantly enjoy it! If we don't love what we do, why pinche bother?

Bear in mind it is a living, ever changing "open literary system." Therefore, it is still full of typos and awkward syntax. We are currently looking for a writer with amazing editing skills who can proofread the text for publication.

We are also interested in foreign curators and intellectuals attempting a feral translation into other languages. Just double check the "neologisms" and pochismos with us.

***Here's a version,** in progress, like life, like live performance...like the way our deviant minds, bodies and multiple communities work.*

Version 69.3.0

- **"What is La Pocha Nostra? A bunch of ethno-cyborgs, sacred monsters, deviant ballerinas & trans/shamans.**
- **How do we survive? En chino y al revés?"**
- **"Pocha Nostra T-shirt: BULLETPROOF:**
- **Latin@Queer/Immigrant ... y que?"**
- **"Precisely because we are a border troupe, all Pocha Nostra truths are half-truths. O sea, we are an exception to a non-existing rule."**
- **Motto for the twenty-first-century artist/warrior: "Permanently outraged but always tender."**

La Pocha Nostra is an ever-morphing transdisciplinary arts organization. Based in San Francisco with factions in other cities and countries, our original mission statement (2001) read: ***"We provide a center and forum for a loose network of international rebel artists from various disciplines, generations, gender persuasions and ethnic backgrounds."***

For 25 years, La Pocha Nostra has been fully engaged in the field of performance and live art through a myriad collaborations, lectures, writings, pedagogy, artivism, and digital art. We have reinvented ourselves constantly in order to remain current, sexy and edgy. We have operated at the intersecting points of new and old (political, cultural, geographic and conceptual) borders. Inevitably, our language, performance strategies, aesthetics, membership and location have changed with the times. We invite you to jam with some of our ever-morphing strategies and core ideas.

Here are some of our ongoing strategies and core ideas.

Who is La Pocha Nostra? Are we, as we've been perceived by journalists, a bunch of "neo-indian cyborgs, sacred monsters, deviant ballerinas, border dandies, trans-shamans, inter-cultural chameleons and identity thieves?"

In a sense, we are...but we are many other things:

A spoken word poem: *"...an intercultural poltergeist, a migrant dream that suddenly becomes a nightmare; a pagan religion located in the body, a bun ch of malfunctioning cyborgs who rebel against the scientist or the curator, an urban tribe of mythological monsters, a deterritorialized desire, a border epiphany, a woman pierced with corporate flags, a mariachi crucified by the border patrol, a queer phantom mariachi fighting eviction and deportation, a shooting gallery of broken stereotypes, a clumsy but efficient form of radical democracy...a deeply committed crew of artist peers and friends...*

With radical tenderness and compassion, La Pocha Nostra has been fighting colonial inner demons and postcolonial re/oppression at the intersection of race, gender and class since 1993, fighting la migra, the PRI,*1 the formalist art critics & the capital "Art World"; fighting our own fetishistic and kinky desires for 20 years, at least; and of course, fighting terror with all our indigenous brothers and sisters since 1492.

We are a unique community of deviant, radical artists still trying to make sense of the post-zapatista, post-"occupy," post-Arab-spring global culture gone wrong; trying to make sense of the sudden arrival of the Trump/ocalypse, the Mexican Crime Cartels, and the pervasive anti-immigrant rhetoric in favour of the (fictional) construction of walls, or rather the staging of a parallel reality constructed by "alternative facts" and political Reality TV...but we are also trying to pay the bills and avoid eviction!

We claim a border/less America in the largest sense of the term. We live in the South of the North, and in the North of the South.

We claim an extremely unpopular position in the post 9/11 USA: No homeland, no fear, no borders, no patriotism, no nation-state, no censorship. In the Trump era, we stand strong under these same

principles: We are matriots not patriots, “Americans” in the Hemispheric sense of the term, with a devotion to land and people and not to the leaders of governments and corporations. Now more than ever La Pocha needs to reinvent and reenergize itself under these principles in order to remain raw, relevant and present in our troubled contemporary times.

We are committed to presenting a poly-cultural and pluriversal “America” from an internationalist, radical humanist, and progressive perspective. Our America is still an open society with porous borders and transnational communities; our America is neither “Red” nor “Blue” it is brown, black, yellow, pink, green and transparent. It always has been…”here,” in the third world within the first world and vice versa; “Here”in the US, Europe, Latin America and the Global South in the Regional North!

La Pocha Nostra is a virtual *maquiladora*, a conceptual assembly line that produces body-based brand-new metaphors and symbols, and that recycles, retouches and rebrands old ones. We create/re-create new images and words to articulate the complexities of our times. Through *sui-generis* combinations of artistic languages, mediums and syncretic performance formats, we explore the interface of migration, hybrid identities, border culture, globalization-gone-wrong, de/colonization, and new technologies.

La Pocha collaborates across national borders, race, gender, language, class, generational lines, political beliefs and assorted theories: Post-colonial, Queer, Trans-Feminist, neo-chicano, neo indigenous, Quantum, Shamanic, et al. Our collaborative model functions both as an act of “citizen border diplomacy” and as a means to create ephemeral communities of like-minded people like you.

We are also a “live art laboratory,” an international “loose association of rebel artists” thinking together, exchanging ideas, aspirations, music scores, playlists, props and creating on site projects. The basic premise of these collaborations is founded on an ideal: if we learn to cross borders on stage, in our bodies, in the gallery or museum, we may learn how to do so in larger social spheres and transgress what keeps us apart. We hope others will be challenged to do the same. This is our ultimate radical act.

La Pocha Nostra has died and has been resurrected dozens of times. Throughout the years, 23 this year, LPN has been a garage performance troupe, an experimental sideshow, an interactive living museum and curiosity cabinet, an inter-cultural orgy, an ecosexual parade in the streets of San Francisco, a wild night club in Berlin, a deviant travelling party, a politicized x-treme fashion show, a conceptual surgical theater with transgressed bodies laid on top of each other, scenarios of the unconsciousness, a bus full of radical nuns driven by a sex worker...or vice versa, etc.

Pocha has also acted as a performance clinic, a nomadic performance school, a lab of misfit identities, a weird town meeting, an intellectual rave, and a virtual resource center. Pocha can also be a Trojan horse (with or without condom? sin condón!) by finding the way to involve other artists in the creative process. La Pocha is this and that and everything in between, always with fluctuating borders and ALWAYS flaunting our "otherness." We are bold, and always occupy the space in-between.

*** La Pocha challenges traditional art world mythologies.** We do NOT accept the role of the artist as a suffering bohemian and misunderstood genius drowning in the angst born of their existential suffering and personal traumas. La Pocha artists are first and foremost social critics and chroniclers, inter-cultural diplomats, re-interpreters and mis-translators, radical pedagogues, informal ombudsmen, media pirates, information architects, reverse anthropologists, experimental linguists, border semioticians with P/T jobs as "high/low tech exotic inter-cultural fetishes for rent during weekends." We even bartend at times.

***To us, the artist is, above all, an active citizen, a public citizen immersed in the great debates of our times.** Our place is located not only in the "Art World" but in the world at large, in the patterns and corners of everyday life. The so-called "Art World" is just a safe place to gather, an irreplaceable rehearsal space where alternative cultural models are developed and later on tested in other realms including community, activism, politics, radical pedagogy, new technologies, and media. For us the capital "Art World" is merely a space to learn new experimental languages to talk back to power and decolonize ourselves. It is a training field for resistance, reinvention, and "imaginary activism."

At different times and for different reasons, we have been called: "Decadent," "sado-masochists," "not chicano enough," "too chicano," "reverse racists," "hipster racists," "anti-American," "anti-Mexican," "anti-catholic," "gratuitously violent," "chicano art on steroids," "unnecessarily shocking," "controversial," "too queer," "faux queer," "too bizarre," "elitist & artsy," "too populist," "too theoretical," "politically incorrect," "too triggering," "always nude," "perpetrators of stereotypes," "too theatrical," and "not really theater". We are easy targets of orthodoxy, normativity, and mono-culture. It's called "performance art".

Our favorite term was when Indian theorist Rustham Barucha called us "the dead-end of multiculturalism." But our very VERY favorite name is "Essentialists of hybridity," a beautiful contradiction in terms. It's like being called "Spanglish purists" or "puritan sexworkers."

At the same time, we have also been labeled "the most influential Pan-Latino performance troupe of the past ten years." We blush.

La Pocha is an ever-changing community. Pocha can be two people or fifty people in physical or virtual presence. Inspired again by the early zapatistas, we create "regenerative and sustainable sources of artistic labor built from temporary concentric and overlapping circles." Sounds corny but it's pinche true! And this open structure truly works. We've been around for a while. Here's the basic blueprint:

The inner sphere comprises the "core members of the troupe" (artists/artivists/pedagogues) whose membership is determined by their degree of commitment and time.

The subsequent middle circle embraces performance artists, activists, curators, musicians, filmmakers, and designers working part time on several Pocha projects. It's our incredible net of Pocha collaborators, guest artists and akin organizations in various countries...

The last outer and overlapping circle includes artist collaborators, students, workshop participants, theorists, and producers throughout the world who may work with us in a specific project if/when the time and place are right.

We believe that there is enough room in the conceptual/performance jacuzzi for everyone (well, almost everyone).

Our constant change of membership inevitably alters the nature of the work and contributes to the permanent process of reinvention. This continuous shifting multi-dimensionality can hinder sustainability. True. But maybe, we hold on to this unconsciously as our antidote to the risk of institutionalization and corporatization!

We sadly see so many performance troupes behaving like mainstream institutions and traditional theater collectives. They love grants! They spend all their time working on grants. They also love big festivals and water down their material to make themselves "festival-friendly"! They lose touch with the world. It breaks our heart. We call it "the blue men syndrome."

How do we survive? We have an online "Conceptual Credit Union" to fundraise against the corporatization of culture, the hipsterization of the barrio and the dismissal of conceptual border art by the mainstream art world.

We adopt the Medusa model: Multiple production bases and overlapping circles (physical and virtual) with troupe members across the world assuming their roles as "Pocha ambassadors" and leading the local forces under the imperative of a clear and transparent communication with the San Francisco Headquarters. We learned this model from the zapatistas.

We remain anti-essentialist and anti-nationalist by nature. This permeates every level of our practice. "Pocha" is hybridity, lives in the permanent border, and embraces "impurities" as a tool against any kind of essentialism. Hybridity is the only condition of our Imagi/nation state from which we can talk back, empower our bodies, and free ourselves.

We continue to embrace diversity and complexity regarding inclusion for workshop participants, pedagogues, collaborators & Pocha "guest artists." La Pocha is and will always be about diversity in gender, race, age, ethnic background, nationality, and everything in between.

The Spanglish neologism "Pocha Nostra" translates as either "our impurities" or "the cartel of cultural bastards or traitors." We love this poetic ambiguity. It reveals an attitude towards art and society: cross-racial, cross-trans-or post-national, poly-gendered, post-ultra-retro-experimental, neo-indio, or a remix of the same or none, ¿y qué? ¿Cuál es el pedo? After all, nation states are dysfunctional and dated.

La Pocha practices radical tenderness and radical compassion as a daily existential and professional ethos. We treat others the way we wish to be treated (on a case by case basis of course), from janitors, cooks and security guards -- up to museum curators and festival directors. We are only formidable enemies of those abusing positions of exaggerated power.

Our common denominator is our desire to challenge, inhabit, cross, and erase dangerous borders between art and politics, practice and theory; between artist and spectator, mentor and apprentice, the human body and our cultural nightmares and twisted subjectivity.

We strive to eradicate myths of purity and dissolve the borders surrounding culture, ethnicity, gender, language, power, and métier. In the act of crossing and erasing borders, we don't deny that we might create new ones that keep challenging us. Sadly, at this point in time, 23 years since we began, these are still considered "radical acts." Chingao!

La Pocha operates from a horizontal model of continual, clumsy and chaotic democratic negotiation, radical tenderness, listening, patience, heroic sustainability and love. We are far from perfect, and perfection is very far from our desire. But one thing we have learned is that a star-driven vertical model does not work for us. We strive for humble and egalitarian participation from our core troupe members and to honor the hard and committed work of our many affiliates throughout the globe. For some of us this is a utopia, a distant marker in the horizon; for others, the younger ones, a mere daily anarchist practice.

La Pocha functions through an open belief system: performance is theory and practice. We strongly believe in embodied theory and embodied artivism. We strongly trust the idea that consciousness is stimulated through non-traditional presentational formats stressing the role of the

"intelligent body", and the concept of "embodied poetics and ideas". Therefore, we view each performance project as an effective catalyst for thought, action, and debate.

La Pocha encourages public dialogue. By embodying theory and art, we challenge theorists and activists to be more performative and artists to explore intellectual avenues and write. Our hope is that our performance and ritual formats are less authoritarian and static than those we see in academia, religion, pop culture, high art, and politics.

La Pocha encourages internal dialogue. Our rehearsals and workshops, virtual weekly staff meetings, quarterly board meetings, and open web documents and google jam sessions involve intense discussions of current issues. At these "gatherings" we explore new ways of thinking about art and community, and new audience development. We highlight the theoretical and methodological possibilities of performance as a way of addressing the changing role of the artist in society. We are also discovering how to better work together from different geographies.

La Pocha's performance pedagogy performs a major role in our political praxis. Our pedagogy is also becoming more and more part of our artistic praxis. The interaction of these two universes is an ongoing process; the process itself becomes "the ultimate project."

Our pedagogy encourages autonomy. It challenges authoritarian hierarchies by horizontally spreading responsibility and participation. It also challenges specialized knowledge by creating temporary utopian spaces where interdisciplinary dialogue and artistic imagination can flourish.

These temporary "utopian zones" are loosely framed by, but not contained within, a pentagon-shape of radical ideas and actions whose vertices are community, education, activist politics, new technologies, and experimental aesthetics. Every project we undertake is loosely framed by these parameters. "Radical Tenderness" and ongoing "trans-cultural trans-disciplinary border crossings," concepts developed by La Pocha 15 years ago, are the framing device for this "utopian/dystopian pedagogical space."

La Pocha workshops serve as an anthropological and artistic experiment where multiple communities of difference can find common ground in performance. It is our connective tissue and *lingua franca.*

La Pocha seeks an unique aesthetic. Functioning as a kind of "crossover live culture jam," our "robo-baroque" and "ethno-techno-cannibal aesthetic" samples and devours everything we encounter including border, global pop culture, TV, film, rock & roll, hip-hop, comics, journalism, anthropology, pornography, religious imagery, theory and, of course, the history of the visual and performing arts.

We cross-reference this information, embody it, and then re-interpret it for a live audience "thereby refracting fetishized constructs of otherness." We become the "shocking" spectacle of our staged hybrid identities by using our highly decorated and accessorized bodies. In this sense we are always, physically, culturally and technologically hybrid beings, what Sandy Stone once called "cultural cyborgs" and what Mexican writer Roger Bartra refers to as "artificial savages" resisting projected stereotypes and exorcising the body from colonial projections perpetuated over time.

This aesthetic praxis works most of the time. However, every now and then we engender a true monster, bad art, cheesy live art...and that's also fine.

La Pocha's aesthetic praxis involves ethnic and gender bending, cultural transvestism and power inversions. Many of our images show women, queers, transgender people and "people of color" in positions of power. In this inverted universe, cultural borders have moved to center stage while the alleged mainstream is pushed to the margins and treated as exotic and unfamiliar. We often place the audience member/viewer/reader in the position of a "foreigner" or a "minority" living in the suburbs of our temporary performance city.

La Pocha crosses dangerous aesthetic borders. We often cede our will and the stage to our audience. We invite them to co-create the piece and to participate in our extreme performance games and rituals riddled with post-colonial implications. We transform audience members into instant performance artists. These games are integral aspects of our work. It sometimes works, but sometimes it backfires. But we try to work with the

accident. It's is part of the game. If we fall, we trust that someone will catch us in mid air.

La Pocha is an ever-growing "living archive." Our personal collection comprises thousands of original photographs, raw videos, books, magazines, soundtracks, performance documents, props, artist-made objects, books, and weird one-of-a-kind costumes. Two thirds of our archives are located in San Francisco and the other third in Mexico City. But our *arte-factos* and archives keep growing in every place where a Poch@ lives.*2

In order to really "walk the talk" outlined in this manifesto, La Pocha Nostra is in a process of shifting from **a star-driven vertical model** to a more horizontal one in which ALL members involved in an specific project share equal responsibilities, perks, rights and payment. This implementation of a neo-anarchist model responds to the claims of the younger members, along with a weak economy in the arts, and the scary resurgence of old geo-political and ideological borders in the world.

Nos aventamos, que no? Untranslatable! Why?

Precisely because we are a border troupe, all Pocha Nostra truths are half-truths. O sea, we are an exception to all non-existing rules.

La Pocha is, above all, a utopian idea. Our ideal setting is a marker in the political distance, a philosophical direction, a quantum dream, a horizon of possibilities, a fucked up anti-poema co-written by Anne Sexton & Nicanor Parra.

Sometimes our frail egos and financial hardships cause us to fall into personal voids, experience compassion fatigue, and temporarily lose our path and compass... In these times of X-treme crisis in all fronts, to recapture our strength, place, clarity, voice and dignity, we count on our international community.

Truly yours,
The LPN "core members":
on fire, during the "post democratic" era of "good ol' USA,"

La Pocha's current core company members are: **Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Balitronica, Emma Tramposch, Federico Tello & EmaLee Arroyo.**

La Pocha Nostra past members include: Saul Garcia Lopez, LROD, Juan Ibarra, James Luna, Michele Ceballos Michot, Ansuman Biswas, Rachel Rodgers, Violeta Luna, Emiko R. Lewis, Alex Bradley, Erica Mott, Orlando Britto-Jinorio, Roberto Sifuentes, Gabriela Salgado, Dani d'Emilia, Lisa Wolford (RIP), Rakini Devi, Daniel B. Coleman, Maria Alejandra Estrada, Amapola Prada, Heather Haynes, Orlando Britto-Jinorio.

21st Century Pocha "Honorary Members" include: Rene Yanez (RIP), Felipe Ehrenberg (RIP), Reverend Billy, Guillermo Galindo, Gustavo Vazquez, Annie Sprinkle, Beth Stephens (The Ecosexual power duo), Mara Bugic (City of Women), Lois Keidan (LADA London), Zen Cohen, Ron Athey, Franko B, Tim Miller, Amelia Jones, Manuel Vason, Herani Hache, RJ Muna, Logan Phillips, Richard Schechner, Diana Taylor, Marlene Cancio Ramirez, Mariellen Sanford, Richard Gough, Leo Garcia, Suzanne Lacy, Carlos Martinez Renteria, Cesar Martinez, Marco Barrera Bassols, *"El Reynito"* Corona, Julia Antivilo, Cristina King-Miranda, Gloria Maldonado and of course, *la banda querida* from El "Instituto Hemisférico de Performance y Política" across the continent, The 18th Street Arts Center (Los Angeles), Las "Smelly Girls" from Athens, the 'Non-Grata' cabrones, El Galpón & Yuyachkani (Lima, Peru).

There are also over 30 current collaborators and "guest artists" spread throughout 10 different countries including Micha Espinosa, Natalie Brewster Nguyen, Jose Torres Tama, Maria Eugenia Chellet, Esther Baker-Tarpaga, Zen Cohen, Andrea Pagnes & Verena Stenke (the pluribus VestAndPage duo), Francesca Carol Rolla, Lothar Muller, Lechedevirgen, Gerardo Juarez Jurado, Justin Hoover, Praba Pilar, Larry Bogad, Amsel and the Cat, Lukas Avendaño, Maria Eugenia Chellet, Missa Blue, Princess Vuvu, Norma Flores, Fotini Kalle, Erika Bulle, Sandra Pestana, DJ Ricardiaco, Martin Renteria and many, MANY other incredible rebel artists, artivists, curators and radical theorists across borders...

We feel so pinche honored working in different projects with each one of the participants of this wild network of trans/national locas y locos!

If we forgot a name, please cut us some slack.