

# Amant

Learning Resource:

Carla Zaccagnini

## ***Cuentos de cuentas/ Accounts of Accounting***

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*Writing Memory* by Phedra Deonarine

*Common Threads* by Cassandra Mayela



## 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 Carla Zaccagnini's exhibition *Cuentos de cuentas*, including downloadable curatorial guides and in-person activities are available via our website.  
**[www.amant.org/guide](http://www.amant.org/guide)**
- Amant provides materials to accompany this resource, such as 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.

## Keywords

**Currency:** the system of money that is used in a particular country, such as the US dollar

**Devaluation:** in economics, this term refers to a decrease in the official value of a currency in relation to other currencies

**Migration:** the geographic movement of people from one place to another

**Memory:** processes used to acquire, store, retain, and later retrieve information

**South America:** a geographic area described as the southern subregion of a single continent called America; it consists of 12 nations, including Brazil and Argentina

**Value:** the importance, worth or usefulness of something; in economic terms, it often refers to the amount of money ascribed to an object or a service

## About the Artist

Carla Zaccagnini was born in Argentina. She currently lives between São Paulo, Brazil and Malmö, Sweden. Her practice is informed by the various cultural and historical references of the context in which she grew up: from colonialism to Latin American neoliberalism and informal economies. Her research tackles abstract historical and social structures, but her works consistently focus on very tangible and familiar objects. Through these objects and the stories that exist around them, she unpacks how history is constructed in specific contexts.

Carla Zaccagnini asks us to think about how we remember the past and to question what history can be. For Carla, the “official” versions of history we read in books at school are just one of the many ways we can tell the story of the past. Instead, she uses her own childhood memories and family stories to tell history differently.



## About the Exhibition

Throughout this exhibition you will see and hear many different stories. Some of them can be read in a book, some can be watched on a film. Others are told through drawings or even through personal objects. For Carla Zaccagnini, there is never just one way to tell a story and never just one story to tell.

She uses personal memories and appropriated stories to narrate tales of everyday life in which the domestic, the historical, and the epic overlap. In *Cuentos de cuentas*, which is the Spanish for “Accounts of Accounting,” we learn of Carla’s grandfather who, like many in the early 1900s, moved from Italy to South America in search of the so-called “American Dream.” We are also told the story of her father who left Argentina in the 1970s for better opportunities in Brazil.

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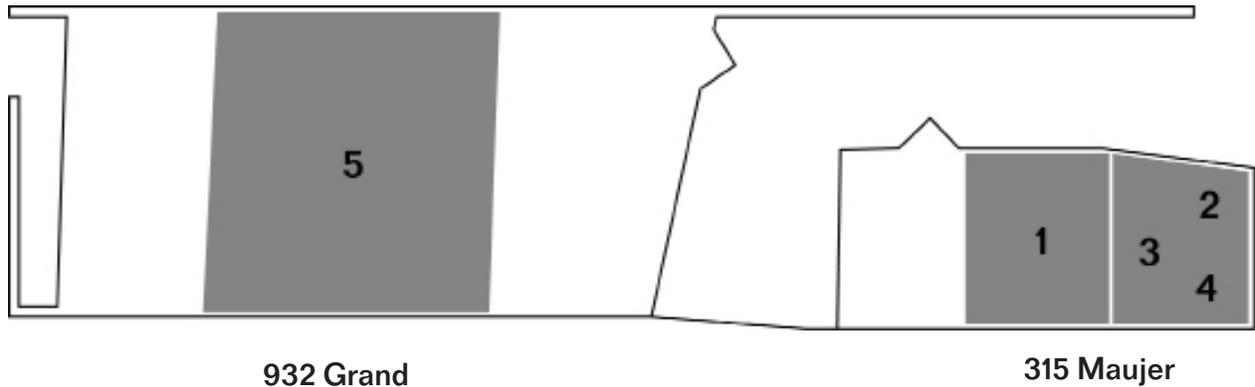
She is interested in these personal stories not just as a way of understanding her own heritage, but for what they can teach us about the history of South America in the 20th century.

She is particularly interested in what we can learn about the histories of movement throughout the region, the circulation of people and of money and how they are often connected. See how Carla uses banknotes in many of her artworks. These banknotes refer to the complicated history of US influence in the region and the strength of the US dollar in controlling the area's economic and political wellbeing. This history can still be felt today as people continue to migrate north.

## **As you walk around the exhibition, think about the following:**

- Does your family tell stories about its past?
- What objects at home can be used to tell the story of your family history?
- (For older students) How do these stories connect to wider economic and political histories?

## About the Works in this Exhibition



This exhibition began as a series of short stories written by Carla Zaccagnini that evolved into a book, as well as a collection of newly created artworks that all share the same name: *Cuentos de cuentas/ Accounts of Accounting*.

These stories are all based on Carla's childhood growing up in Brazil and Argentina during the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, the US dollar was often preferred to the local currency by people in these countries due to its higher monetary value, meaning you could buy more with the US dollar than you could with the same amount in Brazilian reais or Argentinian pesos. As this practice was not encouraged by the government, it was common for people to hide US dollar bills at home and use them in secret, rather than through a bank. Carla is interested in exploring this history as an example of the hidden and often indirect consequences of US economic power in Latin America, and as a way of exploring the very nature of money itself. The artworks in these galleries ask us to think about money as a physical object and how it has changed over time, and why a small piece of paper has more value than a larger, heavier, or more beautiful object.

As you walk around these galleries, think again about how your own family uses money, or how it features in your family stories. Do you see your family using cash every day? Do you or your family use other forms of payment, such as credit cards, cellphone apps, and so on? Has this always been the case?

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## On view at 315 Gallery

### 1) *Cuentos de cuentas* (*Accounts of Accounting*), 2020–2022

In *Accounts of Accounting*, we find 5 televisions, each showing a short film that corresponds to a chapter in Carla's book. The stories in these films are each based around a specific object—such as a tent, a jar, or a vest—that was often used during Carla's childhood to hide US dollars and pay for things in secret.

### 2) *Fleeting Fleet* (*Flota fugaz*), 2021–2022

*Fleeting Fleet* is a collection of banknotes from different countries in Latin America that lost their value and were removed from circulation, meaning they no longer have any monetary worth and are now nothing more than pieces of paper.



*Fleeting Fleet*, installation view



*Cuentos de cuentas*, installation view

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### 3) *La plata y el plomo (Cash and lead)*, 2021–2022

*La plata y el plomo (Cash and lead)* shows a collection of personal and borrowed items that are suspended in the air as part of a hanging mobile. Through this structure, Carla questions the way we commonly assign monetary value to these objects by speculating on their physical weight.

### 4) *El Gigante egoísta (The Selfish Giant)*, 1975–2015

*El Gigante egoísta (The Selfish Giant)* is a wall installation that includes a series of artworks on paper that were painted or drawn by Carla as a child. These works are accompanied by a text written by Carla as an adult in which she considers how history is just a collection of memories that we happen or choose to remember. For instance, would Carla's own understanding of her personal history be different if these artworks no longer existed? How do personal objects affect your memories of the past? Through this installation, Carla returns to a central theme present in her artistic practice: the connection between forgetfulness and the histories that are written.



*The Selfish Giant*, detail view

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*La Plata y el plomo (Cash and Lead), installation view*

**Using your hands to express ideas or words: After watching Carla's *Cuentos de cuentas* film installation, discuss the symbols you know about money.**

- What hand gestures do you or your family use to represent it?
- What words do you use to talk about money?
- Have you heard a different way to express the same term?

Give an example using hand gestures and slang. You can use photographs, real coins and bills, objects, or any visual aid to engage with the students.

## On view at 932 Gallery

The exhibition includes two recent works by Carla Zaccagnini that encompass her research into the power structures that shaped the migratory journeys of people and goods over the past century in Latin America.

### 4) *Una película hablada (A spoken movie)*, 2017-2019

*Una película hablada* is a three-channel film installation in which Carla Zaccagnini revisits her family history and portrays the migratory processes of the artist's grandfather during the early 20th century. Through this film, Zaccagnini explores the connection between personal and social history.



*Una película hablada*, film stills

### 5) *The Sea You See Will Never Be the Sea I've Seen (El Mar que ves nunca será el mar que yo he visto)*, 2017-2019

This installation features approximately 200 glass bottles, each containing a raft. These bottles represent the experience of distance and displacement inherent in migrations: the possibility of living in between cultures and languages, and the complex feeling of belonging and/or being an outsider.



*The Sea You See Will Never Be the Sea I've Seen*, detail view

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

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## Publication

*Cuentos de cuentas* (*Accounts of Accounting*) brings together five recollections from Carla Zaccagnini's childhood in Brazil and Argentina in the 1980s that are relayed by a narrator who questions her own ability to adequately remember what happened. Each episode is structured around a specific object—a tent, a jar, a vest—that is pivotal in enabling secret economic transactions.

Even though told with a childlike innocence and detailed attention to the material reality, the stories illuminate a context in which the US dollar dictated the person-to-person cash economy. Ultimately, they bring the reader to ask: How can we really determine value? How can we really distinguish what is true from what is false? Zaccagnini's texts are punctuated by childhood drawings, magazine and press clippings, and personal photographs. This book includes the texts in English alongside their original Spanish version.

The chapters were released online between January 2021 and April 2022 on Amant's website as episodic preludes to the exhibition.



## Activities

The following activities were developed by local artists Cassandra Mayela and Phedra Deonarine in response to the works on display in *Cuentos de cuentas*.

Please speak to a member of the Amant team about the materials provided for each activity.

### ***Writing Memory* by Phedra Deonarine**

#### **Activity #1**

#### **Memory-based writing: 5–10 minutes**

Recall the images on display today in the exhibition *Cuentos de Cuentas*. Pick one that you remember best. Without looking at the image, describe the image in 3-7 sentences and what it reminds you of.

#### **Discussion:**

**5-10 minutes:** Consider the image. How would you describe it? Do you think that the details in the image remind you of specific places or events?  
(Alternatively, does the lack of details make you remember your own experiences with similar items?)

**5-10 minutes:** Compare your description with the description of your classmates. What do most seem to remember? What do most seem to forget?

**5-10 minutes:** Do you think the image has an impact on what you (and your classmates) remember and/or forget about the image itself? Why might this be?

**5-10 minutes:** What about the choice of objects in the image? Are these familiar to you? Does your familiarity or experience with the main object in the image influence what you think is the meaning of the piece?

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## **Activity #2:**

### **Image-based writing: 20–30 minutes**

Pick one image or object on display in the exhibition and write 100–250 words on how the style of the image helps or hinders what you recall about the image and how what you remember or forget shapes what you think the image means.

#### **Things that you can consider:**

- How familiar are you with the object in the piece you chose?
- Is the style of the art piece powerful? (Why or why not?)
- What did you most remember about the image (without looking at it again)?
- What did you forget?
- Is your take similar to that of your classmates?
- What do you think of those similarities (or differences)?

You do not have to answer all these questions, but these questions can help guide your written response.

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## Activity #3

### Letter-writing exercise: 20–30 minutes

Write a letter (100–250 words) to a family member regarding an object that you wanted to save but lost (or that you think might be lost). It can be a work of fiction. (Examples of objects can be: a family heirloom, a childhood toy, a gift someone gave to you, a book that got torn or lost, etc.) This letter will be left as a message in a bottle that can only be opened (and will be opened) by the specific family member (regardless of time). The family member can be someone in the past or someone in the future.

#### Things to consider:

- Why did you want to keep this object?
- Did you do anything to keep it safe?
- How did you lose it? Do you know how you lost it?
- Are you still trying to find it?
- What did it feel like to lose it?
- Does the object mean anything to others?
- What stands out most when you think of the object?

You do not have to answer all these questions, but these questions can help guide your written response.

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## ***Common Threads* by Cassandra Mayela**

### **Activity #4**

#### **Weaving workshop: 2 hours**

This weaving activity invites participants to reflect on the stories that can be told through the clothes they wear. Learn how everyday materials like clothing are connected to wider histories of global movement.

Participants are asked to bring a piece of clothing they no longer wear, but that they for some reason have kept. These garments will be disassembled and woven into tapestries that can be brought together to form a collective work, revealing the connectedness of all our stories.

This activity builds on themes of migration and displacement present in Carla Zaccagnini's *Cuentos de cuentas*, and how you can explore connections between intimate, family stories and larger sociopolitical histories through childhood memories or anecdotes.

#### **Discussion:**

- Can clothes tell a story?
- How could we create other stories with them?

This is a group activity that must be facilitated by a member of Amant's education team.



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## **About Phedra Deonarine**

Phedra Deonarine is a writer who uses elements of fantasy to explore climate change, vulnerability, and environmental racism. By drawing on her academic background studying the destructive ecological impact of colonialism on the Caribbean, she uses speculative fiction to question who has easy access to green, clean spaces. She explores the concept of experiencing newness while never seeking to control or own what is new and beautiful. Phedra was an Amant New York Studio & Research resident in the Winter of 2021-2022.

## **About Cassandra Mayela**

Cassandra Mayela is a self-taught textile artist who has lived in New York since 2014 when she had to leave her home country, Venezuela. Her personal experiences as an immigrant and a woman of color have shaped her work. She is curious about the storytelling capacities of our clothing, and she is particularly interested in how migration affects one's identity and ideas of belonging. Through research, conversations, audience participation, and engaging with textiles and collected or found materials, she creates community-oriented works that show how fundamental changes in fabric can affect one's perception of identity and sense of empowerment. Mayela's ongoing work *Maps of Displacement* (2020-present) weaves together the clothing of displaced Venezuelan migrants into a series of textile sculptures charting their relocation across the USA.