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An Irish Artist's Travels from Buenos Aires to Araxá

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Abstract:

In 2020, during lockdown as an Irish emigrant in the UK, I re-evaluated being Irish in a foreign country as I examined pictures taken in Latin America during my travels, as artist-in-residence at Zona Imaginaria. This paper reviews three contemporary artists in Argentina and Brazil, Mónica Girón, Mariana López and Pedro Lopes, whose work focuses on diverse cultures, history seen in this context, and colonisation and emigration as influences on three artists' work. In Brazil, I visited farms, small towns and Minas Gerais state, and compared life there with my native Ireland. The effects on the contemporary art and culture of both countries due to colonisation, is noted by an Irish artist, heavily influenced since this trip in her own artwork.

Keywords: Argentina, Brasil, Contemporary Art, Dona Beja, Tupí-Guaraní

1. Introduction

In this winter of 2020-2021, it is evident that our world has been totally transformed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The UK has the highest figure in the world for deaths per capita, with over 100,000 people dead making us afraid. As an Irish immigrant, I have been unable to visit family for 12 months and even though they have been vaccinated, it is unlikely I will see them before this summer, if then. It is ironic to contemplate the apocalypse that European colonisers wreaked upon an unsuspecting Latin American population in the Colonial period with smallpox, measles and chicken pox wiping out vast numbers of the indigenous populations, while here in the UK and worldwide, this modern pandemic situation forces everybody to re-evaluate that devastation in person. Brexit, in addition to the pandemic, has affected travel and borders and there was a huge rise in applications for Irish passports received by the Dublin government (O'Carroll 2019). In 2015, 6,011 applications made from Great Britain. In 2019, first time ap-

plications from Great Britain rose to 31,099 and 47,645 from Northern Ireland, according to the deputy Prime Minister, Simon Coveney. The number of applications has risen sharply since the EU referendum, with five times as many applicants, according to Lisa O'Carroll, Brexit Correspondent.

Sobering times, so reliving my Latin American travels has been joyful; my experiences as artist-in-residence in Zona Imaginaria and Argentina are already recorded (Lawlor Mottram 2020). I viewed the modernist Kavanagh Tower built in 1934 in the centre of Buenos Aires, which was financed by an heiress of Irish descent, Corina Kavanagh, whose offer of marriage to their son was declined by the Anchorena Argentine family of "old money". Legend has it that the jilted lady waited for them to leave town for the holidays, having sold two ranches to finance it, before buying land in front of their favourite church. Her classic skyscraper blocked the view of their favourite church for said family, who had refused her hand in marriage. Romeo and Juliet, Argentine style! As I admired Kavanagh Tower, my eye was also drawn to the Monument to the Fallen in the Falklands War, behind which the Kavanagh Tower reaches for the skies. This poignant and elegant monument, listing the names of every soldier who lost their life in this territorial war, is situated opposite La Torre de los Ingleses (the English Tower). Living in the UK has brought me a great awareness of a war waged by Great Britain for these islands, so close to Argentina, so far from the UK. Before arriving, I had dreamed of seeing the steps where Eva Perón, famous actress turned President's wife, had stood on the famous balcony of La Casa Rosada (The Pink House), the House of Government, to address her adoring crowds. She worked tirelessly, becoming known as the defender of the shirtless (*descamisados*) impoverished, of Argentina. The day I visited however, the famous balcony was barricaded because the families of 44 soldiers missing in a submarine explosion, were campaigning and protesting outside the famous Casa Rosada. Remembering the mothers of The Disappeared, who went on strike every week to find their missing children executed during the military coup, there seemed to be a protest every day on Buenos Aires elegant streets. From this one, to later pensioner protests about the rising cost of inflation as President Macri worked closely with the IMF and pensioners saw their income brutally slashed. Ordinary Argentinians were blasé; they had seen it all before in 2001. For those on the breadline, for whom foreign travel was impossible, the peso devaluation affected their salaries, their pensions, their ability to buy food and their security. Other protests during my visit were those against the revelations of corruption, evidenced in *La Lista* of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and the strange co–incidence of the Irish abortion legislation passing in the same year that the Argentinian Parliament refused to make that law. Argentinians were vocal on the street, car horns blowing at every opportunity, with placards, drums, ghetto blasters and banners, outside train stations, outside Parliament, outside supermarkets, with ages ranging from youngsters to pensioners. My trip led me to a better understanding of how the themes of colonisation had affected my chosen contemporary artists in Argentina and Brazil. Starting in Buenos Aires, I visited museums and galleries in order to learn more about these indigenous cultures as a visual artist, which later developed into themes and patterns which I would use in my own artwork.

2. Background to Indigenous Culture in Argentina and Brazil

Fig. 1 – Weaving with geometric patterns, in the Museum of Mankind[1]

Gathering visual research would deepen my understanding of the complex nature of Latin America, so I visited the National Museum of Mankind (Museo Nacional del Hombre*)* in Buenos Aires, which is dedicated to social anthropology and folklore. The colourful exhibits here explained the prehistory but also provided a contemporary view on the status of indigenous South American peoples and Argentinian groups. Pre-Colonial indigenous tribes were intensely connected with their natural environment; dependent upon it and able to survive using agriculture, hunting, fishing and collection of herbs for medicinal use as well as fruit and fungi. Museum labels, photographed by the Author (Museo Nacional del Hombre 2018) explain that the veneration of their natural environment seemed to be reflected in every tradition.

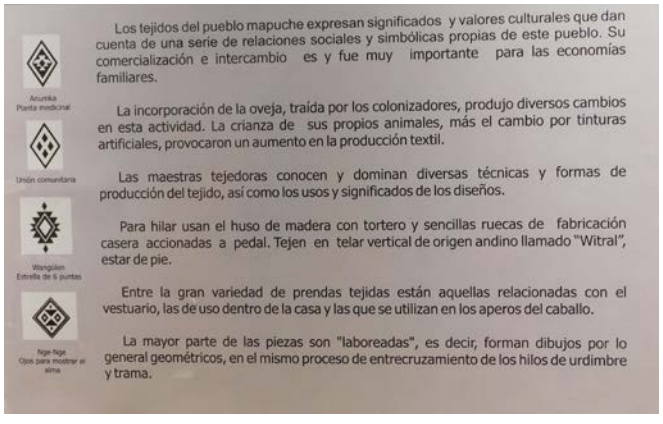

Fig. 2 – Mapuche symbols, photographed in the Museum of Mankind

[1] Pictures 1-5 were taken by the Author during her visit to the Museo Nacional del Hombre, Buenos Aires. The Museum is currently closed due to the Covid-19 emergency. Offical permissions to reproduce them in this essay will be provided after the reopening of the Museum.

Fig. 3 – Two boys called Arturo and Antonio, the only known members of the Klóketen people of Hain in 1923, photographed in the Museum of Mankind

For the *Selk'nam* – the *Onas* in Spanish – whose spirit "Matán el gran bailarin del Hain" – the great dancer of Hain – is said to have descended from the heavens in Tierra del Fuego. They are also said to have had deities at the four cardinal directions, a tradition which is also observed in many Latin American cultures, including in Yucatán with Maya and Aztec populations (Miller, Taube 1993). The *Mbyá* tribe, of *Guaraní* heritage, believed in "La Tierra sin mal" (Land without evil/badness) in which they would never die, where there was no illness, meat and honey were plentiful and "todos viven con felicidad" (Museo Nacional del Hombre, 2018). Drawing parallels with worldwide human longing for paradise on earth – Cornucopia and the Irish Land of the Young, *Tír na nÓg* (Heaney 1994) have similar traits. In the Fenian cycle, Niamh tempts Oisin to "Come back with me to the Land of Youth. It is the most beautiful country under the sun. The land flows with honey and wine, as much as you could ever want. You will never fall ill or grow old there" (*ibidem*).

Fig. 4 – The enigmatic Hanu from the Southern sky/heavens, with hooded costume and his back to the public

The beautiful black and white portraits of these people displayed in the museum show a deity, Hanu (or a human dressed in his likeness) with his back to us, a huge pointed hood pulled up over his shoulders with white, downward vertical stripes, perhaps signifying his astonishing leaps and acrobatics on his descent to Mother Earth. The Tupí-Guaraní speakers were well established before the Spanish arrived, and according to Viveiros de Castro, in AD 1492 Tupí-Guaraní speakers numbered in the millions (Ozorio de Almeida, Neves 2015). They inhabited over 4,000 km in the Rio de la Plata basin, close to coast and rivers, and also the Brazilian Atlantic Coast: Tupí-Guaraní speaking groups were spread over vast regions of South America when the Europeans arrived. Speculation about the process of dispersion of these groups has been ongoing for decades. […] studying the history of the Tupí-Guaraní groups from Eastern Amazonia, producers of pottery related to the Amazonian Tupinambá Subtradition, is fundamental to the comprehension of the mobility and internal complexity of the Tupí-Guaraní (*ibidem*). In Brazil I would hear again of the Tupí-Guaraní, in the name of Sorocaba, translated in Portuguese as "terra rasgada", ploughed, furrowed or tilled earth in their native language (Sorocaba 2021). "Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question" (Andrade 1972 [1929]). This line was written in English by Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade, in his "Anthropophagy Manifesto" in 1929, which defined a cultural adaptation to the foreign, the European, and the non-native in which it was consumed whole and then transformed into something entirely new. This manifesto was inspired by "Abaporu", a painting that his artist and wife, Tarsila Do Amaral (1928), had painted for him as his birthday present. Tarsila do Amaral, commonly known simply as Tarsila, was a Brazilian artist, who trained in Paris and Europe with André Lhote, Albert Gleizes, and Fernand Léger. On her return to her native São Paolo she created work in a completely new style, which greatly influenced Andrade's "Anthropophagy Manifesto" the following year. It is difficult to imagine the emotions stirred by "Abaporu" in 1928. The strange perspective, the inability to decide if this figure is masculine or feminine – and its ability to embody both, the huge cactus, the childish sun, the massive foot in the foreground and the primary colours are striking even in the twenty-first century. The painting inspired not only her husband's writing but indeed a whole new artistic movement in Brazil, "specifically Brazilian culture arising from the symbolic digestion – or artistic 'cannibalism' – of outside influences" (MoMA 2018). The painting is now exhibited in Argentina's MALBA − Museum of Contemporary Art Buenos Aires – and was shown in 2018 in the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) in the US. Andrade's play on Shakespeare's famous words in "Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question" seem to show pride in indigenous roots. This idea that the original natives of Sorocaba, the Tupí-Guaraní, played a part in the swallowing of a European master writer in order to inspire Brazilian art is, I believe, the central idea of Andrade's Cultural Cannibalism. As an artist, not a student of ethnography or anthropology, at this point on my trip, I made a conscious effort to stop trying to interpret what I saw in my limited way, and simply behaved like a large sponge absorbing information visually, sketching in notebooks, photographing and collecting memories for analysis at a later date. There is a famous quote from Saint Augustine reminding us that "the dead may be invisible but they are not absent". The millions that had died during the Colonial period seemed to live on in the spirit of both countries I visited and when I explored the work of Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral in more detail, I began to remember how colonisation worked in Ireland – where the invaders became "more Irish than the Irish themselves [...]. The well-known phrase 'Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis' (more Irish than the Irish themselves). These formed septs on the Gaelic–Irish pattern, headed by a chief. The Gall & Gael became virtually indistinguishable" (MacLysaght 1982).

In Brazil the theory that led to the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto of Anthropophagy" and that this manifesto was a conversation starter in any art opening in modern Brazil,

was something I learned at Pedro Lopes's exhibition later on my trip (see 2.4 below). Therefore, my next step towards a better understanding of this area before the arrival of the Europeans, was grasping the linguistic classification of these groups. Linguistic families were listed in the museum, such as the *Guaycurú* family: *Toba, Pilagá and Mocoví*, the *Mataco-Mataguayo* family: *Wichí, Chorote and Chulupí*, the *Tupí-Guaraní* family: *Chané and Chiruguano, the Mapuche, the Tehuelche, the Diaguita, Guaraní* (200,000 speakers) and *Quechua* (65,000 speakers). As an artist, this clarified very little for me except that many old languages had almost been lost and the memorable fact that European colonisers had wiped out huge numbers of most of these groups through disease and slavery. Visiting Minas Gerais, I realised that individual languages and tribes had left only a tiny mark of their occupation of this land by its adaptation into its current name, as in the case of Araxá in Minas Gerais state. Moreover, a sign that the arrival of the Europeans caused adaptations in local populations is evident in that they brought sheep with them, whose wool allowed the Mapuche to adapt their textile weaving techniques, providing a new material which could be dyed, which added value in local economies. I saw explanations of symbols used in traditional Mapuche textiles, which were a useful interpretation of some of the geometric patterns I saw all over, both in Argentina and Brazil. Not only in textiles, but also on menus, tiles, fabric, weaving, even shop decorations (in the way the Irish people use the shamrock or the harp), these are a visual which perhaps expresses underlying meaning known to the natives, but not to me. The triangle and the diamond shape can be easily woven and knitted (and I saw variations of 2 triangles joined also appearing in textiles from other groups).

Figure 2 (Museo Nacional del Hombre, 2018) shows diamond shaped symbols showing in descending order, first Anumka, a medicinal plant; the second a sign for Community Union (I interpret organisation); Wangüien, A six pointed star; and finally Nge-Nge, Eyes to view the Soul. This tiny museum in Calle 3 de Febrero, 1370/8 was crowded with videos, exhibits and labels of techniques for tool making, basket weaving, musical instruments, maps, exquisite clothing, jewellery, toys and Chané mask making, displaying the range of flora and fauna. Figure 5 shows these striking Chané masks, each with a generic name of the aña-aña (spirit, death, demon/devil) showing (from top left) 1 and 3, aña-uru, uru means chicken or bird, these are usually decorated with feathers. 2 and 4, aña-tairusu and aña-hanti, each of these has a horn, pole or bony structure on an elk and these masks are used during Carnaval celebrations. In the second row (from the left) 5, aña-ngora has a small visor or peak, suggested that this may be similar to military helmets; 7 (far right) is aña-ndechi, meaning old, this type is used in the last days of Carnaval. The remaining masks are of animals local to the area.

Figure 5 – Chané masks on display in the Museum of Mankind

The fact that these masks were used in *Carnaval* celebrations surprised me because it implies that indigenous mask making continued after European festivals arrived in Argentina. *Carnaval* is believed to originate from a pagan or Roman festival, adopted by the Catholic church to coincide with the celebrations (similar to Pancake Tuesday in Ireland and the UK), where food supplies are cooked in anticipation of the 40 fasting days of Lent. *Carnaval* celebrations are still held annually all over Europe (including Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Greece) in the middle of February. Brazil's first *Carnaval* celebrations date to 1723 whereas in Argentina it commenced in the 1600s but was later forbidden under military rule. Nowadays European festivals are usually masked, with special costumes and food while in Brazil, its development is linked to the invention of the Samba dance, when the significantly large African slave portion of Brazil adapted the tradition to become a living, joyous dance celebration. Brazil's *Carnaval* is also known for the annual opportunity to hide behind a mask, to shed social status or the lack if it, for a time. Brazilian men in drag are now commonplace all over social media and pictures as early as the 1930s show the intricacy and delicacy of their dresses (Carnaval History 2020). Clearly this celebration is a direct import from European colonisers and flourishes now with the combination of locals, European visitors and settlers, indigenous people and the descendants of African slaves, all dancing and enjoying a tradition transformed for Latin American usage. Nowadays in Argentina it has been adapted to a *Murga* festival in Buenos Aires and some other northern cities. Latin America adopts European festivals and does it in mid summer with samba bands, compared to freezing February skimpy outfits in Europe – given the choice I know which one I wanted to attend!

2.1 Visual Art in Argentina and Brazil

As my reason for visiting Argentina was primarily to work at Zona Imaginaria, a not-for-profit art organisation, situated in Buenos Aires province, my stay there has already been described in detail (Lawlor Mottram 2020). In my spare time, I visited every gallery I could, the first being *Arte Munar* in La Boca (the mouth, of the river, for non-Spanish speakers). So, in 2021, I re-live gazing out to sea at the widest estuary in the world where the river Plate meets the sea. This is La Boca neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, with its statue of Irishman Admiral William Brown (22 June 1777-3 March 1857) the "father of the Argentine Navy", which is also the site of several art galleries in the harbour.

2.1.1 Mariana López: "Mar de Solís"

Fig. 6 – "Mar de Solís" installation by artist Mariana López, August 201. Courtesy of Mariana López and Arte Munar Gallery, La Boca

Artist Mariana López, born in 1981, studied art in Switzerland and Argentina and exhibits widely in Argentina, Latin America and Europe. It was a cold August day and *Arte Munar* is well hidden from the public. Entrance was by knocking at a large, metal door and then stepping into a chilly, spacious building with a "being renovated" feel. In the first room, imagine at ground level observing a set of 10 rolling, rectangular canvasses moving grindingly slowly, stretched out on a series of revolving camp bed structures it seemed, each blue canvas painted very differently from the one adjacent and positioned to fill the entire gallery. "The sea of Solís", Mariana López's installation, is named as the first view of the River Plate, seen by Juan Díaz de Solís, the Spanish explorer, who named the Río de la Plata in 1516, sailing upriver to the confluence of the Uruguay and the Paraná rivers, with 9 members of crew. Mechanical noises creaked, each piece rolling continuously so nothing remained still, evoking light reflections, wave motions, on what is essentially a flat surface. Is this the view of a sailor? I know from my own sailing in the UK that you need to fix on something on the horizon to stabilise, because the world whizzes past – up above there are clouds, rain, sun and birds, while underneath is a dark expanse, whose depth is uncertain. Modern sailors have the benefit of depth sounders to avoid damage from rocks or getting stranded in shallow waters. This is the widest (and probably the most polluted) river estuary in the world as the Paraná, the Plate and the Luján rivers converge on the sea in a massive area. Although Solís was purportedly the first foreigner to arrive, labelling it "mar dulce" (literally: sweet but translated as "fresh(water) sea") (Britannica 2021). Solís never actually landed. The conquistador was unwilling to touch earth, despite months at sea. Instead, he sailed up towards Uruguay, where he unfortunately met a group of natives, known as the *Charrúa* Indians. It was reported by the only surviving crew member that the entire crew was murdered, then eaten by this cannibalistic tribe. Nowadays this route is for day trips by boat to Colonia del Sacramento, in Uruguay, from Buenos Aires, to see well protected colonial architecture and sometimes to provide visitors with a visa stamp for their passports! This historic section of town takes you back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with an array of interesting museums, an historic lighthouse and Uruguay's oldest church. Most people reach Buenos Aires by plane but entering from the sea on the north to south route the explorer took, would encourage people to land on the Uruguay side first, as it is closest. Uruguay is also where Almirante Brown landed and settled, later than Solís admittedly. Borders are fixed now but imagine it through the eyes of a Spanish, Portuguese or Irish sailor…

For this Irishwoman, it is the scale of Latin America that has gripped my artistic soul. 121 Irelands could fit into Brazil. This estuary, one of the widest in the world, is as broad as your imagination will take you. So Mariana López's "Mar de Solís" halted me in my tracks. When one lingers as I did in this gallery, you become the eye of the absent Solís, watching the surface changing continuously over the length of the gallery. While people passed by, I observed these long blue movements hypnotised by the abstract shapes while simultaneously observing the play on technology being used. In 1872, an expedition ship named "Challenger" had left Spain and Portugal, to cross the deep seas from the Azores to Cabo Verde, "all the way ploughing the seas, raking its seabed, measuring temperature, heat and cold while gathering samples of flora and fauna, scraping reefs, measuring salinity and examining the relationships between light and colour" writes Curator Irina Podgorny (2018), of the Museo de la Plata. López's installation seems to visually question their experiments – how to reveal the bottom of the ocean in a time where submarines did not exist? "Challenger" measured depth using inventions offered by the Royal Society. The complex drawings referred to in the artist's presentation, were used by Sir William Thompson, the future Lord Kelvin. These were a far cry from our modern seafaring ability with Wi–Fi depth finders and online navigation maps but also the precursor to them.

This eminent physicist, mathematician, engineer and inventor, was born to a Scottish father and an Irish mother and is nowadays well-known for his research and development of the second law of thermodynamics, the electromagnetic theory of light and the absolute temperature scale, which is measured in Kelvins. López's use of mechanical cables and engineering to rotate the canvasses, references the sound of wheels and pulleys that Kelvin utilised, using piano wire to determine marine depths. Podgorny continues "sometimes one believes that the sea is flat; the river unmoving ("un río o un mar que no se atraganta con los restos de la historia nacional"), a river or a sea which does not choke with the remains of the national history (2018). The absent Solís observes with me alongside him. I left uplifted. This piece of art really stays with me to this day.

On my return to the UK, I follow López's more recent work using the internet. In 2019 "Frontera" (border; frontier), was exhibited in *Galería Mite* in Buenos Aires. This installation played with sky and wind, turning from the surface of the sea to that of the Celestial. She explains that it is based on her journey in the boundary spaces between Argentina and Chile in the Patagonian region, more specifically in the area near Lake Nahuel Huapi. She describes the unformed shapes of clouds, and her childhood observation of them. For me, perhaps Solís was at last laid to rest; instead, the cloud formation and the wind had become her canvas.

2.1.2 Art in Argentina; Mónica Girón: "Ajuar Para un Conquistador"

Fig. 7 – Hand-knitted jacket, scarf and leg warmers knitted in Merino wool by Mónica Girón, Barro Alto Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of Mónica Girón

Fig. 8 – Hand knitted gloves for a Patagonian bird by Mónica Girón, Barro Alto Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of Mónica Girón

Fig. 9 – Hand knitted costume for an absent bird, Barro Alto Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of Mónica Girón

Argentine artist Mónica Girón was born in San Carlos de Bariloche, Patagonia in 1959 and studied art in Geneva, returning to live in Buenos Aires in 1985. She has exhibited widely all over the world, has won many prizes and her work is in the MALBA, Argentina (2021).

Mónica Girón's contribution to the IV Biennial Exhibition of La Habana, Cuba in 1994, was entitled "Ajuar para un conquistador" (Jackets for a Conquistador). Her famous jackets for Patagonian birds were knitted using the "technology of the new inhabitants", i.e. knitting needles and Merino wool, a legacy of Colonial settlers to Patagonia, evoking a strange emptiness in the eye of the viewer. Girón's inspiration was the childhood museum in her hometown in San Carlos de Bariloche, and she describes its collections as "combining an advocacy of the conquest and displays of the territory established by the nation state" (2018). These "jackets" were chosen for a collective retrospective of artwork in Buenos Aires in 2018, which I attended. Surrounded by noisy, private view visitors to this retrospective, I wished I was in a quieter setting in order to become aware of what was absent, what was invisible. These dainty, hand-knitted, colourful jackets in minuscule sizes with their accompanying claw gloves and socks and hats, hung on a pristine gallery white wall, allowing the empty costumes to make the imagination run riot, filling them mentally with bird bodies with long legs, filling the small dainty gloves and caps with absent claws and heads. One long black knitted neck has a red beak shape at the end and the hanging of all pieces is by a knitted loop, making these absent creatures resemble stuffed birds or pinned butterflies in an old-fashioned museum display. Their names were tempting too, for an Irish woman. *Caburé, Chucao, Bandurria:* Despite my reasonable Spanish, I cannot translate these, and so look to the English translation: the same. Patagonian woodpecker, Andean flamingo, black necked swan, which explains the long black neck with red beak and the Maroon head hummingbird. To me, this sounds like poetry, the words so exotically different from any Irish birds I know. Robin redbreast is hardly able to compete! To a viewer in 2018, these jackets have such a strong, environmental message with ongoing human destruction of their wildlife habitat combined with the materials used so I interviewed the artist again by email in 2020 to find out more, regarding the importance of protection of the environment in her artistic practice.

"Most of my work is related to helping raise awareness and create consciousness about our possibility of growing spiritually and thus improving our relationship to planet Earth, to

nature in general, to water in particular, and our human bodies" (Girón 2020)[2]. Her recent work, which I saw initially in her studio in 2018, is related to the Chinese medicine system or reading the "meridian lines", where acupuncture or massage or gym are applied in order to make them work correctly. "I studied Tai Chi very intensely. (See figure 10). It is one of the branches of Taoist knowledge and I have developed a long study and practice in Feng Shui, another of the Taoist ways of practising interaction with the world". Girón describes becoming aware of environmental issues as a child, living in her hometown and region, Patagonia. Summers are very hot in Buenos Aires so now she likes to travel south to Patagonia or to be in the countryside, in order to be able to work (Girón 2020).

Fig. 10 – Mónica Girón, *Swimmer* (wood), 2019. Oil on canvas, 110 x 90 cm, Barro Alto Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of Mónica Girón

She is extremely conscious of materials and tries not to work with materials that create pollution or that are very difficult to process and recycle. She uses public transport in the city, preferably electric motorisation, which in Buenos Aires means the underground subways and trains. Her car is a hybrid: natural gas and petrol, only travelling by planes if absolutely necessary, and mainly for work, not for vacations or leisure. In her garden she has a compost bin to recycle food waste and she eats mainly organic food, not industrially processed. When I asked her about her best case scenario for the future of the planet, she replied "better interaction with all natural beings and nature; less human reproduction, more awareness" (Girón 2020). So having viewed the estuary of the River Plate through the eyes of the invisible Solís, now Mónica Girón had shown me life through the eyes of absent birds.

[2] This information and what follows is from Mónica Girón, email to the present Author (personal communication).

In April 2019, at the Society for Latin American Studies conference in Leicester University (UK) I attended a workshop entitled "The limits of official memory: Representing the Native Patagonians in Chubut's Welsh museums" delivered by Guillermo Williams, from the University of Patagonia. His argument concerned the exhibits belonging to native Patagonians in such museums often appear to disrupt the museums' narrative "operating as an antagonist alterity, aiming to highlight the 'civilizing' role of the Welsh in Patagonia" (Williams, Barros, Lublin, *et al*. 2019). On the same theme, Kimberly Berg adds "In an attempt to escape British hegemony, the Welsh established a Patagonian colony in 1865. The historical struggles the immigrants faced upon settling the land are rooted in the landscape and commemorated in different versions of Patagonian regional history through provincial museum narratives that serve as a method of solidifying Welshness in Chubut" (2018, 1). Discussions at this workshop about how the Welsh narrative was displayed in museums in Chubut, Patagonia bring forth comparisons with the Welsh-British and the Irish-British relationships. Are a people escaping oppression in their homeland destined to become settled in a new country, perhaps to be viewed as colonisers themselves? This may ring true of the Welsh colony set up in Patagonia in 1865, as well as for the thousands of emigrants from Ireland who settled as farmers in the Pampas. It certainly seems to correlate with Girón's description of the Francisco P. Moreno Museum of Patagonia she used to visit as a child and many of the narratives I heard in this workshop about the portrayal of the indigenous original populations, compared to the newly-established Welsh settlers. The theme of an invisible history with untold stories, established in community museums, inevitably cause tension and discomfort by failing to display historical information from a diverse viewpoint, including that of the indigenous peoples, who were obviously resident prior to the arrival of Europeans.

Returning to Mónica Girón's jackets examining the plight of Patagonian birds, who can argue that avian life was certainly from the outset, at the very least co-resident with all human inhabitants of Patagonia and as worthy of consideration in terms of its environment and its survival Lucas Fragasso (1994), curator of the exhibition in Cuba, also offers a further interpretation to view these absent birds, stating that the fundamental purpose of the life of an animal could be seen as its death, in the sense that it is annihilation then resurgence every season, every year, in the harsh environment that is Patagonia. Suddenly for me in 2019 in Leicester, the tiny jackets, the knitwear itself almost begins to breathe, then exhale, while I examine the life of birds, teetering on the edge of extinction each brutal winter and indeed, man's destruction and exploitation of natural resources in Girón's native Patagonia. From Buenos Aires, I travelled to Brazil, viewing an exhibition of my third artist Pedro Lopes, whose work I viewed in Sorocaba, my first stop in that country.

2.2 Brazil – First Stop Sorocaba

It takes 13 or 14 hours to fly from London to São Paulo, Guarulhos but just 2 or 3 hours from Argentina, that is if the weather behaves itself. It is about 5pm; there were storm clouds hovering above the city with a vast expanse of skyscrapers, clouds and rain. I could not believe the visual extent to which the city spread – as we were delayed, we kept circling round with lightning shooting down on the high buildings and it was so unlike my expectations – grey, then more grey and some grey after that. This was not how I pictured arriving in Brazil. The extensive traffic jams when I finally left the airport, were "normal" the taxi driver, Carlos, assured me. I was headed for a private house in Sorocaba, staying with a friend, Eriane, in Sorocaba, and finally arrived at my destination. Here, like Buenos Aires, the locked gated communities are the norm

because security is such a threat. Everybody seems to own a barking dog. The barking woke me during that first night – another storm was raging. It seems winter in Brazil is not much different to winter in the UK, although the insect net on the windows should have reminded me where I was. Maybe the weather fooled me because when I actually got outside the following day, everything was so different to the UK and Ireland. The first difference is that of personal safety; my hosts were reluctant to let me walk alone promising I could do so after I became more accustomed to the area, worrying for my safety. Luckily, my knowledge of Spanish could be put to good use speaking Portuñol, so I set off with Eriane, camera well-hidden in my bag.

Wildflowers, some distant Latin American relative of our cultivated Busy Lizzie seemed to be abundantly flowering (in winter) from every drain in the streets, in winter! A type of jasmine was flowering over a stone wall, there were exotic yellow and red flowers on most trees on the roads and the first shopping centre had *suco* – a real Brazilian juice bar from fruit I could not identify, indeed had never heard of. The layout was similar to fruit and veg markets in Spain and France but the fruit, veg and nuts being offered were unrecognisable apart from oranges, bananas, mangoes and pineapples. I asked the provenance and believe they said the Amazon; I bought juice made with things I pointed at and the taste was like nothing I ever have had before or since. I have since learned to call them *açaí, pequi* and *jabuticaba* but if you have never visited Brazil, that won't be much help. Later I had juice at a riverside café whose speciality was coconut water. Now I've had coconut milk but this was different. You get a whole fruit with a straw inserted, and sit there, wrapped up for winter in scarf and gloves with this green ball in your hands. Next, we visited the monastery of São Bento – which is one of the oldest in Sorocaba. Later I would see this painted in one of Pedro Lopes' paintings. Outside the monastery, a suited black metal sculpture of a male conquistador stood proudly. I had seen several of these in Buenos Aires and beyond, but I still could not agree with my posing in front of what were essentially land grabber portraits. As I look back, I remember the distaste I felt then and now with Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 in mind, the memory was revitalised. Public statues would cause much concern everywhere, ignited by the death of George Floyd in the US, but this was all in the future. Taking photos here with blonde hair, tall with blue eyes sporting a blue beret, Eriane tells me I could be from Bahía. I learn later this is a state mostly peopled by ex-slaves from Africa, who were liberated and now inhabit the coastal northern corner of Brazil. Sorocaba had many surprises. We stumbled onto a street garden shop, run by an old couple from Nagasaki, Japan and bought herbs.

Our next stop was the municipal zoo Quinzinho de Barros which is one of the largest zoos in South America. It is not a habit of mine to visit zoos because I cannot bear to see caged animals but this one promised exotic flowers, trees and butterflies so I agreed. Very tired and sad wolves, tigers and felines, wandered in their allotted space while we observed feeding time. Zelfa, my host's mother later informed me these are all rescue animals, which does put a sweetener on it and the surroundings are truly magnificent. We stopped continuously for me to photograph butterflies and to admire flowers which defy description – one with red catkins and then an amazing orange type of lily. I even saw a banana in flower! Just visible with eyes above water – fed by the keepers – grazing alligators or maybe caimans; I did not go too close but local people just milled around, kids going so near. My heart was in my mouth! After this, another must visit place was the bakery Padaría Do Gonçalo in Avenida Noguiera Padilla, 261, Alem Parte, Sorocaba. This wood-lined shop had portraits of the famous and historic scenes of the town all over its walls and I insisted on my selfie too. Here we purchased the favourites of the household, and a new delicacy for me – *pão de queijo* – bread filled with cheese. This brief taster was my introduction to Sorocaba and next was my first visit to the contemporary art gallery in Sorocaba.

2.2.1 Sorocaba – Pedro Lopes Exhibition "Yby-Soroc"

Pedro Lopes is a Brazilian painter, born in 1951 in Sorocaba, São Paulo state, studied in the Faculty of Fine Arts in São Paulo. His work has developed through many styles, from abstract to pop in the 1970s and since 1980 he has worked in a neoexpressionist style, working on figurative landscapes.

The Sorocaba of Pedro Lopes' paintings is drawn from historical events ranging over four centuries, the first panel dating from 1532 right up to the present day. More than 450 years of memories from the city's past fill 20 large canvasses, each painted in a contemporary style of the period in the title. The work was presented in the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACS) in an annexe of the old railway station. The curator and Artistic Director of MACS, Fabio Magalhães (2018), commented in the catalogue how rare it was to find a modern painter who devotes himself to historical painting, adding that Lopes has "executed these paintings in styles varying from Joshua Reynolds, the English 'grand manner' painter to Hans Holbein, Tintoretto and historical painters in Brazil such as Victor Meirelles' portrait of Felipe Camarão" (Shikama 2018). These paintings would be well known to local visitors, and Lopes' intention was to explain history using this visual method. This incursion into the beginning of colonisation of the continent up to the present day, was presented in 20 large painted panels, each inspired by an artistic style of the period. Panel 1 (1532-1580) is inspired by Hans Holbien's "The Ambassadors" which is situated in the National Gallery in the UK.

The title "Yby-Soroc" is inspired by the original name of the city in Tupí-Guaraní (Sorocaba 2021), the indigenous language spoken in this region prior to the arrival of Europeans, meaning *rasgada*, in Portuguese, which can be translated as "torn" but also "ploughed earth, furrowed land". Later when I saw the hue of the soil colour in Minas Gerais, I began to understand this but at first, it was difficult to understand the historical references, which seemed very clear to all the other visitors to the gallery, so I enlisted the help of Silvana Sarti, who works in the museum and also spoke English. Sarti, a visual and performing artist who also works at MACS gallery, describes how the exhibition shows the greatness of an artist who manages to put in a single work:

> Several layers of human knowledge, the history of the city of Sorocaba, with its characters from the official and everyday history, the artistic styles of each evoked time, the events of art history and its artists, bringing together different techniques and styles, traditional oil painting and overlapping graphics as hieroglyphics of a brief future. (Sarti 2018)[3]

She commented that few cities in the world are fortunate to have a collection of works that represent their cultural heritage and past so well.

I had just visited a very modern shopping centre, close by a few hours previously, which was actually a relic of Sorocaba's industrial past, when it was twinned with Manchester. During the American Civil War, English textile companies supplies of cotton vanished, which used to be imported from the southern, cotton producing states of the US. In 1862 the first cotton plantation was set up in São Paulo state, including Sorocaba. The local environment and weather proved ideal so English investors built branches in the city, one of which was the supermarket I visited. Nowadays, the natives of Sorocaba shop in living history, the building looking familiar to an Irish or UK resident, with its tiled rooves, large, orange brick buildings

[3] This information is from Silvana Sarti to the present Author (personal communication).

with chimneys, which had been responsible for Sorocaba's title of "Manchester Paulista". The city's railway station, a pretty building next to MACS gallery was opened in June 1872 when six locomotives and 62 bandwagons were brought from England, with seven stations initially planned. The Ferroban railroad used to connect São Paulo and Santos Seaport, with trains almost unused in Brazil – my friend Eriane commenting that "automobiles won that war". As I observed Sorocaba through Pedro Lopes' eyes, I viewed a visual history of the city which encouraged me to delve into a history of the city and the people who spoke Tupí-Guaraní. Seeing history from an Irish, English and European perspective, here was the opportunity to view famous historical Brazilian battles scenes and to see that industrial revolution in Brazil had caused a huge political awakening. Brazilian people now includes the indigenous peoples, descendants of the African slaves, the European settlers who were granted land and modern immigrants, completing a melting pot of cultures, languages, religions and inheritance. I found myself particularly drawn to the panels which highlighted "the invisible women", as Silvana Sarti described them, using her finger to delineate them in the air in front of Panel VIII (2020). Her interpretation of those who worked in those textile factories, are carefully painted as outlines in Lopes' paintings, and connected me instantly to the absent Solís in Mariana López's installation and the missing birds of Mónica Girón's knitted jackets.

Fig. 11 – Pedro Lopes, "Da flor e do fruto o novo produto, Panel VIII", 2018, oil on canvas. Exhibition "YBY Soroc", Macs - Museu de Arte Contemporanea de Sorocaba. Courtesy Pedro Lopez

Fig. 12 – Pedro Lopes, "A passagem dos cometas, Panel XVIII", 2018, oil on canvas.
Exhibition "YBY Soroc", Macs - Museu de Arte Contemporanea de Sorocaba. Courtesy Pedro Lopez

We examined Panel VIII, which covers the period from 1852 to 1909 and is entitled "Da flor e do fruto o novo produto" (From flower and fruit, the new product/commodity). Its theme of the exclusively female working force behind the fortune accumulated by these rich, suited gentlemen standing so proudly. Their exploitation of the workers lends pathos to the plight of the poor in this era and a social commentary by the artist on the nature of industrialisation. Lopes has delicately added colourful lines of paint, outlining the women who manufactured the textiles. Behind every successful man, there is a woman literally painted here. Panel XVIII, 1947-1965, "A passagem dos cometas" translates as "The Passage of Comets", referring to the musicians Bill Haley and his Comets, who resided in Sorocaba in the 1950s. Here, Lopes depicts many famous men from the period including Abstract Expressionist local artists, doctors, historians, scientists (Alexander Fleming) and the facades of famous buildings in the city such as the Science and Law universities. Only two females are pictured, one top right is Dona Tereza de Lucca alongside Victor de Lucca and the other lone female central to the painting is Francisca da Silveira Queiroz, the first female elected councillor in Sorocaba. It is wonderful to see her represented, however, Silvana Sarti and other researchers reveal that another "invisible woman" Salvadora Lopes Perez had previously stood for election and won outright in 1947 as the first woman to be elected to Sorocaba's council but was unable to assume her post, due to her membership of the (then illegal) PCB, the Brazilian Communist Party. Women and 90 years of communism in Brazil ("As mulheres e os noventa anos do comunismo do Brasil") (Buonicore, Garcia 2012). Augusto Buonicore and Fernando Garcia explain the social context.

Salvadora Lopes Perez (*ibidem*) started work in a textile factory when she was ten or eleven. Conditions were dire, ten hour days were the norm and women were badly affected, not only oppressed by employers but also lacking a voice in politics with no chance to vote. Indeed this book documents that, of course, there was no elected representation for women at all in any political party at that time. In 1938 she refused to work the standard ten sometimes twelve-hour day and was sacked as a result. However, she continued to protest, becoming the voice of the strikers when women began to take action against the oppression. These horrendous working conditions proved fertile ground for the Communist Party to recruit many members, whose strike outraged many journalists and indeed, society at large, at that time. However, with help from the party, she was reinstated and visited the USSR in the post war period. A contemporary journalist's outrage at the groups of unhappy young girls who worked in factories, who were striking and shouting outside the factory, was seen as inflammatory at that time. Salvadora Lopes Peres (2020), regained her job in 1939 and workers were given an eight-hour day. There were many issues of safety for children of mothers who were employed (cases of children of 7 years forced into unsafe conditions in factories) and in 1949 she presented "*A exploração da mulher dentro da empresa e a falta de proteção á infância*" to the first Convention of Women of the State of São Paulo.

My interest was also hooked by the fact that another famous Brazilian woman had also visited the USSR as part of the communist party in this era: Tarsila do Amaral (MoMA 2018), the modernist painter. Her earlier work was influenced by her studies in Paris in 1920, and on her return to Brazil just after the 1922 "Semana de Arte Moderna" (Week of Modern Art), she began a series of paintings which defined a new style, working closely with the poet Oswald de Andrade who would become her husband. Tarsila's "The Black Woman" (1923) portrait of a stylised, nude Afro-Brazilian woman outlined with a geometric background marked the beginning of a period of avant-garde experimentation. Accompanied by Andrade, Tarsila was instrumental in the formation of the aesthetic movement, Antropófago (Andrade 1972 [1929]), a method to devour or consume European culture in order to transform the energy into a more powerful art, a uniquely Brazilian art, perhaps like wood which had become an important export from Brazil. Silvana Sarti (2018) described it as a consumption of something powerful, cannibalism in effect, which nourishes and is used to create something entirely new. It was Tarsila's celebrated painting "Abaporu" (1928), which inspired Andrade's famous "Manifesto Antropófago". I had always loved Tarsila's "Operários" (1933; Factory workers) showing factory towers in the background and diagonally placed heads filling the right hand side of large paintings with its human faces of every ethnicity – possibly united workers but maybe a reflection of the racial mix of Brazil, and showing Tarsila's interest in the impact of industrialization on society and perhaps her travel to the USSR as a member of the communist party, where she participated in art exhibitions. However, she was imprisoned for a month during the Constitutional Revolution, accused of subversion. On her release from prison, it appears that she decided to abandon her political militancy but continued to use the themes in her art. Her contribution to and effect on the direction taken by Brazilian art is undeniable.

"Yby-Soroc" had whetted my appetite for Brazilian countryside and after viewing it, this Irish artist hitched a ride with Miguel Cinquini, who worked as a soil fertility consultant for Celta, selling organic soil improver for farms and garden centres, who was travelling through Minas Gerais state for a working week. Hardly "On the road" but this certainly provided me an opportunity to view countryside and farms and I was tempted by the famous cuisine of another Brazilian region.

2.2.2 En Route to Minas Gerais, the Indigenous, the Colonisers and the Irish Story

Miguel had warned me we were in for many kilometres on the road, so I used the opportunity to read up on the cuisine of Minas Gerais, Anthropophagy and the indigenous mix of Brazil, including how many Irish lived there and their equivalent in the Emerald Isle. Unlike

Argentina, there is not a huge population of Irish descent in Brazil. Indeed, the statistics seem to show that an increasing number of Brazilians are choosing instead to emigrate to the Emerald Isle for economic reasons, which surprised me. 13,000 Brazilians lived in Ireland at the last Irish census. Garret Maher detailed some of the reasons, linked to the intervention of an Irish priest:

> Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, when Ireland was in the midst of an economic boom, there was a need for migrant labour to work in a number of industries in which Irish people no longer wished to work. It seems that an Irish resident in Brazil made the initial contact. The Celtic Tiger was very keen for agricultural labour and also for workers for meat processing and construction, mainly in the areas of Gort and Roscommon. In 2002 just over 1,000 Brazilians were recorded in Ireland; by 2006 this increased to more than 4,300 according to census data, yet other estimates suggest that the figure was closer to 8,000 at that time (CSO 2003; O'Neill 2007). (Maher 2011, 77)

Simultaneous with their arrival and playing an influential part in integrating some of the Brazilian immigrants with each other, at least five Evangelical Churches were established in Gort and three in Roscommon, including the Assembly of God (Assembleia de Deus), God is Love (Deus é Amor) and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, also known as the UCKG Help Centre), all of which were founded in Brazil. No Evangelical Churches existed in either Gort or Roscommon, prior to their arrival. In the USA, the influence of the evangelical churches is practical, offering assistance with housing, employment and often documentation (*ibidem*).

Moving on from the Irish, it surprised me to learn that there are more people of mainly African descent in Brazil than in any other nation outside of Africa, and African music, dance, food, and religious practices have become an integral part of Brazilian culture, particularly in the North and also in Minas Gerais where in the eighteenth century, the mining of gold and diamonds began and many slaves were sent to work as agricultural labourers and domestic servants. Most African slaves were sent to labour on sugarcane plantations in the Northeast of Brazil in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, some who escaped and fled into the interior established independent farming communities and/or mixed with Indian groups. The abolition of slavery happened in 1888, and many Africans chose to leave the areas where they had been held captive and settled in other agricultural regions or in towns; however, the Northeast retained the heaviest concentration of Africans and mulattoes. From the 1860s to the 1920s, Brazilian manufacturers hired millions of European immigrants but largely avoided employing the descendants of slaves, who remained at the margin of Brazil's economy.

Before arriving, I had been warned about gun crime and violence on the streets of Brazil and seen incredible photography of the favelas. On 15 March 2018, it was reported that politician Marielle Franco, had been assassinated in her car, alongside her chauffeur, shocking Brazil and adding two more deaths to the numbers of dead protesters. More than 300 human rights activists were killed in 2019, according to a Front Line Defenders report, 14 Jan 2020 (Front Line 2019). While Colombia topped the list for the most murders with 103, with The Philippines second, this was closely followed by both Brazil and Mexico. Details of the physical assaults, defamation campaigns, digital security threats, judicial harassment, and gender-based attacks faced by human rights defenders across the world, on the frontline of protests against deep seated inequalities, corruption and authoritarianism, it is accepted as the status quo. In the cases for which the data is available, the report found: 85% of those killed last year had previously been threatened either individually or as part of the community or group in which they worked. 13% of those reported killed were women. 40% of those killed worked on land, indigenous peoples and environmental issues. In nearly all countries that experienced mass protests in 2019, human rights defenders were specifically targeted. They mobilized marches, documented police and military abuses, and helped citizens who were injured or arrested. So this is the background for the 2018 election campaign of Bolsonaro, the Brazilian candidate for the presidency who was stabbed in Brazil while I was in Argentina. The result for him was victory

in the polls, as the country rallied round a wounded politician, who was "standing up" to gun rule. The Ele não campaign flooded Facebook and social media, as a feminist protest against Bolsonaro's previous actions, while in Argentina the Ni Una Menos campaign was coming into its own. His election caused opinionated family discussions with the people I met at parties and socially; strong support against violence was topical but some espoused the idea that force needed to be met with force, and Bolsonaro's election has led to many changes in Brazil in public behaviour; in the arts, censorship and environment, which is not the purpose of this paper but has been noted.

3. An Irish Woman in Minas Gerais State, Brazil; Swapping Urban for Rural

After six weeks on my travels mainly in urban areas, the trip to *Minas Gerais* state allowed me an opportunity to view real Brazilian countryside. For somebody who had never seen a coffee plant, I was about to see kilometre after kilometre as well as bananas, bamboo, sugar cane and unidentified, exotic fruit, driving though rural areas with a salesman for organic, agricultural products to farmers in these areas. Minas Gerais is industrialised, with a large urban and finance centre based in Belo Horizonte, which we completely avoided. Despite knowing that this is the second most populous state after São Paulo, my trip was to remote farms, garden centres, even a private cactus/succulent grower. The huge distances we drove daily made me pity the travelling consultant's job but permitted me a delightful vista of farms, small provincial towns and a real taste of inland Brazil. I had visited Tigre and La Plata in Argentina on day trips but this was complete immersion for a week. The coffee plantations I insisted on photographing on every occasion, stunned me by their sharp, acid green growth but I was equally mesmerised by the rich, red colour of the soil in this state which contrasts deeply with soil seen either at home in Ireland or in my allotment in Kent. Perhaps it was the influence of my travelling companion that I noticed it so much but the colour was unbelievable. Imagine the rust that forms on an old, unused bicycle and mix that with a dash of blood-red and there it is; the perfect growing medium for that favourite breakfast beverage of half the world.

Fig. 13 – First view of coffee plantations, showing the rich rust red colour of the soil in Minas Gerais. Courtesy of the Author

Leaving Sorocaba we drove to our first overnight stay in Mococa, still in São Paulo state. In what seemed to be a personal message to me that it was time for a nocturnal wake up, another thunderstorm awakening in Hotel Dani, this time at 4:34 am with a pack of barking, howling stray dogs running wild in the car park, in case anybody thought they would be permitted to sleep through this. The weather in Latin America is worth describing because it's not like English or Irish rain. It is pouring down roof drainage pipes, overflowing. The car park visible from my window has rivers of brown water running into huge slatted drains, which are not coping. The lightning, which by now, I have seen all over Latin America, is excelling itself tonight. The crackling sound and the silver shocks are visible through the blind. I am in awe, the dogs howling and dervish-like while I sit in this motel in the middle of nowhere with no Wi-Fi wondering how I got here? These moments of weather were later painted into my "Rainbows for Meditation" landscapes – floods of rain, crackling lightning, howling animals, scudding clouds, swaying palm trees, unknown street signs, night-time. My trip commenced with a downpour and so it would continue. Early breakfast is on the cards for business people and "Café da Manhã" (breakfast) in Hotel Dani – was just 4 of us, the rest suited, me slightly more casual in this formal room, in the middle of nowhere, all in suits. We are almost in one of the best coffee growing areas in the world with friendly staff. My driver would continue to work on this trip – stopping at small farms to fulfil an order of Zeolita, a soil improver, meaning sometimes, I would be deposited in a small town to be collected later. Our first day Miguel went to a farm and I wandered on a tourist trip, with camera clicking.

Lunch is a big meal in Brazil, and we stopped in a huge city with a skyscraper skyline called Alfenas, in a pretty restaurant Miguel knew, with bottles of wine and liqueurs adorning the walls. People were arriving to eat in droves, queueing to buy takeaways and I am wistful now at the freedom of movement we had back then. I had a luxurious Tilapia lunch – Miguel, seasoned driver, knew that a good lunch stop is essential and he had warned me that dinner would be late. However, the Irish newbie was so excited by the unfamiliar food presented, struggling to pronounce it. The pristine, ironed, gingham cotton tablecloths, blue and white squared, the waiter's obsequious service, Miguel's insistence that I eat a lot and sate my hunger should have warned me about the distance we were going to travel. That afternoon's drive was steep – upwards and upwards, the scenery of agricultural fields. At one point I dropped off and woke at the top of a really high mountain with a super dramatic descent – a curling winding down road to Rifaina, a small town which is the last place to buy petrol before we cross into Minas Gerais.

Strangely, I pondered on whether the Conquistadores to foreign lands also felt the same. For me there was WhatsApp and social media so they could see snapshots of my experiences at home, but a sixteenth century explorer had no such resources. Although I was completely lost in a landmass of Minas Gerais, I knew I could switch on Maps at any stage and understand the latitude and longitude and consult TripAdvisor.

Just before where we crossed the river, we stopped at a petrol station in Rifaina, a town that is next to the Rio Grande. Route 464 crosses the river so first we stretched our legs at a huge viewing place, a lake with fishermen. It was absolutely heavenly here after sitting in the car for so long, still light, with groups of fishermen and waves from a motorboat long gone. I know this from my own travels on the River Medway in the UK; if a fast boat passes you, you wait tensely as a curling wave approaches you, preparing yourself for the swing wildly in one direction or the other. It had been a very long drive already. The life of a travelling salesman is long and solitary and for Miguel, this provided him with an opportunity to practise his English and probably a welcome extra person to reflect on the sights. The sky was leaden, and it changed so quickly. Rain was again dropping as we dashed for the car, me getting wet as I had stopped to take pictures of this beautiful, unfamiliar tree in full bloom with bright yellow flowers. Drops began to patter down all of a sudden, we dashed

back to the car as the storm hit. You could feel the electricity in the air, watch as clouds chased each other across the sky and there was a beautiful yellow bloom tree which was battered by the rain. The grey and yellow interacted in the most magical visual way, etched on my brain for later painting. These are *Ipê*, I learned back in the car. We dashed for the car and the element of surprise here leaving Rifaina behind, is that we are about to cross a huge river. Like everything else in Brazil, it is the sheer scale of it. It seemed like an insanely long crossing – it is – but more so because lightning was flashing as we drove. We could see it actually overtaking us and knew with a sinking feeling (if you are me) that we might actually catch up with these scudding clouds and jagged lightning strikes. I see why the ancient civilisations visualise the Lord of Thunder, as on a chariot racing with the clouds, a Celestial noise maker. Once we cross this bridge, Miguel assures me, we arrive in Minas Gerais, as this bridge is also the border between São Paulo and Minas Gerais.

It has to be said that darkness was approaching at this point and once across the bridge, we snaked through a mountainous landscape going higher and higher, chasing the storm clouds. It was pitch black and it suddenly reminded me of a childhood trip on the Conor Pass in Kerry, where the width of the road allowed for no accidents and there were few streetlights. Rivers of rain were pouring down the narrow little roads to the left and right of this main drag. Cows in darkness were lit up occasionally by our headlights or that lightning flash. Trucks came chugging up the hill from the opposite direction. And down. No houses. A land seemingly deserted by humans, perhaps human habitation was concealed by angry clouds, thunder and lightning. We seem to be totally insignificant with clouds threatening to overwhelm. The noise of this storm is overwhelming. Miguel said nothing because he was concentrating on driving, but he was laughing at me and my exclamations and I cannot believe he didn't feel the power and majesty of Mother Nature pouring down on us. Maybe he is used to it? I felt very tiny in the car, like ants on a massive landscape, with the deities above chucking massive buckets of water on a parched land. I was petrified and Miguel kept saying he wasn't scared but it was certainly a type of intense, glad to be alive moment, albeit locked up like a tin of sardines in the small metal shell of a car, terribly aware of our human vulnerability.

Fig. 14 – Rainy weather and a palette of colour in Minas Gerais, which proved inspirational for the Author. Courtesy of the Author

A thought about distances occurred to me. Brazil is almost half of South America, with a total area of 8,514,215 km² (3,287,357 sq. mi.). As the Republic of Ireland is 84,421 km² this means over 100 Irelands could fit into Brazil. While comparing the Republic of Ireland to Minas Gerais, this state is larger than the whole Republic! It is really mountainous too and we could see them in the distance if we drove in the valleys, no matter where we were. When on high, it seemed like a continuous farm with neat rows of cultivated crops stretching in pleasing lines. Comparing myself to a Conquistador, imagine reliving the motives for their trips into this unknown; riches, fame, Royal favour, religion? It must have been terrifyingly different from home. My many hours spent alone while Miguel was selling his products gave me plenty of time for reflection; the kilometres in the car passing through the most miraculous of scenery for me but for the driver it meant a constant scanning of the road, the weather, the traffic and also listening for updates on a phone. I, by contrast, was a mere shadow in the car and the scenery *inolvidável*, unforgettable. Miguel seemed interested in what I was observing, seeing the world though a foreigner's eyes instead of his own, strictly eyes to the road. I revised my idea that this was a script for an on-the-road movie, Jack Kerouac style. The longer it continued, the more it turned into Zen and the Art of Driving Safely Through Minas. Finally we arrive at a destination; it is not raining. I breathe a sigh of relief – we are in São Sebastião do Paraíso.

3.1 São Sebastião do Paraíso, Minas Gerais

Worn out from 11 hours travelling the day before, next morning we settled into breakfast in Hotel Cosini. This hotel is really busy considering it is off season early spring, offering a lavish breakfast with tables of fresh fruit, cut into patterns, pastries and bread sliced with cheeses, sliced meats and yogurt and a kind of sweet cottage cheese. We are served by a smiling waitress, keen to know where we are from and the purpose of our visit. Miguel has meetings to attend; for me, an opportunity to read the *Folha De São Paulo*, the free newspaper provided and to try asking for more coffee, to practise the phrases learned as my usual translator had already departed on his busy schedule. Tiles of exquisite workmanship lined the walls and I glanced into the swimming pool, which was quiet but in full summer I could see this would be a tourist destination. Alone in this sweet little town, its name translating as Saint Sebastian of Paradise, I wandered towards the square and the church outside the Hotel Cosini. The square was full of really mature trees, their roots emerging out of the ground, their shade covering various wooden seats in this busy street where cars zoomed up and down on either side. The weather was kind comparing it to the storms I had seen the day before and in previous weeks. Two statues graced this elegant square – one of a breastfeeding mother, and another of Saint Sebastian (c. AD 256-288) the early Christian saint and martyr. We had arrived so late and under cover of darkness that we had no idea of the beauty of the little town in which we stayed overnight. The colours here were so incredibly different to either Ireland or the UK but the architecture certainly had a European colonial feel. I watched over a railing as school children were playing in a playground, and the building could have been a Spanish or Portuguese restaurant. While our schools seem very functional; this was curved, painted green with little arches and natural hiding places for children to play. Bright blue was another favourite for exterior painting. This town became a municipality in 1870, with a population of about 70,000 and it is known for its high-quality coffee and agricultural production of sugarcane, fruit, rice and beans. However, this is not the state of huge multinationals; the majority of farms are owned as small holdings and agriculture employs 8,400 people. José Carlos Gonçalves, a well-known coffee producer was born here and his farm is also the largest avocado producer in the whole of Brazil. This area

is equally well known for its milk products. For me, the friendliness and beauty of the town are reflected in its high rankings for its quality of life; Paradise indeed.

Fig. 15 – Main Square in São Sebastião do Paraíso showing the church, several statues and abundant tree growth. Courtesy of the Author

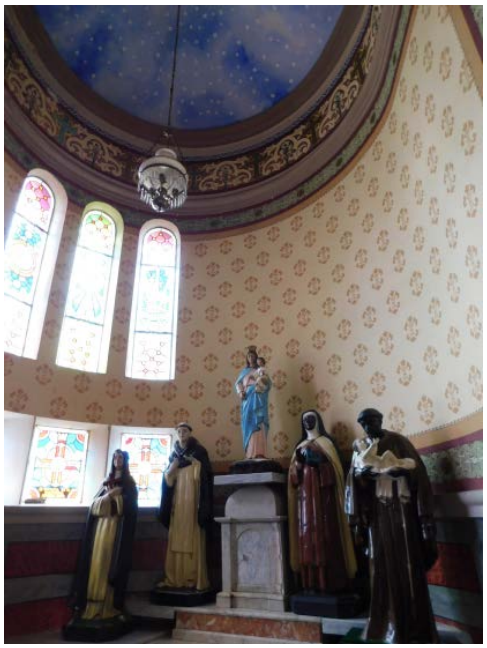

Fig. 16 – The interior of the church with a Black Madonna. Courtesy of the Author

Fig. 17 – Street vendor with vegetables displayed in a wheelbarrow. Courtesy of the Author

Atop the tower of the church, Igreja Matriz São Sebastião do Paraíso, Christ's outstretched hands overlook this picturesque square inviting visitors to prayer. It is busy – cars are beeping, people are playing in the square and shopkeepers are shouting out prices. However as eyes struggle to adjust to the darkness on entry, then I push a crafted, beautiful stained glass window door. Inside, the dark interior reveals a treasure trove above my head, a circular night sky painted with stars in the foyer, and standing underneath them are four statues, one of which was a Black Madonna. To date, I had seen these statues in Montserrat in Spain, in Dublin, in Poland, in La Plata, in Sorocaba and now this town.

When I arrived home, these faces of Black Madonnas seemed to speak to me. These were developed into a series of mono-prints in my exhibition, "Patterns for Peace" in 2019 (Lawlor Mottram 2019). Inside the church, the overall feeling is lightness, with colour provided by red marble columns lining the aisle, beautifully painted frescoed ceiling overhead and wooden pews to rest a while and enjoy the peace. On a street close by, I found a vegetable seller – his wheelbarrow full of home-grown lettuce, several types of spinach, leeks and onions. I found a souvenir shop and tried my luck in clothes shops for presents and also a supermarket, to view the local produce. Local coffee, sugar, fruit, sweet dairy cottage cheese products and something I had never imagined – sugarcane chopped into pieces to use in juice making. By now, my Spanish had been left in Buenos Aires and I could understand written signs and make myself understood in most situations, ordering lunch and having a Brazilian beer in an outdoor café. I would certainly recommend this town for a slow easy holiday, particularly if you like swimming and can use the sauna and pool in Hotel Cosini.

For our afternoon outing I was due to meet up with Miguel after his first meeting, to visit a farm; Fazenda Nossa Senhora da Conceição. My eyes gazed on gentle hills with fields of trees in bloom – lilac purple, high Jacaranda trees and coffee planted in rows, on wet sodden fields,

water logged after the previous night's storm. A proud "Approved by ILLY coffee" adorned a wall. This farm manager discussed production – how coffee beans are grown on slanting hills all around, then collected in a large flat area laid out on the ground on a pitch about the size of 4 or 5 football pitches to my eye, then carefully graded into green coffee or red coffee, the green being slightly inferior and for local use. The red beans are selected, dried and sent for export. As we wandered about, I was on the lookout for *canastras*, a local animal with no luck but we saw an abundance of butterflies, lizards and birds. A fruit tree I could not identify; we picked a tiny orange, oval shaped one off the ground and tried it – discarded on the soil under a tree. Deliciously sweet, looks like an apricot but certainly not one. This is a fruit of the *Cerrados* (Savannah) Miguel tells me, so it might be a *pequi*. I tried a piece of it and it was so sweet.

Accompanying a soil consultant, we were able to visit huge storage rooms and drying rooms, where the precious beans were stored. We could also admire the farm's own little brick-built church, for the family's use. I also spotted an old Volkswagen from the sixties or seventies, which was being fixed for use. This so reminded me of parts of rural Ireland, where youngsters would fix up old cars. In fact, it seemed such a worldwide activity, this re-modelling of old bangers that it made me smile. Here too, we saw an allotment, a garden for use by the workers to grow salads and herbs, all growing wonderfully in winter. I began to think longingly of hotter temperatures but Miguel said he was relieved it was cool because he was working.

Minas Gerais is famous for many agricultural products – *pequis* are grown all over the state and it is permitted to pick them by anybody. They can be eaten fresh, although they have spikes so locals often dry them, after removing these. The seed can be salted, then and eaten like peanuts. They also have a high oil content which can be used for biofuel. *Goiabada* is a sweet made with Guava fruit, often eaten with local cheese; *queijo com goiabada* is a Minas delicacy. Another strange sounding fruit is *jabuticaba* which you can buy on roadside stalls in boxes, a light brown, roundish fruit I had never heard of. Another state special was *coxinha*, chicken and potato croquettes fried in oil. I even read that there is now a market for loquats grown here in Minas to sell to Asia; some local farms are also growing lychees for foreign export. Today is another long drive. Feeling like I have learned a lot about local produce and flora, we climb higher and higher up hills in darkness now, to reach a place with little lights sparkling in the distance, a town famed for being the best place to catch a view of the rising sun.

Fig. 18 – Boxed *jabuticabas* on sale in a street market. Courtesy of the Author

3.2 Minas Gerais State – Araxá

"The name Araxá" said the lady in the tourist office in the centre of town pointing at a tourist leaflet, "is a reference to the name given by the indigenous population who lived here until the eighteenth century. In their language, it means a high place from where you see the sunrise first" (Côrtes 2011). This description perfectly describes this picturesque town on a hill, overlooking lush scenery in the spring time I visited. The city is famed for its healing mineral waters and in the nineteenth century, there were studies undertaken with regard to its use in the treatment of tuberculosis. Legend has it that these waters give eternal youth, and speakers of Irish will know the term The Land of the Young or *Tír na nÓg* (Heaney 1994) and The Water of Life or *Uisce Beatha*. Having recently introduced the story of the Salmon of Knowledge (Lawlor Mottram 2020) to children in Buenos Aires province, I found myself relating the legends of Fionn MacCumhail once again, marvelling at how similar mythology and beliefs survive across all five continents. The natural mineral waters of the Dona Beja Springs (DBS) named after the town's most famous citizen (see section 3.5 below) and Andrade Júnior springs (AJS) from Araxá city, in the Brazilian State of Minas Gerais, are well known since the nineteenth century when started the studies of their healing properties for the tuberculosis treatment (Bonotto, de Oliveira Thomazini 2019). The period 1930-1950 in Araxá saw a boom in thermal and non–thermal spas, both for therapeutic and leisure purposes.

Assumed to be American in the Tourist Information Centre, I corrected them and as the first ever Irish visitor to the town, I proudly signed the Visitors' Book in the central Municipal buildings and asked if anybody there could help me in English, with some of my questions. Employee Madalena Aguiar gave me a guided tour of the city and the town's produce, in her excellent English, showing me home-made local fruit preserves and other items in storage, and explaining where I could buy them as gifts. I was disappointed that the museum of Dona Beja was closed for renovation so she suggested the general museum instead. I was made so welcome here too – Madalena explaining that I was the first Irish visitor to the town, the guides rushed to tell me in as much detail as possible about the town.

Fig. 19 – The old railway station in Araxá, converted into a cultural centre. Courtesy of the Author

Fig. 20 – The weavers who work in the cultural centre in their workshop. Courtesy of the Author

I had already found an arts and cultural centre by chance, Fundação Calmon Barreto de Araxá – next to the railway lines. The Foundation was set up in the disused railway station in 1996 to celebrate the work of Araxá's most famous visual artist, Calmon Barreto. It is a beautiful building, with many original features intact and is now used as a centre for local artists and writers to meet, also housing a weaving workshop where local female weavers still work and sell their textiles in the shop. I had learned about the arrival of the railway in Sorocaba and I knew the level of foreign investment and engineering. Barreto, a native of the town, had moved to São Paulo where he had exhibited widely and won many awards for his paintings before moving back to his hometown. In 1987 an exhibition entitled "Dona Beja recebe Calmon" showed twelve of his paintings in the Municipal Museum of Dona Beja. It was this painting of Dona Beja which caught my attention, which I saw in the town's museum; – an equestrian picture of a blue-dressed, beautiful young woman, seated mounted on a horse, not in the classic female side-saddle position but seated as a modern rider of a horse. By now, my curiosity was whetted to discover more about the town's famous citizen and the answer was a commentary on how history is made according to the standards of the era.

3.3 In Memoriam: Dona Beja and Ann Lovett

Araxá's most famous resident has been immortalised by TV Manchete's television soap opera loosely based on her life, which aired first in the 1980s, called *Dona Beija: A Feiticeira* (the sorceress) taking its name from the beautiful beijo flower. This series concerned the protagonist's strength in overcoming the events that clouded her life, including the disapproval and prejudice of a small-minded rural town. The series was also made in Spanish called "Doña Bella", which was commissioned by Telefutura. Although some facts are based on her life, the true story would make headline news as horror today. Ana Jacinta do São José, was born in 1800 in the municipality of Formiga. The family moved to Araxá when she was young, where

she lived her adolescence happily until the age of 15. Information provided by a local Town Councillor, Sidney Ferreira (2020), describes her as an extraordinarily beautiful teenager who in 1815, aged just 15, was abducted then raped by the General Ombudsman of the county, a man named Dr Joaquim Inácio Silveira da Motta. Her grandfather died in the attempt to stop the kidnap. After this initial rape, her mother, Maria Bernardo, made a formal complaint to the local authorities but Councillor Ferreira says at that time, events like these were quite common especially when the offence was committed by somebody of a higher social status and the doctor forced the girl to live with him for 12 years, as his lover. The only recourse available to her mother was an appeal made to the neighbouring Governor of Goiás, known to be a sworn enemy of Dr Silveira da Motta. His response to Dona Beja's mother's complaint was to pass a decree transferring Araxá's judicial and sentencing bodies to became part of the Minas Gerais district (Côrtes 2011).

When said Ombudsman was recalled to the Royal Court twelve years later, Ana Jacinta then aged 27, was able to finally return to her home town. Her arrival in Araxá was not without problems, after 12 years of abuse (if viewed in contemporary terms), where she was met with quite a hostile reception. Conservative society decided that she was not a victim but a seductress. Leonardos (1957) in his book about her narrates a story which illustrated the rivalry which existed between the Ladies of Araxá (*Dona Beija: A Feiticeira do Araxá* narra uma passagem que ilustra a rivalidade existente entre Beija e conservadoras "senhoras do Araxá"). In response, Dona Beja built a sumptuous house in Chácara do Jatobá, where she settled with her family. There she entertained the men of the district, holding parties and receptions in colonial style, living out her days in semi-luxury from the high fees charged to anybody seeking her favour. So although some tourist leaflets label her as a courtesan-type character who was "loved by men and hated by women", the real life character now has her own museum in pride of place close to the centre of town, painted in sky blue. However, the facts about Dona Beja's life, if re-told with a twenty-first century perspective, read incredibly differently from how she is portrayed by history and contemporary society.

The age at which she was brutally raped is exactly the same as that of Ann Lovett in Ireland, the teenager whose baby died after giving birth outdoors in a freezing, cold grotto in February 1984, followed by the death of the mother due to exposure. In both cases these young women were initially seen as bringing shame upon their local community but ultimately Ann Lovett's death "changed Ireland forever" says Niall O'Dowd (2018) in an article about her in 2018. The story was originally covered by Rosita Boland of *The Irish Times* (2004); O'Dowd referred to Ann Lovett's death, which happened just four months after the outcome of a divisive abortion referendum in which a two-thirds majority voted to enshrine the right to life of the unborn in the constitution. After Ann Lovett's untimely death, the local community remained silent, although there was a police investigation, with connections to the local priest and a missing letter from the young girl which supposedly had been burned. Several questions remain unanswered. At that time the identity of the baby's father never came to light and there was no talk of criminal charges of having sex with a minor or if indeed, he was of age himself. The Garda investigations petered out. There was a private inquiry into Ann Lovett's death, but the report was not made public. Later articles uncovered the girl's sexual partner who claimed there had been an unreported incident, where her thighs were bruised, he suspected rape but she refused to report it to the local police. The tragedy of her death meant her name resounded in the public debate about whether the rights of a mother were equal to that of her unborn child. Extenuating circumstances of another underage child X in 1992, who had been raped and sought to travel to terminate that pregnancy, was in danger of becoming criminalised and also the death of Savita

Halappanaver in 2012, who had been denied an abortion while suffering a septic miscarriage. All of these tragedies increased calls to repeal the Eighth Amendment in Ireland. The debate surrounding these cases questioned whether the rights of the mother should be given equal importance as those of the unborn child which caused national discussions about Church and State. The Citizens' Assemblies formed to gauge and inform public opinion were successful in framing the debates during the referendum in 2018. This was the year I travelled to Latin America, where the same issue was being discussed by the Argentine parliament; to equally loud protests for and against with graffiti, posters and debates on the streets of Buenos Aires during my visit. The "invisible" men who fathered the children rarely faced the public outcry faced by young women. I imagined that Tarsila do Amaral would have certainly swallowed their stories, including the governor, with passion and converted them into something huge.

4. Summary: How This Journey Impacted the Artist's Creative Work

> El emigrante por sí mismo y a través de las instituciones que crea, vive simultáneamente en el país emisor y en el receptor. (Cruset 2019)

Writing these memories has also brought waves of nostalgia; this trip was a once in a lifetime event and the themes of invisible and visible histories and their preservation in the collective mind, in food and festivals, in agriculture, in churches and monuments became obvious to me only in writing this paper. My fascination with that which is absent, like Girón's bird jackets or the invisible Solís and those outlined women workers in Lopes' paintings, somehow is the theme that emerged after my trip. It may stem from my upbringing on tales of the mythical Irish heroes the *Fianna* (Heaney 1994), the exploits of Fionn MacCumhail but also the *Tuatha Dé Danaan*, that tribe forced to leave Ireland forever and move into the *Sidhe* (fairy) underground who are less well known but do linger deep in my own knowledge of Irish mythology and which echo ever present in the imagination of the Irish. We live with two languages, like many of the places I visited and in a similar manner I imagine that the spirit of the indigenous mind still co-habits the land and the genetics of the inhabitants. "The dead may be invisible but they are not absent" as Saint Augustine of Hippo is reported to have coined.

So how does this fit into my own artistic practice? The artwork created after my Latin American trip was exhibited in my exhibition "Patterns for Peace" (Lawlor Mottram 2019) at the Royal Engineers Museum, UK, based on my artist-in-residence in Argentina incorporating Black Madonna portraits and *Rainbows for Meditation.* Recently, one of these Black Madonnas illustrates the cover of a book called *Hag's Well* by Honor Ní Fhactnáin (2021), a story of a single mother in the Gaeltacht area of Ireland. However, I feel that my experience in Brazil is now also coming forward and the vast areas of countryside, the different species of trees, fruit and flowers seen there are ever present in my drawings of vegetation. In 2021 I created "A Stump to view the Ghost of a Tree" (Lawlor Mottram 2021) in which I plan to place a sawn off log in front of the funereal black velvet artwork of a dead tree, created as a protest for a tree that no longer exists – the Cubbington Pear (Bond 2020), destroyed during lockdown in the UK to make way for the new, high speed railway HS2. In 2015 this tree was voted Britain's favourite and it is ironic that during the pandemic of 2020, the world valued their green spaces so much while this ancient tree was felled. I fear for our natural world.

Fig. 21 – Black Madonna photographed in Sorocaba, Brazil. Courtesy of the Author

Fig. 22 – Tina Lawlor Mottram, *A Stump to view the Ghost of a Tree*, moulded paper and fabric installation, 2021. Courtesy of the Author

The travellers and the foreigners who settle, bring with them their skills and experience, in addition to their language and any disease to which the local population may not be immune. Travel broadens the ability to view your own life from a distance and enables some recognition of similarities in situations; the abortion debates, the struggle against an occupier, territorial struggles in which I include Brexit, different languages and different viewpoints. The Dona Beja story brought memories of Ann Lovett, the Me too movement and also Ni Una Menos, so strong in Argentina. The 2020 BLM movement was also a call for change – in our pandemic disease-struck world, the young and the active protested wearing masks on the streets and toppled statues into the waters in Bristol.

In 2021, casting an eye backwards on my travels in a landmass I can barely see on a whole page of my atlas, I track my journey with pleasure while also plotting the journey of the COVID-19 virus making me feel that I have travelled back in time. The sheer distance – from Sorocaba to Araxá was about 1000 km, from Buenos Aires to Brazil was huge in relation to Irish distances. When the first European travellers arrived, they brought silent killers such as smallpox, measles and influenza which decimated native populations, unaccustomed to them. Our daily TV flashes of scenes in intensive care COVID–19 units in hospitals worldwide, all of them masked, covered in protective clothing makes 2020 a year the world will never forget. I last visited Ireland in Feb 2019 and there seems to be no hope in the near future of going there until I have my vaccination passport. As Cruset (2019) maintains, the emigrant lives in both the new world chosen in addition to carrying their country of origin deep inside. For me, on my travels I was deeply aware of how embedded in British culture I have become through employment, marriage and friendships while also relishing future contact with Ireland and future collaboration on Latin American art and environmental projects.

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