

Sol Calero
Archivos Olvidados

Archivos Olvidados is a tribute to Sol Calero's late grandmother Luisa Hernández, known by her grandchildren as "Abuli." A pillar of the family, Hernández lived between her home in Caracas and her farm in Los Llanos, the flatlands of Venezuela, where she became an important member of the community, opening up her home for the local children to learn in classes, decorate the house and participate in social meetings. After raising her six children alone as a widow, she enrolled at the Escuela de Artes Cristóbal Rojas in Caracas and began to study fine art. Calero spent a large part of her childhood taking part in her grandmother's organic learning process, where art and craftsmanship became indivisible from a familial and social structure that allowed for and celebrated the collective aspect of art-making and understanding. The central subject matter of the exhibition is her grandmother's most recent archive of images, which she collected from magazines as references for her paintings. These last clippings represent a body of work left unfinished upon Hernández's death, here picked up and elaborated upon by Calero.

The gallery space presented itself as a trajectory of Calero's process of approaching the archive, beginning with an intimate room of child-sized proportions, where the original images that Abuli used as references for her paintings were displayed. In the same room, Calero had undertaken a drawing exercise she learned from her grandmother: draw a line, then another one to close it into a shape, and fill the space with color. Using the gestural freedom that children possess by nature to cover the entire space, Calero repeats the ritual of drawing with her grandmother. The artist leaves chalk marks on the blackboard canvases used for paintings in this room as visible remnants of her attempts to draw horses for the first time.

In the following room, the paintings departed from Calero's usual visual language to feature fragmented compositions referring to the newspaper clippings collected by Hernández. Featuring motifs such as horses, fruits and landscapes, the paintings contain bits of the archive and anecdotes from her childhood. This room led to another, which Calero had transformed into a patio: a place where visitors could gather and sit together, activating the space. The walls here were painted with a mural of pastel colors, decorative patterns and fruit motifs based on a sketch from the archive.

Behind this colorful façade lies the ambiguity that comes with trying to piece together memories, how selective the act of recollection can be, and the limitations of our efforts to capture the past. In the context of Venezuelan society, where oblivion and preservation are in constant conflict, the mural represents the smoothing out of events and the subsequent glossing over of history in favor of external narratives about a people's culture. And yet, the transference of the archive into a social space and the gathering of people through word of mouth carry the potential to preserve the past. Calero undertakes the journey of remembering over and over again, interpreting deeply-rooted memories in the hopes of revisiting a history that is only personal on the surface.