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### Ana Vizcarra Rankin: Reimagining Maps as a Method of Decolonization

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# Ana Vizcarra Rankin: Reimagining Maps as a Method of Decolonization

By **Jessica Baker**

*Special to The Quad*

On Thursday Oct. 20, West Chester University's Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology welcomed internationally established artist Ana Vizcarra Rankin to speak on her artwork of both inverted and reimagined maps. These maps, which challenge the traditional north-/south-oriented maps, are a key starting point in "rewilding our visual language" to undo the implicit bias subtly reinforced by centuries of cartography.

Michael Di Giovine, the director of the museum, was thrilled to introduce Vizcarra Rankin, an artist and activist who holds a BA from Temple and a MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and whose art resides in both public and private collections across the globe. After a quick thanks to the co-sponsors of the lecture, Di Giovine gave the stage to Vizcarra Rankin, who began to present her lecture entitled "Maps, Migration, and Darkness: Rewilding our Visual Language as a Method of Decolonization."

Vizcarra Rankin curiously started her lecture with the topic of stargazing, informing the attendees that the naked eye needs 30 minutes to properly adjust to darkness. She then displayed an image of a star map she personally created in 2015, using only her naked eye for reference. She expressed her wonder as she compared her own map to an almost identical star map created in 1695 by Italian cartographer Vincenzo Coronelli she discovered after completing her own.

Vizcarra Rankin specifically pointed out the constellation Orion, clearly seen in both star maps, who is generally recognized as a hunter or warrior. She challenged this perspective, saying that

these "stars who have been christened by men" reflected their values of masculinity and dared the audience to imagine the stars of Orion creating a woman with a long flowing skirt instead of a man with a sword or club.

In some native cultures, Vizcarra Rankin said, Orion was not a warrior at all, but instead represented various gods of creation or fertility. The redefining of these constellations contributes to the erasure of native cultures, she informed students, supporting her statement that renaming places (and spaces) contributes to the erasure of native populations who were "colonized by missionaries and reinvented by scientists."

Vizcarra Rankin continued, displaying images of inverted and reimagined maps. One piece entitled "El Sur" depicts the traditional world map upside-down. There is no reason for north to be at the top, she told the audience. She then compared her piece, created in 2014, to another map created in 1943 entitled "Nuestro Norte es el Sur," which shows an inverted map of South America. Vizcarra Rankin also showcased one of her inverted world maps that utilizes paint drips to indicate which way the painting should be displayed in a gallery. "[The painting] was so disorienting that people wouldn't even recognize it as a world map," she exclaimed.

Vizcarra Rankin also displayed one of her reimagined maps compared to a map called "World According to Fishes." These maps depict the oceans as continuous bodies of water with the continents warped around as a border. Antarctica is presented in the middle of the maps, resembling an island.

Using data and scale, Vizcarra Rankin showed the attendees a few more of

the maps she has created. One map entitled "Warm Acid Bath" used temperature scales to show the rising temperatures of the oceans, and another map, "IQ ≠ Intelligence," used IQ data to express the faults in the way we measure intelligence. "A carrot knows more about soil than any human," she said, "but it is currently incapable of sharing that information."

Vizcarra Rankin ended her presentation with some incredibly thought-provoking insight. "Can we be a part of our environment without ruining it?" she asked as the audience observed her maps of rising temperatures and increased hurricane frequency. Leaving the attendees with newfound knowledge of the bias and erasure implied by traditional maps, she stated, "it is up to us to progress further into a more equitable environment."

Ana Vizcarra Rankin's lecture was sponsored by the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, the Anthropology Club, the Department of Art and Design and the Institute on Race and Ethnic Studies. Her art is currently on display for viewing at the Beyond the Bell exhibit, located in the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in the Old Library.

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*Anna Vizcarra Rankin's display. Photo by Jessica Baker.*