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INFLATION ART: HOW VENEZUELANS TURNED UNSPENDABLE MONEY INTO A SYMBOLIC ARTFORM

JASON ROVIG AND ANDRÉS CHAPARRO

Arte de la inflación: cómo los venezolanos convirtieron el dinero sin valor en arte simbólico

Arte da inflação: como os venezolanos tornaram dinheiro sem valor em arte simbólica

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ABSTRACT:

Some Venezuelans have found a way to survive their country's economic crisis by creating art from paper money made valueless due to inflation. They use a modular form of origami similar to that used by a group of Chinese refugees from the Golden Venture cargo ship in New York during the 1990s. The similarity is not the result of a direct connection; most likely both practices are based on the same traditional Chinese folk art techniques. The unique aspect of the Venezuelan crafts is that they almost exclusively use devalued Venezuelan currency as artistic material. This document provides a closer look at the development of this money art within the context of the migrant crisis through the perspective of Art For Impact, a social organization that has worked directly with Venezuelan money artists in Cúcuta over the last two years.

KEYWORDS:

Venezuelan crafts, Art For Impact, money art, refugee art, Venezuelan migration crisis, migration art

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RESUMEN:

Algunos venezolanos han encontrado una manera de sobrevivir a la crisis económica de su país al crear obras de arte a partir de billetes que han perdido su valor por causa de la inflación, aplicando una forma modular de origami semejante a la empleada por el grupo de refugiados chinos que llegaron a Nueva York en el carguero Golden Venture en la década de 1990. La semejanza no es resultado de una conexión directa; lo más probable es que ambas prácticas deriven de la misma técnica tradicional de arte vernáculo originaria de China. Las artesanías venezolanas tienen de singular que se valen casi exclusivamente de moneda venezolana desvalorizada como material artístico. Este documento ofrece un estudio más detallado del desarrollo de este arte hecho con dinero en el contexto de la crisis migratoria y desde el punto de vista de Art For Impact, un colectivo que durante los últimos dos años ha trabajado directamente con los artesanos venezolanos que producen arte a partir de billetes en Cúcuta.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Artesanía venezolana, arte hecho con dinero, arte hecho por refugiados, crisis migratoria venezolana, arte hecho por migrantes

RESUMO:

Alguns venezolanos têm encontrado uma maneira de sobreviver à crise econômica de seu país com obras de arte com bilhetes que têm perdido seu valor por causa da inflação, a aplicar uma forma modular de origami que assemelha à que fora usada pelos refugiados chineses do Golden Venture que chegaram a Nova Iorque na década dos anos 90. A semelhança não é resultado de uma conexão direta, mas ambas práticas são derivadas da mesma técnica tradicional de arte vernáculo originária da China. A singularidade dos artesanatos venezolanos é seu meio artístico é a moeda venezolana desvalorizada. Este artigo oferece um estudo detalhado do desenvolvimento de esta arte feita com dinheiro no contexto da crise migratória e desde o ponto de vista da Art For Impact, um coletivo que durante os últimos anos tem trabalhado diretamente com os artesãos venezolanos que produzem estas obras de bilhetes em Cúcuta.

PALAVRAS CHAVE:

artesanato venezolano, arte feito com dinheiro, arte feito por refugiados, crise migratória venezolana, arte feito por migrantes.

WHAT ARE VENEZUELAN BOLIVAR BANKNOTE CRAFTS AND HOW HAVE THEY BECOME ARTISTIC SYMBOLS OF VENEZUELA'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS?

The money crafts made by Venezuelan migrants in Colombia during the humanitarian crisis of recent years have been the subject of various journalistic reports. However, there has not been a more detailed analysis that allows us to know how this type of craft was developed, how it reflects the socio-political situation of the Venezuelan people, and what role it plays as a symbolic art form. This research follows the rise of this type of crafts in the city of Cúcuta, from the devaluation of the currency that allowed its use for producing handicrafts, to its recognition by the media and its intersection with the work of our art based organization, Art For Impact.

This is not the first time that origami has been used by immigrants and refugees, nor is it the first use of this technique as a symbol to protest conditions related to migration. In this case the emergence of this type of artform is intrinsically tied to the evolution of the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis of the last decade. The proliferation of this unique craft beyond its initial nucleus and the growing public interest around it invites investigation of how this specific practice is carried out in a context of migration and political turbulence within Venezuela and Latin America. There is a symbology behind making crafts from paper money that goes beyond individual artistic expression and takes on the value of a political statement.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PAPER ART AND MIGRATION

Although origami is not often associated with migration, a closer look at the subject reveals more than a casual relationship. The use of paper units in crafts has its roots in the centuries-old Chinese *zhé zhǐ* tradition and Japanese modular origami. Both are distinct traditions that gained worldwide popularity in the western world by the twentieth century, thanks to the work of people such as Friedrich Froebel and Miguel de Unamuno, among others.¹ “Chinese paper folding became hugely popularised with a book in 1948 by Maying Soong, called *The Art of Chinese Paper Folding*. Plus, this book also helped separate the Chinese’ paper folding to the Japanese [sic].”² Possibly the earliest reference to modular origami is Hayato Ohoka’s *Ranma Zushiki*, published in 1734.

In the UK, the art of folding paper designs is practiced and taught by Chinese women in immigration prisons as a way to pass the time.³ In the context of the Syrian crisis, refugees in Jordan camps have also found origami and paper

1. Britannica, “History of Origami,” *Britannica*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/origami/History-of-origami>.

2. Cha Cha Moon, “Origins of Chinese Paper Folding,” Cha Cha Moon, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://thechachamoon.wordpress.com/2014/06/26/origins-of-chinese-paper-folding/>.

3. Sarah Turnbull and Joanne Vincett, “Art as Resistance: A Story from Immigration Detention,” *ResearchGate*, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334730353_Art_as_Resistance_A_Story_from_Immigration_Detention; Joanne Vincett, “Origami Art in Immigration Detention,” *Hidden Social Space*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://hidden-socialspace.wordpress.com/origami-art-in-immigration-detention/>.

4. Charlie Dunmore and Annie Sakka, "Origami Helps Syrian Refugee Shape New Life in Exile," *UNHCR*, April 19, 2017, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/4/58ede8b54/origami-helps-syrian-refugee-shape-new-life-exile.html>.

5. Frances Wang, "Japanese-American Activists Will Bring Paper Cranes to Show Solidarity with Migrant Families," *NBC News*, March 25, 2019, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/japanese-american-activists-will-bring-paper-cranes-show-solidarity-migrant-n983856>; Kimi Robinson, "Japanese Americans Make Origami in Show of Support for Immigrants," *Kyodo News*, March 26, 2019, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2019/03/f6adc0ea4bec-update1-japanese-americans-make-origami-in-show-of-support-for-immigrants.html>.

6. Butterfly Effect, "The Butterfly Effect: Migration is Beautiful," *The Butterfly Effect*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://butterflyeffectmigration.org/>.

7. Anthony M. Destefano, "1993 Ship Grounding Affected Immigration Policy," *Newsday*, June 1, 2013, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.newsday.com/news/new-york/1993-ship-grounding-affected-immigration-policy-1.5387547>.

8. Origami Resource Center, "Golden Venture Folding," *Origami Resource Center*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.origami-resource-center.com/golden-venture-folding.html>.

9. Museum of Chinese in America, New York City, "FOLD: Golden Venture Paper Sculptures," YouTube video, 22:05, uploaded July 11, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UadqXh-WX5w>.

10. Kenneth Chang, "Freedom Dreams : A Hundred Illegal Chinese Immigrants Sit in INS Jails for the Third Year," *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1995, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-05-15-ls-5043-story.html>.

folding to be therapeutic.⁴ In the United States, Japanese Americans have used origami to protest immigrant detention policies, specifically that of detaining children. Japanese Americans are particularly vocal in the fight to close immigration prisons in the United States because of their experiences being put into internment camps during World War II.⁵ These immigration prisons were officially called "relocation centers" at the time and were filled with Japanese and Japanese Americans who were only allowed to bring what they could carry for the duration of the war with Japan. During that period many Japanese who had never been artists used art as a way to cope. For people who are locked away or prevented from seeking a better life, art can be a means of self-expression. In another example, a group of youth activists from San Francisco is working to create 76,020 butterflies to signal the number of children detained at the US border in 2019.⁶

Another notable case relates to the *Golden Venture*, a human smuggling ship that ran aground in New York Harbour in 1993. The traffickers who were operating the ship fled, abandoning hundreds of Chinese immigrants, many of whom were fleeing persecution. They ended up in a US immigration prison, one of the first mass imprisonments of immigrants and refugees in the US.⁷ During the development of the "Golden Venture Case" the immigrants who were unsuccessfully smuggled into the US applied for political asylum and were put in York County jail while they awaited clearance on their legal status. As a way to fight boredom and pass their time during their imprisonment, they began folding paper. The crafts became very popular as a pastime, and the Chinese detainees began selling these works as a form of income to cover legal fees and as tokens of gratitude towards those who helped them.⁸ This paper model making eventually became a way to tell their story and make their appeal for freedom more widely known. Over a period of three and a half years, around 10,000 folded paper works were made within the prison. Some of these became part of a traveling exhibit which gave voice to the situation of these asylum seekers.⁹ Only around 10% of those detained migrants were finally granted asylum in the US and other countries,¹⁰ and the majority were deported and sent back to China, where there were few reports of what became of them.

INFLATION IN VENEZUELA AND POLITICAL TURMOIL

On June 2, 2010, more than a decade after his rise to power, Hugo Chávez declared an "economic war" due to increasing shortages in the country. His government's mismanagement of the country's economic powerhouse, the state-owned national oil company PDVSA, along with corruption and the progressive stalling of the initial success of the Bolivarian Missions, marked the decline of

what used to be one of Latin America's strongest economies. The Bolivarian government spent substantial money on fake and corrupt social programs and aid to foreign allies such as Cuba and Bolivia. The crisis further intensified under the Maduro government, in early 2015, when oil prices fell and the country's poor maintenance reduced its overall oil production capacity. The government kept spending the country's budget on controversial investments while denying the growing crisis and violently repressing the opposition.¹¹

The Venezuelan government has dealt with economic default and hyperinflation by printing an immense quantity of bills and replacing their paper currency several times through the addition and subtraction of zeros. In 2015, at least 15 billion new bills were ordered by the Maduro administration from mint houses abroad¹² without taking any measures to back up the value, while the country's international gold reserves had become depleted. This increased inflation so much that people stopped counting money and instead began to weigh it (Imgs. 1 and 2). Businesses would often not accept paper money, especially older, smaller denominations, and people began relying on alternate payment methods such as bartering or using the government's virtual coin, the "petro," which was to be backed by oil. Certain neighborhoods in Caracas even began making their own local currency, named "panalito," with the effigy of Hugo Chávez.¹³

11. Keith Johnson, "How Venezuela Struck it Poor," *Foreign Policy*, July 16, 2018, accessed September 5, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/16/how-venezuela-struck-it-poor-oil-energy-chavez/>.

12. Wall Street Journal, "Toneladas de billetes llegan a Venezuela en aviones," *Estrategia y negocios*, April 2, 2016, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.estrategiaynegocios.net/lasclavesdeldia/926321-330/toneladas-de-billetes-llegan-a-venezuela-en-aviones-%C3%A9chele-la-culpa-a>.

13. Agence France-Presse, "Vecinos de barrio de Venezuela crean moneda con imagen de Hugo Chávez," *La Nación*, December 15, 2017, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.nacion.com/el-mundo/interes-humano/vecinos-de-barrio-de-venezuela-crean-moneda-con/FC4BAJQR6ZEWBDKRKNQ3IINNDI/story/>.



Image 1. Series Title: By Any Measure... Photo study of the cost of goods in Venezuela in early 2019.



Image 2. Series Title: By Any Measure... Photo study of the cost of goods in Venezuela in early 2019

14. AFP Español, “Devaluados billetes venezolanos se transforman en obras de arte,” YouTube video, 01:34, uploaded February 7, 2018, accessed September 1, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUOom8ygEo4&ab_channel=AFPEspa%C3%B1ol.

15. DONLENGUA - Videos de Venezuela, “Montañas de billetes de Bolívars [sic] son descargados de un camión para la basura,” YouTube video, 00:45, uploaded September 5, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAY7ILrzJBg>.

16. R4V, “Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2020,” R4V *Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela*, accessed September 18, 2020, <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>.

The situation has resulted in massive dumping of paper bills, and bank robberies where the money was left because it wasn’t worth enough to take.¹⁴ The accounts and videos of truckloads of these bills being dumped or burned speak loudly to the economic situation.¹⁵

The economic collapse has played a major role in the migration crisis, since there is no value that can be held in cash or in banks for the vast majority of the Venezuelan people. As people get paid they are likely to spend the entire paycheck on needed items which can then be used to barter, because the following day whatever cash a person holds may only have half of its buying power.

VENEZUELA’S MIGRATION CRISIS

The Venezuelan diaspora is the largest migration in the western hemisphere in modern history. Since 2015, over five million Venezuelans have fled terrible economic collapse and atrocities in their native country.¹⁶ This diaspora has led to the displacement of Venezuelan people, from families and children to scholars and artists, along with their culture, across South America and beyond. Venezuelan “walkers,” as they are known across South America, represent the most vulnerable portion of this migrant wave. Traveling on foot due to a lack of resources often means that they have no access to basic necessities or a trusted network to help them along the way (Img. 3). All that they have is what they can carry in a few bags or in their *mochilas de la Patria*, the state-provided backpacks that



Image 3. Art For Impact used the proceeds from their shows to fund humanitarian aid along the mountain migration routes in Colombia.

have become a symbol of the migration.¹⁷ Whole families have covered immense stretches of land walking along the highways of Colombia to other countries southwards along the northern Andes. They face many hardships along the way and are often pushed to their very limits. They have to cross barren landscapes under the striking equatorial sun, climb in freezing mountain highlands, and look for whatever shelter or help they can find along the way. They also pass through areas run by paramilitaries and drug traffickers, increasing their vulnerability to extortion, human trafficking, or forced servitude. Many try to stay in large groups to help reduce these and other physical threats.¹⁸ The way is treacherous and more than a few have been unable to make it due to severe conditions including hypothermia, malnutrition, heat shock, dehydration, exhaustion, and traffic accidents.¹⁹ Some of them walk until their shoes fall apart and their feet are covered in blisters (Img. 4). Crowds of families are forced to occupy makeshift shelters in gas stations, parking lots, and public parks, while some lucky ones find better conditions in humanitarian shelters in large cities and stops along the route. There are also private initiatives by people that try to help with whatever resources they have.

17. Gabriela Pinillos Quintero, “La mochila de la Patria y los objetos de la migración venezolana,” *Comunidad Interdisciplinaria de Estudios Migratorios*, January 30, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://ciemcomunidad.wordpress.com/2019/01/30/la-mochila-de-la-patria-y-los-objetos-de-la-migracion-venezolana/>.

18. Boris Miranda, “Crisis en Venezuela: cómo las mafias y grupos armados de Colombia se aprovechan de los migrantes venezolanos,” *BBC News Mundo*, September 19, 2019, accessed on August 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-49486230>.

19. Felipe Jacome, “Berlin: The Venezuelan Exodus Through Colombia’s Highlands. Photographs and Text by Felipe Jacome,” *LensCulture - Contemporary Photography*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/felipe-jacome-berlin-the-venezuelan-exodus-through-colombia-s-highlands>.



Image 4. Art For Impact co-founder, Nery Santaella, cleans and bandage blisters for a group of Venezuelan youth who have been walking several days over the mountain passes between Cucuta and Bogota.

Pressed by the appalling situation of public health in their native country, pregnant women often attempt to cross the border into Colombia to give birth there, as Colombia's open-door policy will accept their newborns as nationals and this will mean better opportunities for them to access public health and education.²⁰ Many of these travelers have Peru in mind as their objective, while others head for Chile or Argentina, countries where they hope to establish themselves, carve a new life for their family, and hopefully send some extra money or medicines back home to Venezuela.

TENSIONS AND SECURITY

Colombia's border city Cúcuta has undergone considerable change as a result of this wave of migration. Cúcuta's economy is co-dependent on trade with the Venezuelan towns of San Antonio del Táchira and San Cristóbal across the border. This border region, to the south of the petrol-rich and once industrialized area around the Maracaibo lake, has had a strategic importance throughout both nations' histories, being their main point of contact for social and economic exchange. This proximity to oil means that the fuel prices in the area were usually lower than in other parts of Colombia. Due to factors such as the crash in oil prices and mismanagement by the country's main oil-producing company (state-owned PDVSA), Venezuela's oil-producing capabilities have crashed along with its economy, deepening the widespread crisis. Local gangs quickly moved to control the black market for Venezuelan-produced oil in the region, also dealing in goods and food from Colombia.²¹ As of April 2020, Venezuela has been forced to rely on its ally country, Iran, to import oil amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic. The region's widespread instability makes it one of the most dangerous areas in both the context of the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis under Maduro's regime and the complicated post-peace treaty scenario in Colombia, where the state has been unsuccessful in properly achieving the goals for the implementation of the Peace Process Agreement signed in 2016.²²

This border region, with all its permeability and bi-nationalism, has also been one of the main battlegrounds for the Colombian armed conflict. It has become not only a corridor for the drug trade and smuggling operations, but also an area with security situations between different warring factions that range from leftist guerrillas to far-right paramilitary forces and organized gangs.²³ There is also a vast network of alliances and non-aggression pacts between these actors when it comes to making a profit out of the instability and turmoil of this region.²⁴ Twelve different armed groups operating in the border region have been identified as of February 2020.²⁵

20. BBC News Mundo, "Las madres de Venezuela que cruzan la frontera para dar a luz en Colombia," *El Comercio*, February 22, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://elcomercio.pe/mundo/latinoamerica/madres-venezuela-cruzan-frontera-dar-luz-colombia-noticia-499243-noticia/>.

21. Alexandra Ulmer and Mariana Parraga, "Oil Output Goes AWOL in Venezuela as Soldiers Run PDVSA," *Reuters*, December 26, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-pdvsa-military-specialreport/special-report-oil-output-goes-awol-in-venezuela-as-soldiers-run-pdvsa-idUSKCN1OP0RZ>.

22. Ángel Bermúdez, "Crisis en Venezuela: cómo se produjo la dramática caída de PDVSA, la joya de la corona del país latinoamericano," *BBC News Mundo*, February 5, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47099849>.

23. Adriaan Alsema, "Decapitations Take Turf War Over Colombia's Border with Venezuela to New Level," *Colombia Reports*, July 16, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://colombiareports.com/decapitations-take-turf-war-over-who-colombias-border-with-venezuela-to-new-level/>; Carolina Avila, "The Gangs That Rule Along Colombia-Venezuela Border [sic]," *Worldcrunch*, September 17, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://worldcrunch.com/opinion-analysis/the-gangs-that-rule-along-colombia-venezuela-border>.

24. Venezuela Investigative Unit, "GameChangers 2018: Venezuelan Migration a New Gold Mine for Organized Crime," *InSight Crime*, January 8, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/gamechangers-2018-venezuelan-migration-organized-crime/>.

25. Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, "Así operan los grupos ilegales en el Catatumbo," *El Espectador*, February 10, 2020, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/asi-operan-los-grupos-ilegales-en-el-catatumbo-articulo-903966>.

Although the large majority of Colombian society, and especially the residents of Cúcuta and the border region, have been supportive and welcoming to the enormous Venezuelan migrant wave over the last four years, there has been a worrying rise in xenophobic sentiment and negative expressions against Venezuelan migrants within Colombian public opinion. They are often targeted as the cause of a range of problems like unemployment, delinquency, prostitution, and crime.²⁶ It is certainly a difficult situation for Colombia's migration authorities.

THE FLOW OF DEVALUED CAPITAL AND ITS RISKS

As the major city along the Colombo-Venezuelan border, Cúcuta boasts a lively trade in Venezuelan bolivars between the money-exchange houses and the craftsmen who use these bills in their art to both survive and tell their stories, creating a complex local industry of its own.²⁷ Moving money to create art can be a dangerous business, even if it is only old money that is no longer legal tender. The collection and transportation of currency is actually a specific line of business along the border, where low-income families have been reported to be paid irrisory wages for the hard labor of gathering, sorting, and packing the bills (Img. 5).²⁸ One has to bear in mind that a monthly salary in Venezuela may only pay for a flat of eggs,

26. Adriaan Alsema, "UN Condemns Spike in Xenophobia Against Venezuelans Amid Colombia's Anti-Government Protests", *Colombia Reports*, December 2, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://colombiareports.com/un-condemns-spike-in-xenophobia-against-venezuelans-amid-colombias-anti-government-protests/>.

27. Infobae, "Las artesanías venezolanas hechas con bolívars para subsistir en Colombia", *Infobae*, February 27, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.infobae.com/america/fotos/2018/02/27/las-artesantias-venezolanas-hechas-con-boliva-res-devaluados-para-subsistir-en-colombia/>.

28. Boris Miranda, "Cómo la venta de billetes de Venezuela se convirtió en un lucrativo negocio en la frontera con Colombia", *BBC News Mundo*, March 23, 2018, accessed September 9, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-43310816>.



Image 5. A bag of bolivars, paid by the weight.

and it is not uncommon for women to cross the border just to sell their hair for sums that may equal a six-month salary back home.

The old banknotes are collected from the ground and garbage cans, as they are worthless inside Venezuela. Large amounts are sorted and packaged into bundles called *panelas* (the traditional name for a brick of dried sugar cane molasses), which contain around 1000-1200 bills each and weigh around one kilogram. These bricks of bills are then packaged ten to a bag and transported in larger bags of around 10,000 bills each. The cheapest *panelas* can cost as low as COP6,000-10,000 (around USD2-3) depending on their denomination and from whom they are being purchased. Some bills were not used long enough to have large amounts printed and circulated, while others were in use for years and are much more common. The most common is the 100 bolivar bill, which was nicknamed “The Indestructible” because of its long-enduring use cycle within Venezuela and because it represents around half of the circulating bills. In 2016, Maduro’s failed attempt to take this note out of circulation to stop trafficking led to the exact opposite result and made larger quantities of these bills available over the border.²⁹ Otherwise almost worthless, it could still be used to pay for gasoline at the state-sponsored and price-controlled gas stations until 2019. The currency in Venezuela has been replaced three times within the last twenty years,³⁰ so art and craftworks made out of such a symbolic material speak to the economic decomposition and political crisis that Venezuela has dramatically faced during that time.

It is illegal in Venezuela to make anything from money, including old currencies after they have been replaced. Very little money art is created within Venezuela for that reason, as it is generally easier to move the money into Colombia and then create the art there. Many artists working with money have been detained or had their art confiscated by the police in Venezuela, and people who make or wear such items risk spending time in the regime’s feared prison system. Bribery is a frequent way around this situation. Having large amounts of old currency in your house can also bring fines or imprisonment, so businesses with money that they were not able to get rid of can actually find themselves in violation and be shut down unless they pay heavy fines. The bill traders go to great lengths to ensure that their whole operation successfully transports tons of discarded money into Colombia, almost certainly being extorted at various points along the trade route.³¹ The final goal is to get the large cargo of discarded money across the Táchira river and into Colombian territory, where it will be redistributed among exchange houses, black market counterfeit dealers, and, in a minor proportion, craftsmen who use it for the creation of art. Corrupt officials, small private armies, and even civilians partake in this parallel economy of legal

29. Victor Hugo Majano, “¿Por qué sacan de Venezuela los billetes de 100 bolívars?,” *Cuba Debate*, December 18, 2016, accessed May 28, 2020, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2016/12/18/por-que-sacan-los-billetes-de-100-boliva-res-de-venezuela/>.

30. Agencia EFE, “Los venezolanos se han adaptado a tres conos monetarios en 20 años,” *Banca y negocios*, June 14, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <http://www.bancaynegocios.com/los-venezolanos-se-han-adaptado-a-tres-conos-monetarios-en-20-anos/>.

31. Julia Zilver, “At Venezuela’s Border with Colombia, Women Suffer Extraordinary Levels of Violence,” *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/26/venezuelas-border-with-colombia-women-suffer-extraordinary-levels-violence/>.

and illegal commerce. Due to its characteristics, criminal gangs regard these bills as well-suited to being “washed” or bleached and made into fake US currency, a trade that is prosecuted on both sides of the border.³²

This quagmire hasn’t stopped the craftspeople from seeking to expand their network of traveling craft merchants. Members of Art For Impact have met numerous times with the money artisans in Cúcuta and Bogotá (Img. 6) and been told that some of their business partners visit Colombia’s major cities and tourist spots such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Cartagena, and Santa Marta for months at a time, offering their creations to tourists and pedestrians.³³ The crafts can also be found in the Guajira region in Maicao and Riohacha, which is another important crossing point for migrants. Some of their work has reached even further, exploring new markets along the migrant routes in Ecuador, Peru, and Chile.³⁴ Meanwhile, the knowledge and awareness of these crafts travel along with their practitioners, radiating outward as they journey to other South American countries. Since their work has gained some recognition, the craftsmen have been able to navigate a way around and stay clear of the shady bolivar

32. Diario La Verdad, “Detenido por fabricar y vender billetes de monedas extranjeras,” *La Verdad*, January 30, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <http://www.laverdad.com/sucesos/151610-detenido-por-fabricar-y-vender-billetes-de-monedas-extranjeras.html>.

33. Michael Ardiles, “Artesanía con billetes venezolanos,” YouTube video, 02:16, uploaded February 18, 2020, accessed August 27, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMBYN-10fEiU&ab_channel=michaclardiles.

34. 24 Horas, “Joven artesano confecciona bolsones con billetes venezolanos,” YouTube video, 02:35, uploaded August 31, 2018, accessed on September 1, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0cSG-Kpi1Q&ab_channel=24Horas.



Image 6. Some members of Art For Impact pose with a group of Venezuelan money artists in Cucuta.

business; the quantities they deal with are on a smaller scale than the counterfeit trade and not specifically illegal in Colombia.

Moving and collecting the bills nonetheless represents a risk for the craftspeople, since, as mentioned, this money is also collected for counterfeiting US dollars.³⁵ There have been several large seizures of Venezuelan money around South America, in Paraguay, Brazil, and Colombia, among others.³⁶ Taxi drivers tell stories of being offered more than a month's salary to drive trunks-full of Venezuelan currency to other cities, presumably to be used in counterfeit creation. If they are carrying more than can be considered a personal amount, Colombo-Venezuelans living in the border region, and people who go there seeking to migrate, risk being extorted by the feared groups stemming from civilian paramilitary Chavist groups who control much of the informal traffic along the Venezuelan side of the border. Colombian and Venezuelan authorities may detain or imprison civilians who attempt to cross with this money, suspecting them of being traffickers for the money-laundering schemes.

An advantage of living and selling their crafts in Colombia is being paid in Colombian pesos, which allows the craftsmen to earn a decent living in Colombia and send revenue back to their families and relatives in Venezuela. Cúcuta is home to more than 700,000 people, and it is often visited by international humanitarian aid workers, business people, journalists, and others. The city has proven to be a fertile ground to sell this type of artistic and economic expression, allowing artists and craftspeople to support themselves and their families.

BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS OF THE CREATION OF MONEY CRAFTS BY VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS

Tracing back the story of how the three-dimensional Chinese-patterned artform reached Venezuela is a difficult task. Venezuela's Chinese-descent population is one of the largest in Latin America.³⁷ Even though Venezuela historically maintained an open-door policy toward immigrants and accepted at least one detainee from the Golden Venture case,³⁸ it's not likely related to this case, as there are discernible differences both in the maturity of the designs and their construction. Documenting the adoption of this style of artistic paper folding, specifically its use by the craftspeople in Cúcuta, back to the arrival of any particular group of immigrants from China seems unlikely and there are of course other possibilities such as seeing an opportunity and learning the techniques online. Some of the craftsmen, when asked about their knowledge of this type of craft and its trade, claim to have heard that it came from Venezuelan jails, where prisoners developed them to make some money and taught fellow inmates the techniques so

35. Notilogía, "Conoce todo los detalles del tráfico de billetes venezolanos en Colombia," *Notilogía*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.notilogia.com/2015/09/conoce-todo-los-detalles-del-trafico-de-billetes-venezolanos-en-colombia.html>.

36. CNN Español, "Incautan 25 toneladas de bolívares venezolanos en Paraguay," *CNN Español*, February 14, 2017, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2017/02/14/incautan-25-toneladas-de-bolivares-venezolanos-en-paraguay/>; Policía Nacional de Colombia, "Desarticulada red de tráfico de moneda extranjera y nacional," *Policía Nacional de Colombia*, October 25, 2019, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://oas.policia.gov.co/noticia/desarticulada-red-trafico-moneda-extranjera-y-nacional>; *Con el Mazo Dando*, "¡Con todo! GNB desmanteló banda dedicada al sicariato en el estado Bolívar," *Con el mazo dando*, September 10, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.conelmazodando.com.ve/con-todo-gnb-desmantelo-banda-dedicada-al-sicariato-en-el-estado-bolivar-detalles>.

37. Jacqueline Mazza, "Chinese Migration to Latin America and the Caribbean," *The Dialogue. Leadership for the Americas*, October 2016, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.the-dialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Chinese_Migration_to_LAC_Mazza-1.pdf.

38. Committee on International Relations, *China MFN: Human Rights Consequences. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Operation and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Fourth Congress, Second Session, June 18, 1996, Volume 4* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), <https://books.google.com.co/books?id=ocdZpHSu2UsC&pg=PA3&lpg=PA3&dq=golden+venture+venezuela&source=bl&ots=BuxgbzaQt1&sig=ACfU3U02MURoTyC0e8mFPEAgPM3Au8mY5Q&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjib3VqdHpAhUim-AKHdqPAdgQ6AEwDXoECAGQAQ#v=onepage&q=golden%20venture%20venezuela&cf=false>.

that they could try their luck at selling them once out of prison.³⁹ Additionally, this technique can be occasionally found in countries around the world in street stands and shops, as in this picture taken by the author in Cuba (Img. 7). Often the work is made from discarded plastic, paper, or other low-cost materials such as packaging. What makes the work done by Venezuelans uniquely theirs is the use of their country's paper money.

EVOLUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF VENEZUELAN MONEY CRAFTS

Even though Venezuelan artists refer to their work as origami, a Japanese word, the designs they use are not solely Japanese in origin, but also Chinese. 3D origami can also be called modular origami or unit origami, a style with distinctive variants in Japan, China, Korea, and elsewhere.⁴⁰ The two basic construction methods used by Venezuelan migrants include interwoven flat folds, used mostly in purses and wallets similar to Japanese designs (Img. 8), and a sparsely documented Chinese three-dimensional technique called *zhé zhǐ*, where pieces are stacked and glued to create sculptures (Img. 9).

The world came to know the story behind these colorful creations around 2016-17, as more foreign journalists reached Cúcuta to cover the tense border situation and migratory crisis. It wasn't long before the artists started building larger figures and sculptures and selling them as a separate line from the more



Image 7. Children in Havana, Cuba creating and selling 3d origami sculptures out of paper

39. Valora Analitik, "Bolsos hechos con billetes: el triste final de la moneda venezolana," *Valora analitik*, April 26, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.valoraanalitik.com/2018/04/26/bolsos-hechos-con-billetes-el-triste-final-de-la-moneda-venezolana/>.

40. David Lister, "Old European Origami," *British Origami Society*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://britishorigami.info/academic/lister/oldeuro.php>.



Image 8. Purse made entirely of money by Venezuelan artisans in Cucuta, Colombia. Collected in 2018 by Art For Impact.



Image 9. Art Sculpture of a Toyota 4x4 vehicle made from Bolívars by one of Cucuta's money artisans. Collected in 2019 by Art For Impact.

utilitarian purses and bags. Competition grew between the craftsmen as they enrolled relatives and acquaintances to create more pieces. There was plenty of inspiration to be found online and the original pieces often copied designs found elsewhere. Their creativity led to original sculptures referring to objects and situations more familiar to their daily life, such as armadillos, trucks, parrots, jeeps, helicopters, and also weapons such as pistols and AK-47s, a grim reminder of the tense situations experienced by many of the artisans. The sculptures became more ambitious in size and complexity, in some cases involving moving parts. They also started incorporating other materials such as popsicle sticks, plastic eyes, soda-can aluminum, and metal frames and axles, making for more expressive and sturdy builds. Some of them even include electrical parts with battery-powered lighting systems rescued from broken toys.

Within the utilitarian designs and artistic sculptures there is a huge variety in patterns and quality. Through practice and experiment, the artists have learned to use the colors and intricate prints on the various denominations to create beautiful patterns by mixing bills and folding them in different ways. Examples include basic hearts on the purses and flat-woven flags. Simple toy stars soon evolved into swan vases and larger jars as the internet gave the craftspeople the opportunity to search for inspiration and more complex builds. The ingenious animal and car figures are sold on the sun-struck streets of downtown Cúcuta, capturing the attention of pedestrians of all ages. The craftspeople learn by experimenting and from watching each other.

In their construction, the first step is to cut the bills to size, after which they are folded into the modules needed according to the pattern that is to be used. Two patterns are predominant:

Pattern 1: The Rectangular *Shide*

This basic pattern, originating in Japan, involves a series of simple rectangular-shaped folded units of paper that are intertwined to form zig-zag-shaped bands that can be expanded to the sides by sewing or gluing them together.⁴¹ The building module is easy to make from a single bill by folding it four times to form a rectangular V-shaped unit. When several strips are joined at the sides, a surface can be created in which to display patterns and figurative elements. The development of this style has led the craftspeople to explore the variety of patterns to be found within different parts of a bill's surface design. This has enriched the palette and the variety of hues available to design more complex combinations by differential folding of the bills. The shide pattern is mostly used to fabricate utilitarian pieces like purses, wallets, belts, hats, and other wearables. These products have more demand and are easier to sell among the resident population and in flea markets of big cities such as in Bogotá's Usaquén flea market.

Pattern 2: *Zhé zhǐ* or the "Golden Venture Unit Pattern"

This pattern uses a unit that begins as a square section of a bill folded into a right-triangle shape. When complete, this unit has two separate pouches on one of its sides, allowing units to lock with each other. The triangle-shaped unit allows for greater three-dimensionality and organic-looking structures. This technique lends itself to building smoother forms like curves, circles, and round shapes. As mentioned above, the pattern may have gained visibility in the West through the activities of the Golden Venture refugees:

While assembling the history of this unit proves to be difficult, it is generally agreed it originated in China and only relatively recently came to the attention of Western and even Japanese folders. [...] Prior to the early 1990s there are few references to the unit in Western origami media, although it does appear as if some Westerners of Chinese or Taiwanese descent may have been aware of the unit as a money fold, given in times of celebration.⁴²

Along with the art described, the idea of using Venezuelan money for other artistic purposes has also spread. There are artists like Karina Monaca and José León who paint pictures on the bills, cut them out for collages, make prints, or subject them to other artistic processes.⁴³ There is even a Youtube channel, Origami Venezolano, where a young boy teaches viewers how to make a purse

41. Wikipedia, "Shide (Shinto)," *Wikipedia*, accessed May 28, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shide_\(Shinto\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shide_(Shinto)); "Some of the earliest examples of paper folding (with cutting) are shide; these are zig-zag shaped paper used in purification rituals," Origami Resource Center, "History of Origami," *Origami Resource Center*, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.origami-resource-center.com/history-of-origami.html>.

42. Outspoken Origami, "Introduction to Chinese Unit Origami," *Outspoken Origami*, accessed May 28, 2020, <http://outspoken-origami.blogspot.com/2008/06/introduction-to-chinese-unit-origami.html>.

43. Neolínea, "Karina Monaca: la artista que 'empapela' con billetes venezolanos," *Neolínea*, June 22, 2019, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://neolinea.wordpress.com/2019/06/22/karina-moncada-la-artista-que-empapela-con-billetes-venezolanos/>; El Universal, "Crea arte contra crisis en Venezuela," *El Universal*, December 21, 2017, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/artes-visuales/con-arte-protesta-contra-crisis-economica-de-venezuela>.

out of bills, which counts as an example of the sources typically used by those migrants who can access the internet.⁴⁴

SYMBOLISM IN VENEZUELAN BOLIVAR CRAFTS

The close relationship between art and money is an expression of power that has been variously instantiated throughout the ages, spanning from the earliest examples of ornate currency in ancient empires to representations of money in European art like Quentin Metsys's 1514 painting *The Money Banker and his Wife*. Likewise, there are many examples of the use of money as an art or craft medium, from the 1800s, when Chinese coins were sewn into the armor of the Tlingit, an indigenous group in the American Pacific Northwest, to contemporary artists such as Mark Wagner, who uses cut-up bills to make collages, and Stephen Boggs, whose hand-drawn artistic imitations of bills have repeatedly drawn attention from law enforcement.⁴⁵

Venezuelan migrant artists use various paper-folding and -weaving techniques to create pieces that some may claim are only works of "craft" rather than art. However, "craft" can be elevated into an artform through practice, creativity, and purpose. One could refer to the words of Ai Weiwei, one of the world's most respected refugee artists, who stated that artists only become good when their work has meaning to other people.⁴⁶ If that is true, then the argument can surely be made that, for the Venezuelan people, art made from their currency has a great deal of symbolic meaning, and that by extension it has the capacity to develop into a powerful expressive language, making a universal appeal for their situation as a people who have been forced into migration by the failure of their home country's political system and institutions.⁴⁷ Indeed, the use of currency in such quantities as an art medium is a statement in itself about the economical crisis and political turmoil of the issuing country, if we consider that "[t]he stamp of authority marked the symbolization of money as a cultural artifact: the character of a ruler, a symbol, or an inscription on the coin came to be a signifier of value."⁴⁸ In the case of Venezuela, the putative meaning of this signified value for the currency and the state it represents is subverted by its use as an art medium to talk about the failure of that country's government to look after and properly manage a once booming economy.

For this vulnerable population, the use of money crafts as an art medium tied to their story also establishes them as cultural markers that provide evidence for the construction of a new identity based on their experiences. The relationship between displaced Venezuelans and their crafts can produce insights into the impact and effects of the migratory dynamic. The crafting activity not only allows them to make a dignified living but also provides a therapeutic tool that

44. Origami Venezolano, YouTube channel, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCRipFcgNkhXCmD1Z3U7voA>.

45. 1xRun, "Mark Wagner Gets Political With Currency Collages," 1xRun, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://news.1xrun.com/mark-wagner-gets-political-with-currency-collages/>; Anne Quito, "When is a Fake \$500 Bill Worth \$15,000? When it's Art," *Quartz*, November 28, 2015, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://qz.com/559738/when-is-a-fake-500-bill-worth-15000-when-its-art/>.

46. RTE, "Artist Ai Weiwei on Creating your Own Revolution," *RTE*, October 18, 2019, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.rte.ie/culture/2019/1017/1084013-artist-ai-weiwei-on-creating-your-own-revolution/>.

47. Sinikka Pöllänen, "The Meaning of Craft: Craft Makers' Descriptions of Craft as an Occupation," *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 20, n°. 3 (2012): n.p., accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230878416_The_meaning_of_craft_Craft_makers'_descriptions_of_craft_as_an_occupation.

48. Violeta Vojvodic Balaz, "Monetary Symbolism: Art as a Deposit of Value," *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* 20 (2019): 137.

helps them to deal with stressful lives and reduces the risk of their collective members being exposed to illicit or risky activities. In the words of Venezuelan craftsman Jorge Cordero: “I learned this by watching. I did my first one, not very good and rather ugly... I kept going and by the third one I was getting better until I learned. Thank God since I came here things have been good and we have been able to make a living, helping each other out and making a better future for our children.”⁴⁹

The use of devalued currency to bring attention to the Venezuelan monetary crisis was perhaps most powerfully demonstrated in June 2017. At an anti-government demonstration in Petare, one of Caracas’s largest slums and a traditional stronghold of popular Chavism, a group of protesters raised a 25-meter (82-foot) banner made out of over three thousand VES20,000 bills. This huge poster represented the equivalent in bolivars to a single US dollar.⁵⁰ People around the world could see how bad the monetary devaluation in a country had to be in order for people to use money as a substitute for toilet paper and napkins, items that were in short supply.⁵¹

ART FOR IMPACT

Art For Impact is focused on amplifying marginalized voices through art and media. Since 2018, Art For Impact has made six trips along the Venezuelan-Colombian border to work with Cúcuta-based Venezuelan artists, conduct research and interviews, and provide humanitarian assistance. The organization seeks to provide attention to Venezuelan artists and help them find increased economic opportunities. Art For Impact started out as a collective of artists, journalists, photographers, and other volunteers from Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and the United States, who wanted to make a difference. They saw something important happening in Cúcuta, something that could become a symbol, and decided to use it to convey the message that fighting xenophobia and helping immigrants integrate into their host communities was the right thing to do. Art For Impact has since grown from a grassroots initiative into a social startup working with international NGOs pursuing those same goals.

On each trip to the border, Art For Impact gathers information, collects art made from money, and engages in humanitarian work such as distributing food, clothing, personal care items, and health supplies. In their work, they have gotten to know the area’s craftspeople, who have banded into groups to work together and sell their wares. The artisans sought feedback on the physical and aesthetic details of their products and received recommendations such as creating a color palette through different folding options to attain more elaborate woven textures. They were specifically challenged to “break their

49. Crypto Cucuta [sic], “Cómo un venezolano hace bolsos a mano con dinero real,” YouTube video, 16:31, uploaded June 7, 2018, accessed on August 27, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQBAXlyN8eM&ab_channel=CryptoCucuta.

50. José Alejandro Urdaneta, “Hacen pancarta con los billetes necesarios para comprar 1\$,” *La Verdad*, June 10, 2017, accessed May 28, 2020, <http://www.laverdad.com/politica/121921-hacen-pancarta-con-los-billetes-necesarios-para-comprar-1.html>.

51. Aurora Vasco, “Venezuela usa sus billetes como servilletas por el poco valor de los bolívares,” *El Confidencial*, August 20, 2015, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2015-08-20/venezuela-billetes-servilletas-valor-bolivar_979392/.

mold” and create new designs, and to use additional techniques and patterns in order to expand on the capabilities of their art. Art For Impact has built trust between its team members and several of the craftsmen groups, and developed a relationship of patronage with some of these artisans. The Cúcuta artisans received advice on how to exploit the capabilities of their medium and to increase the value of their products by improving the finishing details in their creations. Art For Impact highlighted these artists’ work in several art exhibitions, including *Economía de papel* in 2019 at Crispeta Galería in Bogotá, which told the story of immigration through money art and photography (Img. 10). All the proceeds from the exhibition went toward providing aid to Venezuelan migrants. Members of Art For Impact used what they learned in their efforts to raise awareness and to engage the Venezuelan community to build digital networks to connect Venezuelan migrants in Colombia with services and information, furthering their intent to combat xenophobia through art, media, and communications.



Image 10. Venezuelan artisanal crafts and sculptures from Cucuta, Colombia on display during the show Economía De Papel at Crispeta Galería in Bogota.

This patronage relationship has brought a number of commissioned pieces for installations, including a series of origami AK-47 replicas and woven pictures of Nicolás Maduro (Img. 11) and Hugo Chávez (Img. 12), the current and former presidents of Venezuela. These woven faces have a deeper meaning as they were inspired by a similar panel created for use in protests in Caracas. While there are others who resell crafts made by Venezuelan artisans on eBay and Etsy, Art For Impact puts 100% of the profits back into helping the migrant community and works directly with the artists to improve their craft, designs, and livelihoods.

The art and stories of the Cúcuta craftspeople have had an impact on Art For Impact's members, who also began to use bolivar bills to make their own art. At the *Economía de papel* exhibition in Bogotá, spectators could see intricate and delicate collages built using the depiction of native Venezuelan fauna found on the bills (Img. 13), alongside whimsical wooden colonial-style *retablos* that combined ceramics and money patterns. There was also a series of photographs depicting the cost of different everyday items in Venezuela. One of the



Image 11. A panel of Nicolás Maduro commissioned for a future installation.



Image 12. A panel of Hugo Chavez commissioned for a future installation.



Image 13. Collage made from Venezuelan Bolívars. Artist: Andrés Chaparro.

big hits among visitors was a large chromatic panel with a diamond-shape design made from bolivar bills of different denominations, a work inspired by the late Venezuelan artist Carlos Cruz-Diez (Img. 14). The interactive work *Curtain of Solidarity* (Img. 15) allowed visitors to write messages of support to the Venezuelan people on loose bolivar bills, which were gradually clipped together to form a large mantle symbolizing solidarity with the Venezuelan people. On the second floor of the exhibit, there was a visual timeline built with photographs taken along the path from Cúcuta to Bogotá, documenting the migrants' journey. The show brought the Venezuelan and Colombian communities together to celebrate art and served as a space for healthy debate and brotherhood. Visitors were also encouraged to engage with the Cúcuta craftsmen's crafts and sculptures which were available for purchase.

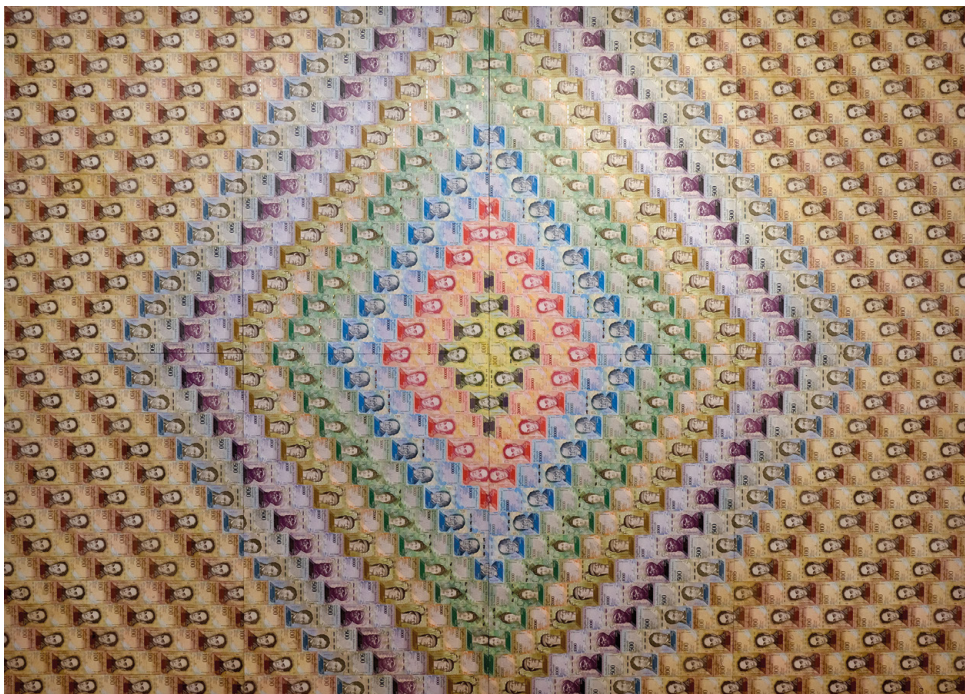


Image 14. Title: Fall Of The Bolivar Artist: Jason Rovig.



Image 15. Title: Curtain Of Solidarity (Bolivar Challenge) Interactive art installation by Jason Rovig and Andrés Chaparro in 2019.

Another use of Venezuelan money by Art For Impact occurred during the 2019 edition of Bogotá's Art Week where Art For Impact created and modeled a dress made from bolivars to bring attention to the migration crisis (Img. 16).



Image 16. Title: Bolivar Dress Nery Santaella poses with a dress made out of Venezuelan Bolivars with origami details from Art For Impact at Artbo in 2019. Concept: Jason Rovig.

CONCLUSIONS

Venezuelan money crafts have significant symbolic value and are an aesthetic resource that can be used successfully to draw attention to a delicate migrant situation. In addition to the skill and patience needed for these crafts, the textures and patterns that are attainable from currency are remarkable. The craft is both a means to earn a dignified living through art and a therapeutic tool, and the resulting artworks offer an insightful reflection on our understanding of the connections between society, money, and power.

This craft is an artform that has the ability to make much out of almost nothing, teaching values to its makers and the public, perhaps creating a deeper symbolism than even the creators intended. A money bill or piece of paper is weak by itself and can be ripped apart. But the strength achieved when several folds are laced with each other can be formidable. In the same way, people can come together out of need, interlocking their intentions and desires for peace, home, family, and country.

The future for millions of Venezuelan migrants, including the money-based craftspeople in Cúcuta, is especially critical in this era of unprecedented crises and misery. The international community should not forget its duty to aid a community that is in such desperate need. Raising awareness about their situation and supporting their art and the accountable NGOs which are working with Venezuelans is a good way to help.



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