



PEMBROKE
COLLEGE OXFORD

JUNE
7TH-22ND
2025

CHANTAL MEZA
Disappearance *of* Worlds

PMB | ART

Pembroke College JCR Art Collection

5 Brewer Street, Oxford OX1 1QN
Wed to Fri 3pm – 6pm
Weekends 11am – 4pm

Art Exhibition & Dialogues on Disappearance

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Chantal Meza (b.1989, Mexico) is a painter based in the United Kingdom whose practice focuses on the human as seen through various forms of disappearance. Her work is held in public and private collections around the world and over the past 15 years her paintings have featured in exhibitions and biennials in prominent Museums and Galleries in Mexico the United Kingdom, Paraguay and Germany. She has delivered international lectures and workshops at reputable universities such as Harvard University, École Normale Supérieure, and Goethe Universität, as well as being commissioned publicly and privately. Her work has received the support of grants and awards of prominent institutions in the cultural sector including a distinguished recognition in her birth province of Puebla, Mexico.

Chantal's State of Disappearance series has been exhibited in Bristol, London and is now on permanent display at the Chancellors' Building at the University of Bath. Her recent Eden Bleeds show at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol during March/April 2025 was the first contemporary art exhibition in the iconic venue's 800-year history and was featured on BBC 1 Easter Sunday morning broadcast.

Chantal has written extensively on the links between Art and Politics, while featuring on prominent media outlets such as the BBC's news and arts programmes. Her work appears in many international publications and on book/magazine covers, including The Philosopher, Penguin Books, Columbia University Press, Review of Education Pedagogy and Cultural Studies, La Jornada, Trebuchet, W&F Science & Peace, LA Review of Books and American Book Review, among others.



Photo credits @KarlBaker

DISAPPEARANCE OF WORLDS

Worlds are disappearing before our eyes. Humans continue to be abducted and forcibly removed from their societies, while others simply vanish from the surface of the earth as they flee the ravages of conflict and violence. Cultures are being decimated and languages lost as ancestral knowledge and indigenous ways of life have been crushed under the weight of historical progress. Forests are being scorched and rivers running dry as consumption patterns lead to the devouring of ecologies and liveable habitats. Across the world, authoritarian regimes are emboldened, leading to the disappearance of journalists and students which points to a wider problem of the disappearance of truth. This is happening at a time when the humanitarian dream to create a world free from conflict and violence is crumbling, shadowed it seems by a vacuum of ideas concerning humanity's future.

How are we to confront this violence? What is the purpose of art when responding to these tragedies which are marked by a devastating absence? Can we even picture such a tremendous loss? Do we need to develop new ways of seeing and feeling the beauty and pain of the world? And how can we develop better conversations between those most deeply affected and artists and cultural producers, policy makers, and academics, so that the thresholds between appearance and disappearance can be better understood?

Exhibition Partners

Pembroke College JCR Art Collection

Pembroke College, Oxford

The FOUND Project

Centre for the Study of Violence, University of Bath

Oxford Festival of the Arts

FrontierTech

Global Security Programme, University of Oxford

Violence & Transitional Justice Lab, University of Notre Dame

Human Rights Program, Universidad Iberoamericana

British Embassy Mexico City

www.chantal-meza.com



“What can art say when confronted by the terror of absence? Perhaps painters can sharpen the gaze by looking into the beauty and pain in a way that could somehow portray reasons to believe in this world, despite the violence we learn about each and every day. Disappearance is intolerable. It is an open wound in time. We need to find ways of recovering something of the human.”

Chantal Meza

CONCERNING DISAPPEARANCE

The terms 'disappeared' and 'disappearance' were first used during the Argentine dictatorship in the 1970s, when the Argentine state kidnapped and killed those that it perceived to be a threat to its operations and ideological foundations, literally disappearing their bodies. However, disappearance has been perpetrated systematically and for diverse rationale across the globe for centuries. As such, enforced disappearance has been a historical constituent element of violence linked to wider political, economic and cultural processes, including slavery, colonialism, the egregious political violence perpetrated in diverse settings during the Cold War, the violence of the global drugs trade, onto the continued practices of disappearance linked to indigenous persecution, feminicide, the kidnapping of women and girls for sexual slavery and the silencing of opposition, including ecological and environmental activism.

Given the wider economy of terror disappearance creates, the problem can be seen as the ethical test for our shared humanity, especially what it means to bear witness to such devastating absence, erasure and denial. Today, enforced disappearance is considered a serious human rights violation and a permanent form of torture. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance entered into force in 2010, with the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances celebrated on 30 August.

Chantal Meza's work on disappearance started in 2017. It wasn't a problem she sought out. Her home country of Mexico had become the global epicentre for the crisis. The problem arrived to her, and it couldn't be ignored. Since 2006, the number of enforced disappearances in Mexico reported by Human Rights Watch exceeds 100,000. Over the same period, more than 4,000 unmarked graves have been discovered around the country. A significant number of these victims are young women and people from other vulnerable groups including children and migrants. But the disappearance of nearly 150 journalists highlights the policy of silencing that goes with it. Today, Mexico is one of the most dangerous places in the world to try to report the truth.

Countering the problem requires a considered response, which brings together searching family members, international organisations, artists, academics, students and wider publics so that the terror of absence can be confronted and the human recovered. It is precisely to listen to mothers and family members such as Indira Navarro of Guerreros Buscadores de Jalisco' and Lizet & Carmen Cardona of Corazones Robados, who we are humbled to be joining us, in conversation with the art and those with the knowledge and willingness to overcome this egregious practice.

ABOUT PEMBROKE COLLEGE JCR ART COLLECTION

The Pembroke College Emery Gallery is run by the Pembroke College JCR Art Collection Fund Committee. Established in 1947, the Pembroke College JCR Art Collection was founded by Anthony Emery, a mature undergraduate who came to Pembroke College to read History following his return from the Second World War. Pembroke's JCR was the very first in Oxford (or Cambridge, for that matter) to establish an art collection. Since its establishment, the collection has continued to grow with it now containing works by especially many notable post-war British artists, such as Sir Terry Frost, Dame Elisabeth Frink, Lynn Chadwick, Duncan Grant, Mary Fedden, Dominic Greaves, John Piper, Julian Trevelyan, and Patrick Heron. In 1997, the JCR decided to transform the Art Collection into a registered charity known as The Pembroke College JCR Art Collection Fund. Since then, a student-led committee has been primarily responsible for managing the collection, growing it through new acquisitions, and organising multiple exhibitions every year. Alongside this work, the committee engages with JCR students through various grants and a termly artwork loan scheme as well as supports emerging artists through an annual 'Emery Prize'.

Proudly Supported by



PEMBROKE
COLLEGE OXFORD

Centre for the
Study of Violence



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH



GLOBAL
SECURITY
PROGRAMME

V-TJlab



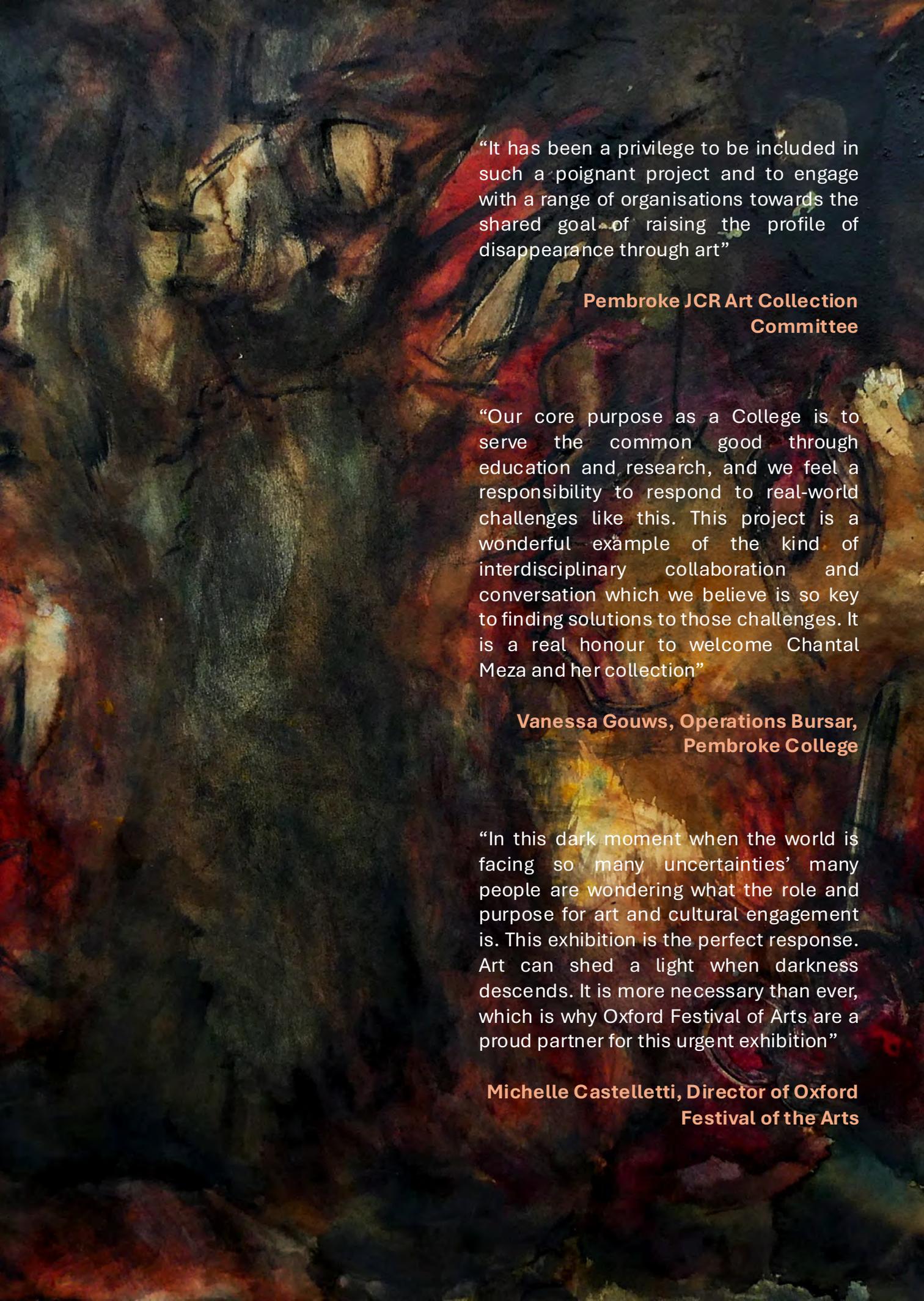
British Embassy
Mexico City

IBERO
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO

Incidencia /
Derechos Humanos /

OXFORD
FESTIVAL
of the ARTS





“It has been a privilege to be included in such a poignant project and to engage with a range of organisations towards the shared goal of raising the profile of disappearance through art”

**Pembroke JCR Art Collection
Committee**

“Our core purpose as a College is to serve the common good through education and research, and we feel a responsibility to respond to real-world challenges like this. This project is a wonderful example of the kind of interdisciplinary collaboration and conversation which we believe is so key to finding solutions to those challenges. It is a real honour to welcome Chantal Meza and her collection”

**Vanessa Gouws, Operations Bursar,
Pembroke College**

“In this dark moment when the world is facing so many uncertainties’ many people are wondering what the role and purpose for art and cultural engagement is. This exhibition is the perfect response. Art can shed a light when darkness descends. It is more necessary than ever, which is why Oxford Festival of Arts are a proud partner for this urgent exhibition”

**Michelle Castelletti, Director of Oxford
Festival of the Arts**



THE POWER OF TESTIMONY

An essential part of the Disappearance of Worlds Art Exhibition is the presentation of the voices of those family members who can speak directly for their loved ones whose very bodies, words and existences are being denied. They are the witnesses for those who are absent. They are the memory of refusal that defiantly stands with dignity against the forces of oblivion. Theirs is a labour of care that silently walks to ensure our shared humanism is never fully lost or all hope taken.



HOW TO HELP

You can support the Mother's search Group "Guerreros Buscadores" directly by scanning the QR Code.

"This donation allows us to continue our searches. Thank you for your empathy – it is through your support that we can carry on looking for our missing loved ones."



PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Opening Evening

Friday 6th June | 6pm-7pm | Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College

Painter **Chantal Meza** in conversation with **Will Gompertz** Director, Sir John Soane's Museum, journalist and writer.

Searching for the Disappeared: The Case of Mexico

Saturday 7th June | 4pm-6pm | Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College

Fernanda Lobo Díaz Human Rights Program, Universidad Iberoamericana (Chair)
Lizet & Carmen Cardona Corazones Robados Searching Mothers' Collective.

The Disappearance of Humanitarianism

Friday 13th June | 6pm-7.30pm | Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College

Gareth Owen Former Humanitarian Director, Save the Children

Technological Responses to Disappearance

Saturday 14th June | 4pm-6pm | Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College

Índira Navarro Leader, Searching Mothers' Collective 'Guerreros Buscadores de Jalisco'.

Miguel Moctezuma Global Security Programme, Pembroke College/The FOUND Project.

Nicholas Márquez President, British Association of Forensic Anthropology.

José Luis Silván CentroGeo/The FOUND project.

Jorge Ruiz-Reyes Transitional Justice Lab, University of Notre Dame.

Andrea Horcasitas Human Rights Program Coordinator, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico.

Mariela Garfias Head of Programmes, British Embassy in Mexico City.

Chantal Meza Painter (Chair)

Justice for the Disappeared

Friday 20th June | 6pm-7.30pm | Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College

Phil Scraton Campaigner & Emeritus Professor, Queens University Belfast.

Dr. Annette Idler Director, Global Security Programme, Pembroke College, and Associate Professor in Global Security, University of Oxford (Chair).

Escape from Disappearance: The Power of Sanctuary

Saturday 21st June | 4pm-6pm | Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College

Jan Royall Principal, Somerville College Oxford.

Brad Evans Director, Centre for the Study of Violence, Professor of Political Violence & Aesthetics, University of Bath.

Hari Reed incoming co-director, Asylum Welcome.



PMB | ART

Pembroke College JCR Art Collection
5 Brewer Street, Oxford.
OX1 1QN