



Palo fierro tree at the excavation site outside Altar, Sonora. Image courtesy of the artist, 2022.

La Espera [The Wait] is Miguel Fernández de Castro's first exhibition at Travesía Cuatro.

Miguel Fernández de Castro (Sonora, 1986) is a visual artist based in the Sonora-Arizona borderlands. Through photography, video, sculpture, and writing, he investigates the ways in which ecological and violent regimes intertwine in the production of space and memory.

In Mexico, his work has been shown at Museo Tamayo; Museo Jumex; Casa del Lago; Museo de Arte Moderno; and Museo MARCO, among others. Internationally he's presented work at the Shanghai Biennale; The Cleveland Museum of Art; MASP Museu de Arte de São Paulo; Storefront for Art & Architecture; Ballroom Marfa; Frac Centre-Val de Loire, Whitechapel Gallery; Spazio Veda; Wren Library; Museo Artium; and Ashkal Alwan, among others.

He was a fellow of the FONCA Young Creators program in 2012 and 2019. Since 2022, he has been a member of the National System of Art Creators of Mexico. He lives and works in Altar, Sonora, where he is co-director of Altar Centro de Investigación. Since 2018 he has collaborated with multiple search groups documenting mass graves on both sides of the Mexico-US border.

In 2026, he will continue with the Altar Research Center program thanks to support from the Mellon Foundation. He will participate in the quadrennial Rubaiyat Qatar and present an exhibition at Fogo Island Arts, Canada. His work will be part of the exhibition Constellations and Drifts: Latin American Art from the FEMSA Collection, at MARCO in Monterrey.

La espera [The Wait]

Miguel Fernández de Castro

La Espera [The Wait] by Miguel Fernández de Castro's (Sonora, 1986) takes place in a suspended time, where bodies and forms remain exposed to the elements, to weathering, and to surveillance. Far from alluding to disappearance, the work focuses on structures and remains incorporated into the landscape, identifying in them a dissonance between the finding and the subsequent reconnaissance. This gap articulates a waiting period, often marked by a lack of answers, on a threshold defined by violence and institutional omission.

The installation draws on the artist's experience in the Altar desert, where he lives and works, and where he is co-director of the Altar Research Center. This territory is a space marked by slow and prolonged times—both physical and symbolic—as well as accelerated transits and urgent passage. In this context, at the intersection of human and animal time, minimal actions emerge—walks, encounters, traces—that structure the daily operation of the desert and the artist's work. The arrangement of the elements in *La espera [The Wait]*—a butterfly, the replica of two molars, and a wooden chair—establishes a relationship between materials with different rhythms of erosion and resistance, and activates a dialogue between the waiting times of each process and a territory in constant tension.

The work reflects on how memory is embodied in objects and reconfigurations torn from their time, place, and diachronic continuity, but which retain their own temporal significance. In this sense, the replica of the two teeth does not function solely as a copy, but as a gesture inscribed in a temporality marked by abandonment and distance: a discontinuous, almost theatrical temporality that becomes visible when something interrupts it. The chair, made from an organic fusion of ironwood and mesquite trees—two of the densest and most resistant woods in the world, endemic to the Sonoran Desert—will take centuries to decompose, while the butterfly continues its cycle. The three elements produce a balance inherent to the living conditions in the Sonoran Desert.

Illuminated like a forensic study or a film set, *La espera [The Wait]* can be observed from the outside: from an uncontaminated gaze that records a violence which has become part of the landscape.

– Lena Solà Nogué

Brief conversation between Miguel Fernández de Castro and Lena Solà Nogué

What kind of ethical or political relationship arises in your research process?

With regard to ethics, my process is not organized around protocols of correction or total transparency, but rather around an ethic of non-extraction and non-translation. The remains, objects, and gestures with which I work are not activated to produce information, testimony, or symbolic reparation. The central ethical decision is not to force speech from that which has already been violated: not to re-inscribe it in a circuit of meaning, legal or emotional, that renders it useful. The piece seeks to sustain ambiguity and assumes the risk of opacity as a form of care. My work does not seek the performative fulfillment of ethical criteria.

The political dimension does not lie in denouncing illegality or simulating restitution, but in remaining on the threshold where legality, ritual, and abandonment merge. The work does not collaborate with the regime of visibility that demands evidence, narratives, or pedagogy, but rather suspends that mandate. In this gesture, the chair, the dental remnant, and the butterfly do not align with the law nor explicitly transgress it, but rather shift the political question toward the regimes that administer visibility, evidence, and time, and toward what falls outside of them.

In *La espera* [The Wait], we find a butterfly resting on a replica of two molars, which in turn rest on a sturdy wooden chair. Do you think that the image of a butterfly pausing for a moment during its migratory cycle can be interpreted as something symptomatic of our times?

Yes, but only insofar as that respite can no longer be interpreted as a natural gesture or an organic pause. The butterfly pauses in a simulation that reproduces the migratory movement without sharing its material conditions. This artificiality is not a formal device, but a structural element: the cycle continues, but only as choreography, separated from the systems that sustain it. In this sense, the pause does not signal balance or care, but rather the way in which contemporary times incorporate detention as part of their functioning, producing regulated movements, managed pauses, and ritualized gestures that no longer guarantee orientation or return. On this threshold, the butterfly does not represent a damaged nature, but a movement that persists even when its frames of meaning have been displaced, operating between the living and the technical without resolution.

***La espera* [The Wait] is the result of walks, encounters, and conversations in the Altar desert. Do you think your work navigates between fiction and documentation of the conflicts and tensions that permeate the place where you work?**

I don't work with fiction and documentation as separate categories or as opposing forces. Both appear as forms derived from my experience in the field, produced by spending long periods of time there, walking, waiting, and—sometimes—returning to the same places. What is often read as documentation does not respond to an impulse to verify or archive, but rather to a practice of situated attention; and what could be understood as fiction does not introduce distance or invention, but rather a way of sustaining that which does not quite settle into a stable narrative. In this sense, fiction operates less as representation than as a force of variation, a way of making palpable that which lingers in the territory without becoming entirely legible. The work does not seek to represent the conflicts of the Altar desert, but rather to remain close to them, accepting that a direct experience of the place produces forms that oscillate—without being resolved—between record, drift, and construction.

The work exists on a threshold where the remains are neither scientific evidence nor official archaeology. Is there an intention to monumentalize or sacralize certain elements that make up the work?

There is no intention to monumentalize or sacralize the elements of the work. On the contrary, the work seeks to remove these from value systems—monumental, ritual, or hereditary—that tend to consolidate the remains through institutional or symbolic recognition. The objects are kept in a state of displaced use and ambiguous presence, closer to informal economies of care, circulation, and waiting than to established forms of memory or veneration. As in certain contexts where ritual does not produce sanctification but rather a pragmatic coexistence with uncertainty, the work refuses to turn the remains into relics or emblems.

I am not proposing a space of reverence, but rather an unceremonious closeness, where what matters is not to elevate or preserve, but to leave objects on an unstable threshold, outside narratives of transcendence. This condition is not defined solely in the space of the gallery: the teeth and bone also exist elsewhere, in the Altar desert, where the grave remains unexcavated, outside circulation and reconnaissance.

Upon entering a space of visibility and circulation, that condition is not resolved. No position is affirmed, nor is the distance between the two places corrected; rather, a form of inoperability is maintained, in which the work remains in an impassable space, exposed to erosion. The friction persists as part of its form, offering no resolution.