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About the Artwork
There are people who believe that much can be said about a person
about looking at their shoes. By their color, shape, style, how well the
shoe is taken care of, how it is made, and the materials used in its
manufacturer. Some shoes are made by hand by expert craftsmen
with skills and methods passed down from generation to generation,
made of fine leather, wood, natural fabrics and other organic materials.
Others are mass-produced in factories using poured rubber, plastics
and other synthetic —sometimes toxic— materials. What is at once
a seemingly mundane object, reveals details about its maker, and
its owner, in unique and inconspicuous ways, causing this footwear
to cease being ordinary, but transformed into an artifact, a portrait,
an archive, a memento, of a person, time, and place. Each with its
own characteristics and personalities of sorts, these fineries become
iconographic signs or symbols reflecting the personality of the
person who owns them. The object is a symbol of power, a symbol of
belonging, of tenacity, status, class, style, of necessity, of history, of
beginnings and of end. The object gives testimony to space and time,
place, and person.
My Feet are my Wings is a collective series of photographs of
discarded, found and collected objects, primarily shoes, for which
exists an analogy between the object, and the human being. The
object, interpreted as a form of “living matter”, is capable of evoking
feelings and sensations, capable of passing on to us a large amount
of information left by it and contained by the energy of the people
who participated in its making, and those who will then make use of
it. Depictions of discarded objects, particularly footwear, and mostly
white shoes, are remarkable for their sense of harmony, visual drama,
and narrative content. There are no images of anatomical parts (feet)
or celestial figures (wings), but the reference to the existence of a
person, or persons, as they relate to the shoes, is metaphorically clear.
Although they are not depicted, viewers are reminded that the feet
provide support as well as transportation, that shoes can constrain,
between also provide protection, and freedom —both physical, and as a form
of expression. Oftentimes they are left behind as evidence of human
existence —the proof of one’s passage through life— and sometimes,
in the end, even lost, or discarded. Due to their personally hygienic
nature, shoes are an element of clothing that is rarely inherited, or
passed down, so they essentially represent a unique remnant of the
owner, much like a fingerprint, an identification card, or a portrait.
Each of Iraheta’s photos embodies the story of a shoe, or shoes, as the
main character/s of the work: the shoes are worn, fixed, arranged in
order, or simply dumped. Iraheta shows sensitivity for the history of
Central America in compositions such as Encontrados (trans. Found),
which resembles an archeological showcase of objects unearthed
from a mass grave. In these works, the artist took photographs of the
strewed-away shoes that were discarded on roads and pathways known
as immigrant travel routes northbound from El Salvador, where the
artist is from. His invitation to reconstruct the history of these personal
migrant journeys is both powerful and persuasive.
Just as some stories make readers feel uneasy, other photographs
offer a sense of balance. In Mandalas, the monochrome and essential
geometric structure of a circle of white shoes bears resemblance to
a garden for meditation. On the other hand, his photograph Jardín
(Spanish for Garden), in which shoes are scattered arbitrarily over a gray
surface, suggests the idea of entropy and disarray, or perhaps, order
within chaos. Alternately, these also convey a feeling of freedom and a
care-free existence.
In certain ways, this series is also a poetic, nostalgic work: When Iraheta
was a boy, his family was severely economically challenged, so owning
a pair of shoes was something of extraordinary luck. Generally, they
weren’t the shoes that one loved to have, but they complied with his
mother’s expectations of durability. One of his most recurring
childhood dreams was to see himself arrive home with boxes and
boxes of new shoes —Converse All Stars of every color, and perfectly
remembering the smell of the new canvas, the rubber sole— then
waking in the morning with these sensations still so vibrant and alive.
The first thing he would do upon waking was search for them under his
bed. Obviously, the only thing he found was his single pair of everyday
shoes, ugly and hard. But that beautiful and emotional memory now
reproduces a joy and reminiscence that is extended to the sight of
abandoned shoes, those buried in the road, or tangled in the telephone
pole cables. “I always pick these shoes up when I can, and take them to
my studio hoping that at some moment they will talk to me and tell me
their story as I get ready to photograph them.”
About the Artist
Walterio Iraheta studied Applied Arts at Centro Nacional de Artes,
CENAR and the University Dr. José Matías Delgado in El Salvador,
the country where he was born; Graphic Arts at the Chicago Cultural
Center, in the US, and then at School of Visual Arts, La Esmeralda,
México. He has won the first place in the Art Biennial Paiz of El Salvador
2007; an Honorable Mention in the competition of Contemporary Art
in Palma de Mallorca, Spain 2004; first prize in the Contemporary Art
Biennial of Central America, 1998, among others. He has had more than
35 solo exhibitions and has participated in over 150 group shows like
the Photography Biennial in Lima, Perú 2012; the Venice Biennial, Italy
2011; Pontevedra Biennial in Galicia, Spain 2010; The X Havana Biennial,
Cuba 2009; The Latin American video projects Visionaries at The Itaú
Cultural Sao Paulo, Brazil and The Museum of Contemporary Art Reina
Soña, Madrid, 2009; Valencia-São Paulo Biennial, Spain 2008, among
others. In the last ten years he has combined his artistic work with
those of curator and cultural management, coordinating projects like
The National Drawing show and Photography Festival EFSOTO in his
country. He lives and works in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Iraheta has gone through a process which began with traditional
techniques, but continuously expanded to include any technique
or material in the creation of artworks. As a creator, he is constantly
moving towards new languages and topics, passing from one
another without losing his way in the search for aesthetic results.
At times, however, his choices come dangerously (and consciously) close
to being too kitschy, or he seems unnecessarily reticent to breaking
with convention, in an effort to preserve a traditional sense of visual
structure, and the sort of perfectionism and appreciation for detail that
has characterized him as a draftsman.

What remains unchanged is the direct and enriching conversation
Iraheta achieves between his work and its viewers. There are moments
of mockery and humor, or of social consciousness, as well as more
intimate passages related to love and memory. Currently, he is very
interested in issues related to human movement, the phenomenon of
migration and hybrid cultures, and in mixtures of values and traditions
among people of different regions. In some pieces, the focus is on
himself as the subject, a natural consequence of the self-referentiality
apparent in all his œuvres.