

TEMLON

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IVAN NAVARRO

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Iván Navarro *Penumbra*

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Punk came late to Chile, says artist Hugo Cárdenas in Martín Núñez's 2010 documentary, *Punk: Orígenes del Punk en Chile*, which looks at the politically charged underground music scene that arose during the 1980s in Santiago. At the time, Chilean youth were coming of age under Augusto Pinochet's oppressive CIA-backed military dictatorship. "It was a yell from my generation," Cárdenas explains: an intersectionally rebellious civilian chorus that, in 1983, intensified as the Jornadas de Protesta Nacional.

Cárdenas appears again in Mario Navarro's 2010 documentary, *El Punk Triste*, which was screened during *Penumbra*, a show of installations by Chilean artist Iván Navarro (Mario's brother) and Hueso Records, which Iván founded in 2005 to publish underground music, including by bands active during the dictatorship era in Chile, like the iconic Pinochet Boys. Presented during a one-night event, *El Punk Triste* follows Cárdenas to places where punk blossomed in the Chilean capital. After the screening, a montage splicing footage from angry protests with grainy videos of punk concerts from that era contextualised the night's headliners: María Sonora. After collaborating with vanguard bands like Cleopatras and Electrodomesticos, siblings María José and Sebastián 'Tan' Levine formed María Sonora in 1988, the year a referendum triggered Pinochet's eventual demise. Blending hip-hop, funk, raggamuffin, cumbia and rock, the band's embrace of colour, humour and joy as resistance prompted one magazine to observe: 'The party is coming'. María Sonora honoured that observation with its *Penumbra* set, which marked Hueso Records' release of the band's first album – recorded in Santiago in 1990, mixed in Tokyo that same year, but never released – with cover art by Brazilian artist Nelson Leirner.

Staged as part of the 17 Bienal de Artes Mediales de Santiago, everything about *Penumbra* felt geared towards María Sonora's reunion – a dream come true, says Navarro – which amplified the exhibition's title, referring

to an opaque object's shadows and, consequently, the potency of the peripheral subcultures that lurk within them. With the gallery transformed into a small concert venue, Navarro's characteristic monochrome light-boxes – coloured neon tube-lights and mirrors producing an infinity effect around phrases like 'Enterrar y Callar' (Bury them and keep quiet) and 'Farándula de Charlatanes' (The charlatan's swindle, after Goya's *Disasters of War*, 1810–20) – leaned into the artists' punk roots, flanking the stage like minimalist divebar lights. To one corner, a black-padded listening cocoon, *The Music Room IV* (2017) – created with artist Courtney Smith to play songs from revolutionary albums whose covers line the wooden structure's outer shell, including *Africa in Revolutionary Music* and *Revolución Mexicana* – operated as loveseat, sound booth and time machine in one: a space of sonic, political transmission from past to present. As was the night, given the reverberations of state-suppressed protests against socioeconomic inequality that erupted in Chile in 2019, and María Sonora's embrace of its multigenerational audience, including a joyfully impromptu freestyle round with young artist Planta Carnívora. Because what is punk if not a DIY riot?

Left on mute for the night, as if to demonstrate punk's capacity to lift a crowd for a minute, was *Flashlight: I Am Not From Here, I Am Not From There* (2006), a video projected onto one wall showing a man walking forsaken streets and siphoning car fuel to power a wheelbarrow made of fluorescent light tubes, with the actual sculpture positioned in front of the video. On a normal day, *Flashlight* filled the gallery with the soulful melody of Argentine songwriter Facundo Cabral's 1970 song *No Soy De Aquí, Ni Soy De Allá*, interpreted by Nutria NN, about a life from neither here nor there: untethered and free. Projected onto the opposing wall was *Landless Land* (2023), a film showing Navarro and a friend pilfering electricity from New York City light fixtures to power a shopping cart made from light tubes, with lyrics to *Juan Sin Tierra* (1968), a Mexican corrido by Jorge Saldaña – whose

original recording is among the songs played by *The Music Room IV* – appearing as intertitles. *Juan Sin Tierra* was also recorded by Chilean singer-songwriter Víctor Jara, who was among those brutally killed by Pinochet's thugs shortly after the coup – a fate echoed in the song quoting Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata's call for land and liberty, since Zapata's murder by the Mexican government was intended to end the Zapatista movement but instead turned Zapata into a beacon: like others before and after him. Hinting at that enduring thread was a line of sculptural cymbals cutting a diagonal through the room. Collapsing the embodied act of music-making with the political impetus to move when enough is enough, each cymbal is engraved with a word from the work's title – *Break, Crack, Crash, Crush, Hit, Kick, Knock, Scratch, Smack* (2017).

In Navarro's work, everything comes back to the neoliberal fascism that shaped Chile under Pinochet in one way or another, a firm part of global postwar international history, and he has long tapped into the DIY legacy of the country's historic punk scene with that in mind. There's a reason for this, as Cárdenas suggests in *El Punk Triste*, when thinking about the creativity that has fuelled grassroots sociopolitical movements rather than the commercial tastes of the ruling classes, here and elsewhere, then and now. Wandering the worn-out streets of a post-Pinochet Santiago, Cárdenas offers a familiar lament not limited to this context alone: that "Chile hasn't changed" – "poverty continues, exploitation continues" – he sighs – recalling when art stood for people, not profit. As Sergio Gomez of Niños Mutantes explains in *Punk*, the ability to create "was our way to say no to a dictatorship that represents death and negation". Photographer Gonzalo Donoso puts it this way: "The future was blurry, but we had a today." Both are neat encapsulations of what it felt like to be in the space that Navarro and his collaborators created, with new and old friends, in 2025. The present is always ours when we're together. *Stephanie Bailey*

facing page

Penumbra, 2025 (installation views). Courtesy the artist and Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral, Santiago

