

Sismos Tarrah Krajnak



Silver Eye

Gallery Guide
12.1.17-2.17.18

About the Artist

Tarrah Krajnak was born in Lima, Peru in 1979. She received her MFA from the University of Notre Dame. She currently lives and works in Claremont, CA. She has exhibited nationally and internationally at: Art13 London, Art Basel Miami, The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Center for Photography Woodstock, San Francisco Camerawork, Newspace Center for Photography, Columbus Museum of Art, The Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, and MetroPCS Gallery LA among others. She received grants from the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Vermont Council for the Arts, The Vermont Community Foundation, and the Arizona Commission on the Arts. Her work has appeared in both print and online magazines including the L.A Review of Books, Nueva Luz, and Camerwork. Krajnak is currently an Assistant Professor of Photography at Pitzer College. She taught previously at Cornell University and the University of Vermont.

Sismos

Photographs are, for most of us, the defining documents of our autobiography. Images from different stages of our lives show us what we looked like, the choices we made: they describe the world we existed within. The details in these photographs contain subtle layers of our history—the people, hairstyles, rooms, clothes, and cars—like layers of rock forming a geological record. The layers shape a story that is at once, personal, cultural, and political. Tarrah Krajnak's (American–Peruvian, b. 1979) series of images, *Sismos* contains this layered, beautiful, and haunting sense of history. Yet, none of the images portray her or her family.

Sismos focuses on Krajnak's relationship to the turbulent history of Lima, Peru around the time of her birth in 1979, and the decades that followed. This was a time of seismic change in Peru's capital, a chaotic transitional period between the military dictatorship of the 1970s and the onset of the Shining Path's guerilla war in 1980s. The increasing violence and instability in Peru's provinces caused a massive influx of rural migrants to enter Lima. Krajnak's birth mother was among them, one of many young women uprooted during that tectonic demographic shift. Krajnak writes, her mother was, "vulnerable in a city that was a violent, dangerous place. 1979 was a year that created orphans."

Krajnak was adopted the same year she was born by a couple of high school sweethearts from a coal town in eastern Pennsylvania. They adopted three children in that winter of 1979: Tarrah, another child from Peru, and an African-American baby boy born in Philadelphia. They formed an immediate family, and moved through a constellation of blue-collar suburbs from New Jersey to Illinois, eventually settling down outside of Cleveland. Raised as a twin to her African-American brother, Krajnak's early experiences of racial difference and familial discontinuity continue to drive her photographic work.

Krajnak describes her adoptive family's visual archive as, "unusual and problematic hinting at something profoundly

TEXT

David Oresick
Executive Director,
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unsettling about the myths of unity and cohesion that underlie all family arrangements—even the biological ones.” In 2011, after 32 years, Krajnak finally returned to her birth place with no romantic expectations about “finding her roots”. Rather, she began walking the city collecting magazines and newspapers from the year she was born, and salvaging the forgotten and discarded family photographs of strangers.

Sismos, the Spanish word for “earthquake”, combines this collection of images, archival research, still life photography, and original portraiture to create a new narrative that exists somewhere between Krajnak’s life in America and an imagined life in Peru. This project pulls together this found material and recorded narratives to invent a new story, what Krajnak calls a “psychic history” centered around Lima in 1979. It is her attempt at the impossible task of locating herself in a place she was born, but left.

Sismos is made of several distinct series. The images in the series *1979* (2014) are complex photographic still lives that draw from Krajnak’s intense periods of research and collection in Peru. Speaking little Spanish, her exploration of Lima initially focused on the photography located in magazines she was collecting from 1979. Krajnak used these magazines, along with shards of glass and other archival material, to construct and then photograph these still lives. The resulting images are a beautiful, chaotic view of the time and place Krajnak was born, full of contradictions, idealism, passion, and violence.

In her series *Marble Studies* (2014) Krajnak rented a studio for three months on the edge of a seaside town called Barranco. This studio was inside of a crumbling mansion that had once been a symbol of wealth and modernity, but changed along with the city. In the 1980s it was abandoned and then became a site for raves and underground parties in the 1990s. The mansion had cracked marble pieces left underneath broken wooden flooring which Krajnak used as a background for *Marble Studies*. Each day she roamed the markets and the streets of Lima collecting vernacular photographs and printed materials such as passport photos, personal snapshots, and portraits. The marble, wood, and glass

of the mansion became a surface to conduct what Krajnak called, “re-photographic experiments.”

The photographs Krajnak appropriated form a scrapbook or family album of an imagined life—her imagined life—in Peru. It’s easy to imagine the studies of young women from the early 1960s—glamorous and staid—as portraits of the artist’s mother. It is also easy to imagine the studies of the photographs of young women in the early 1990s—posing like models, campy and alluring—as portraits of the artist as a teenager. The photographs, arranged delicately on the marble become a kind of alter to these lives, and one can sense the deep empathy Krajnak has for these women.

For the photographs in the series *Time Twins* (2016) Krajnak posted ads in Lima to locate and photograph other women born in the same city and the same year as herself. She then made audio recordings of each woman telling a personal story or memory of growing up in Lima. These recordings, often banal, sometimes tragic, are used to make experimental poems that are seen in the series, *The Garden of Forking Paths* (2017). A collection of broadsheet prints, with these poems, are featured in this exhibition and are available to viewers to take with them as a memento. The title is a reference to a Jorge Luis Borges story where a man learns his distant ancestor wrote a sprawling novel with dozens of possible narratives that play out simultaneously.

The binary of “insiders” and “outsiders” is often used to classify photography projects. The “insiders” photograph their own communities, autobiographically exploring the people and places of their lives. “Outsiders” travel the world, photographing distant lands, learning about and reporting on foreign cultures. Like so many classifications, “insider” and “outsider” is not really a binary system, but an infinite spectrum, as one’s position in the world is rarely fixed. Growing up in suburban Ohio Krajnak was never quite an “insider”, and in Peru she is not exactly an “outsider.” *Sismos* presents us with an imagined life that encompasses a range of alternate possibilities. The history that is present in these images—layers upon layers of personal details—are of a life vivid, yet imagined.

	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Magalay</i> from the series <i>Time Twins</i>	1979/2016 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Raura</i> from the series <i>Time Twins</i>	1979/2016 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Indira</i> from the series <i>Time Twins</i>	1979/2016 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Linda</i> from the series <i>Time Twins</i>	1979/2016 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Rifa</i> from the series <i>Time Twins</i>	1979/2016 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Hambre</i> from the series 1979	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,700
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Grau</i> from the series 1979	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,700
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Soy Hermafrodita</i> from the series 1979	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,700
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Terrorismo</i> from the series 1979	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,700
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Homosexual</i> from the series 1979	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,700
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Capital Del Aborto</i> from the series 1979	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,700
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Mulata</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 28 × 42" Archival Pigment Print	\$2,000
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Dancers</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 28 × 42" Archival Pigment Print	\$2,000

	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Lima Infestada</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 28 × 42" Archival Pigment Print	\$2,000
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Doubles</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 28 × 42" Archival Pigment Print	\$2,000
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Dead Ringer</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Goth Band</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Line Up</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Transvestism</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 24 × 36" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,200
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Double Blue Tube Top</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 16 × 28" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,000
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Double White Pants</i> from the series <i>Marble Studies</i>	2014 16 × 28" Archival Pigment Print	\$1,000
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Crimen</i>	2014 30 × 40" Transparency Print	NFS
	Tarrah Krajnak	<i>Derecha, Centro, Izquierda</i>	2014 30 × 40" Transparency Print	NFS

**Silver Eye Center for Photography
Aaronel deRoy Gruber & Irving Gruber Gallery
4808 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15224**

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