

# A NOTE ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATED SYMBOLS, “TOOLS FOR UNCERTAINTY”.

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**T**he exercise of illustrating something is directly related to the interpretation of the illustrator. Everything that can be seen and touched, what can be felt, when brought to a paper, will reflect the unique touch of the illustrator. Naturally, translating into symbols a list of words or tools, phrases typical of the reflection of the term “common good”, or *Commonwealth*, is a personal interpretation that has to do entirely with the fact that I was born, grew up and worked as an artist in a colony: *What is the meaning to me of each of these words, beyond their given definition? How do I think about them? What feelings do they provoke in me? With what I can relate them? How I see myself in them? What relationship do they have with each other, in addition to being terms thought within the “common good”?*

Spoken, written and gestured language have their graphic interpretation. For example: “love” can be a heart.

Taking this as a starting point I chose to divide the list into categories using color, then created symbols that collect the words that correspond to those categories, or their derivatives, and thus be able to put together compositions. This in order to be able to create a symbol language that would translate 56 words and phrases, that was coherent and related to each other, and taking into account my personal reflection on each one of them. One word is itself. A concept exists as such, but it has a range of interpretations depending on who does the exercise of thinking them, in this case, of illustrating them and translating them into symbols:

\* The categories ***I don't know*** and ***Composite*** have no initial symbol.

***Violent Actions / Political Concepts*** (blue) - (1) Colonize (4) Payback (15) Resistance (24) Debt (37) Gentrification (47) Promise (48) Sovereignty

***Tangible Resources*** (red) - (2) Resources (5) Water (8) Energy (18) Wealth (21) Currency (27) Fissure - Crack (28) Trace (30) Sweat (32) Weapons (36) Food (38) Infrastructure (53) Shadow (Shadow)

***Abstract resources*** (mustard) - (3) Power (7) Responsibility (13) Interdependence (16) Reconciliation (26) Education (29) Empathy (31) Access (33) Boundaries (40) Knowledge (41) Love (43) Security (44) Memory (45) Experience (46) Values (53) Imagination

***Time / Space*** (orange) - (6) Space (9) Past(10) Present (11) Future(49) Permanent(50) Temporary

**Individual / Collective** (green) - (12) Public (14) Generation (17) Collectivity (19) Neighbors (23) Band or Group (25) Individual (34) Community (35) Family (39) Institutions (42) People (56) Collective

**I don't know** (black) - (20) Currents (22) Common (51) Sustainable

**Composite** (magenta) - (54) Spatial Economies (55) Historical Agency

After creating the categories, I put together unique codes for each one. This classification made it easier for me to think of the words from what they are, from their given definition, and in contrast to my reflection on them.

Each word, having its given meaning, now has a new reading. An illustrated reading from this language of tools; from this system of codes or symbols.

The entire process of searching for references to arrange the tools was fun, instructive, and eye-opening. I started looking for the meaning of each word in Spanish, then going to their synonyms and antonyms, reading examples of those words in sentences and in different contexts. I did the same process as well in English. I looked up the words in other languages, rather to see how they looked graphically. For example, the word “family” in Persian: “**دهادون‌اخ**”. The word “resistance” in Greek: “**αντίσταση**”. The word “empathy” in Japanese: “**共感**”, among many others. I looked for references of graphic signs in writing systems such as pictograms, logograms, petroglyphs. Eventually, I started thinking the words

from other places. What do they mean to me? What do they make me feel? What experience do I have of them? And soon I was locating shapes, the initial categories, and then separating others to make the compositions of the symbols.

Once I assigned a symbol to each category, then I worked the distinctions of each word relating them to each other.

*So I thought that if each of those terms could already live within that new reading, perhaps it was possible to think of others. Think of other concepts that could have life under that same language. To think of other compositions. Other formulas.*

*Individual. Person. Art. Lorraine.* The possibilities are endless. Through this illustrated language, which occupies those 56 words that have to do directly with “common good”, or *Commonwealth*, we can work on many other concepts, and consequently, many combinations of symbols to think about ourselves from the initial reflection. We could include more values that we have in common and thus expand our toolbox.

Contemplating the infinity of possibilities, the universe of combinations, we created a generator of tools: an invitation to generate unique arrangements. Clicking builds a formula of symbols, and thus others based on the 56 words. The generator works like an oracle, a random exercise whose result is random. So each person who uses the generator will get their own set of tools. Possibility is everything.

The exercise of creating a system of symbols that responds to values that we have in common is also an exercise of creating language. And language is a tool, and a tool is also a weapon.

This exercise is not final. Everyone who was born and lived in the *commonwealth* can build their own symbols on these same words, and having the same reflection. Build other toolboxes. Add others and so on.

This is just a reflection of a creative process. It is sharing a method, an exploration, an approach.

*Commonwealth* is organized and curated by Beta-Local co-directors Pablo Guardiola, Michael Linares, and nibia pastrana santiago and former co-director Sofía Gallisá Muriente; ICA at VCU Chief Curator Stephanie Smith; Noah Simblist, Chair of Painting + Printmaking at VCUarts; and Kerry Bickford, Director of Programs, Nicole Pollard, Program Coordinator and Nato Thompson, Sueyun and Gene Locks Artistic Director at Philadelphia Contemporary.

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