



## Encounters: Memory Becoming Education Drawing Inspiration From Guararí, Heredia, Costa Rica by Felipe Vega

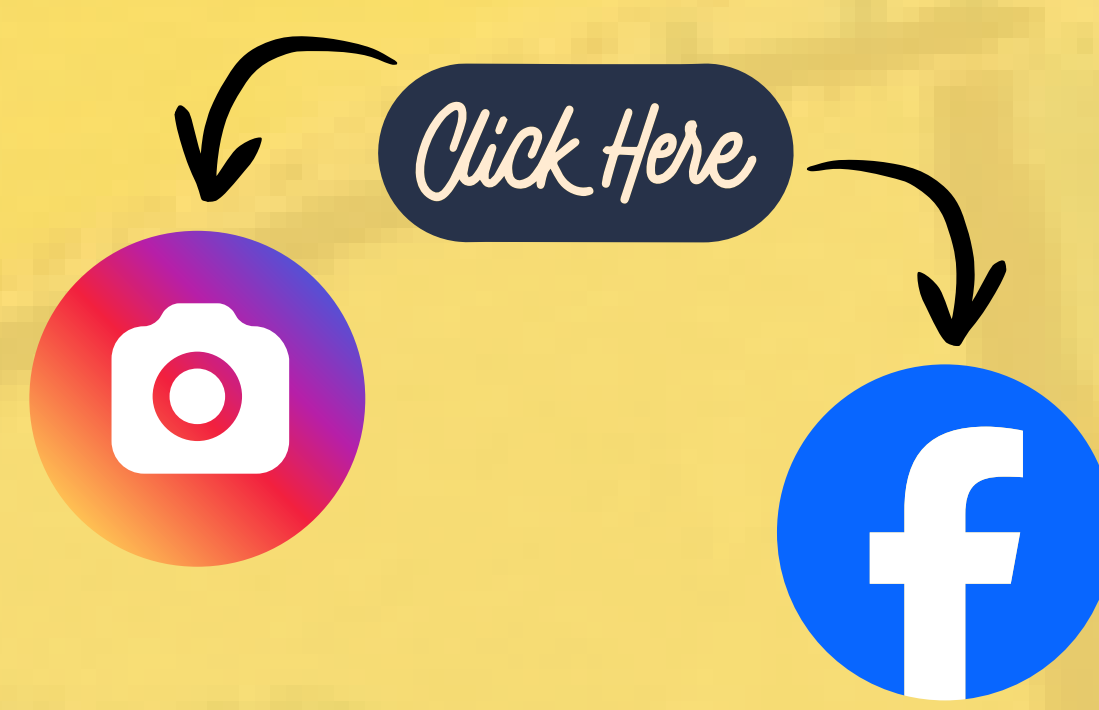
I have often seen Guararí, Heredia described through a lens of fear and insecurity. However, looking more closely into its origins reveals a very different story—one of courage, collective labor, and visionary women who transformed open land into a living community.

Costa Rican artist **Fiorella Benavides Sánchez**, cofounder of **Arte para la Tierra**, is dedicated to restoring foundational memory in public consciousness.

Her project, **Guararí: Stories of Women Who Built Their Own Houses** (2025), revisits a self-construction initiative from the 1980s, in which a group of women contributed 900 hours of building labor in exchange for a home. Through their collective effort, they transformed what was once finca **La Libertad** (formerly a coffee plantation) known as Guararí into the neighborhood that stands today. Their work included building the houses, streets, and even the school their children would attend. Along the way, they endured profound challenges—including a hunger strike, police enforcement, and complex negotiations with the government—before finally securing their homes.

Through a scenic and visual approach grounded in biographical oral storytelling, Fiorella collaborates directly with these founding women, honoring their testimonies and lived experiences. The project has also been recognized publicly. Recently, the founding members have been welcomed into the community's cultural house and have shared their history with younger generations while visiting the very school they helped construct. In these ongoing encounters, memory becomes education.

I see in this work an important effort to reconnect institutional structures with community voices. Ongoing **Arte para la Tierra** initiatives aim to strengthen ties between the municipal government and local residents. These projects amplify a reframed narrative and revalue Guararí's collective roots. By illuminating the beauty in its origin story, **Arte para la Tierra** highlights the power of activism. This activism restores dignity, strengthens civic identity, and transforms how a community sees itself—and how it is seen by others.



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