

a world that contains many worlds

from ethnography to interactive visual narration: an image-based investigation of Zapatista iconography

Francesca Cozzolino & Kristina Solomoukha – March 23, 2023

• *caracol* • *chiapas* • *ethnography* • *iconography* • *mayan culture* • *tangible knowledge* • *visual atlas* • *zapatista movement*

This article presents image-based research on the iconographic production of the Zapatistas (Chiapas, southeastern Mexico) and the visual universes that are invoked there. Product of the collaboration between an anthropologist and an artist, this research project is composed of an interactive visual atlas made up of images from different sources, temporalities, and systems of historicity. We question how these images reflect transnational and transhistorical political cultures, and how the Zapatistas repurpose different iconographic traditions. Drawing inspiration from Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* and his method, we have created a constellation of images based on the repetition of a motif, the *caracol*, which evokes for the Zapatistas the imagery of a political process that is «slow» (in opposition to the idea of capitalist progress), and also the marine snail or concha, which is found in the symbolic system of the ancient Maya. This motif, ranging from the representation of the snail to the spiral and the seashell, embodies both the Mayan past and the Zapatista ideals of the present (Gossen, 1996; Benjamin, 2000).

To determine the links between the images that make up our corpus, we have organized them into two shapes—the snail and the spiral—used in Zapatista embroideries. Then we associate other images with these representations (from Mayan archaeological sites, codices and pre-Hispanic museum collections) where these visual motifs are found, by taking into account the actors who produced them by variegating them with a color code (Ancient Maya in green; Zapatistas in blue; Zapatista supporters in purple).

At the iconographic level, the ambition of this research is to reveal “significant associations” between different visual cultures by bringing these images together through the effects of proximity and formal or symbolic resemblance. The *caracol* would constitute then the “core” of this cultural continuity (López-Austin 2001: 59) that we show through the image.

On the anthropological level, one of the aims is to question the way in which a culture produces the images that constitute its visual and political identity. Another of our objectives through our approach is to visually translate the processes specific to anthropological reasoning, such as ethnological analogy (Kubler 1972, Dehouve 2020), which enables us to postulate the existence of a cultural continuity between the past and the present in a given cultural area. Thus, this image-based research aims to challenge both the semiotic and formal survival of an iconographic motif and the disjunctions that occur when a visual form acquires different meanings over time.

Playing with scales, unit comparison, and image combinations, we want to deploy knowledge that displaces the relationship of the visual to the objectivity of scientific analysis and seek the emergence of heuristic pathways through the image. Our aim is to shape an interpretative space of the image that is formed through the perspective of the reader-spectator and opens to a form of knowledge that is as much structured as aware (Laplantine 2005).



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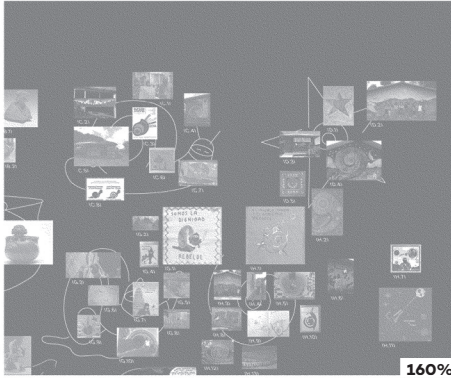
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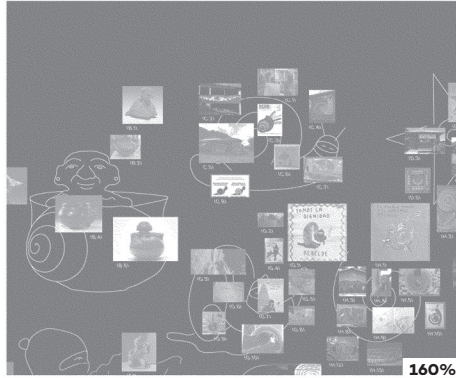
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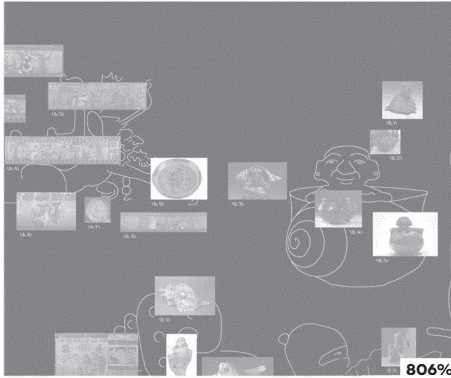
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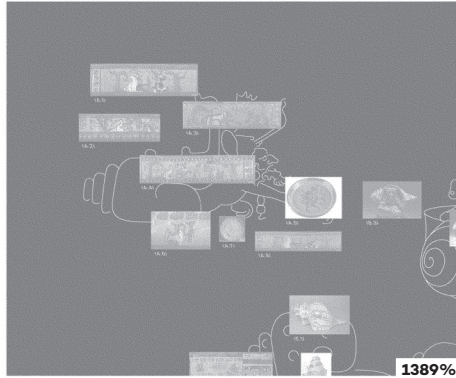
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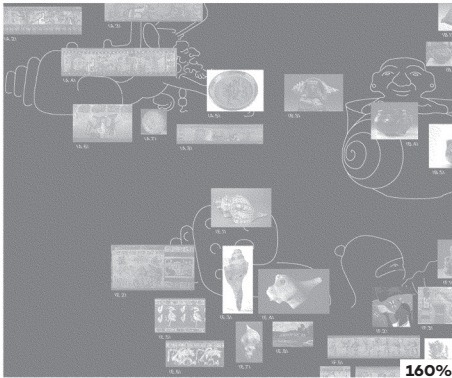
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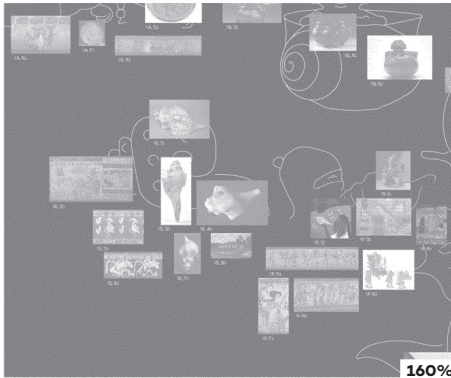
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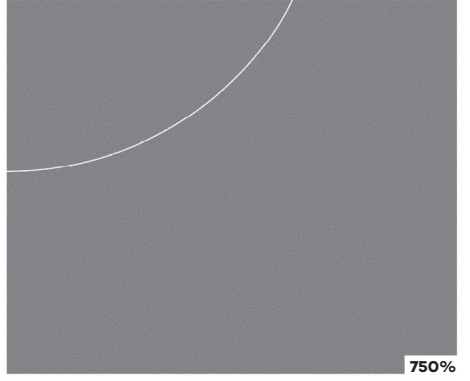
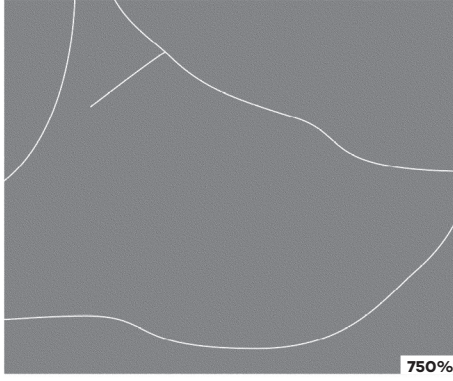
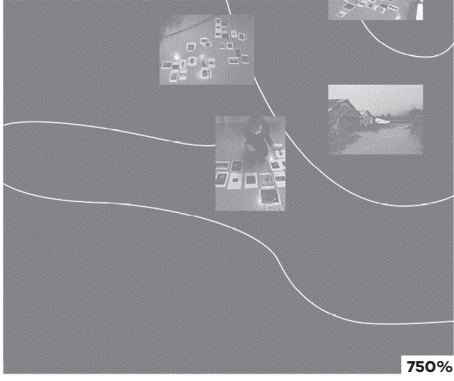
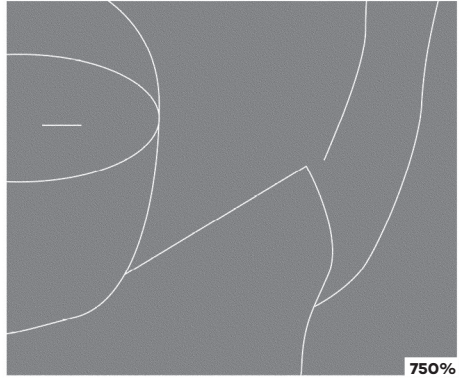
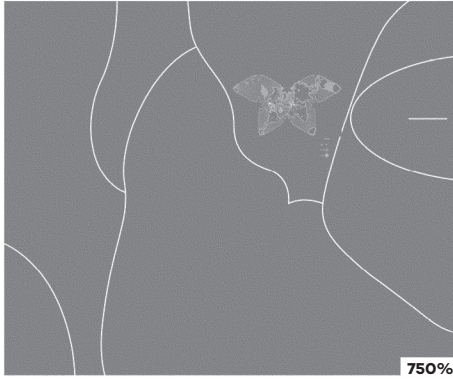
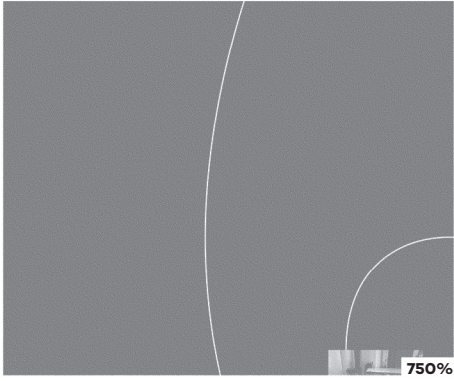
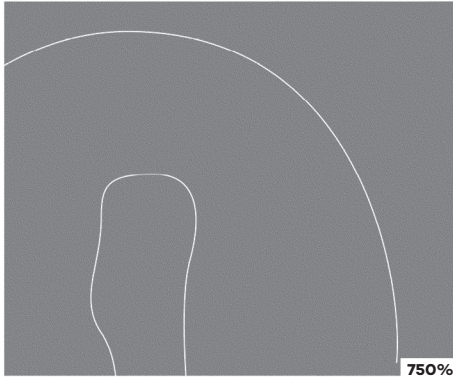
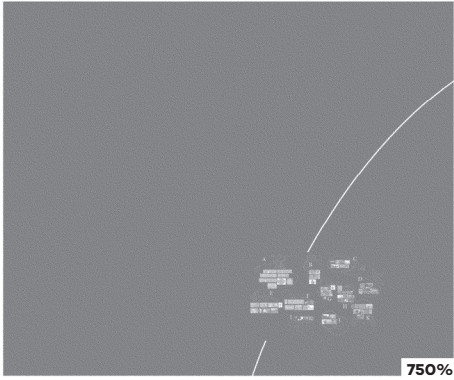
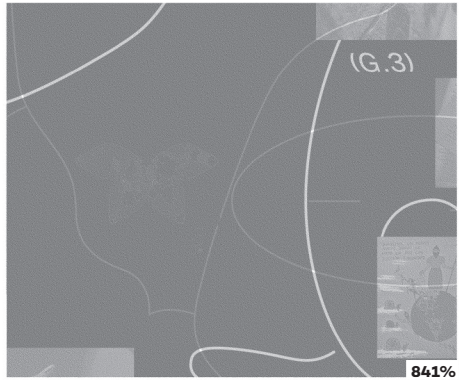
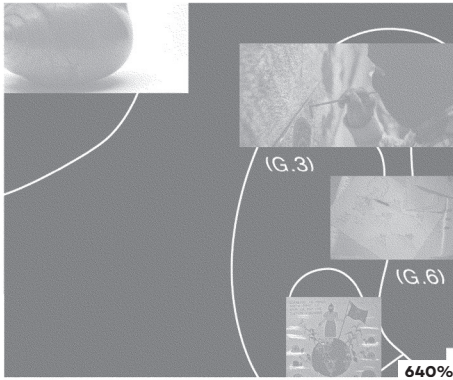
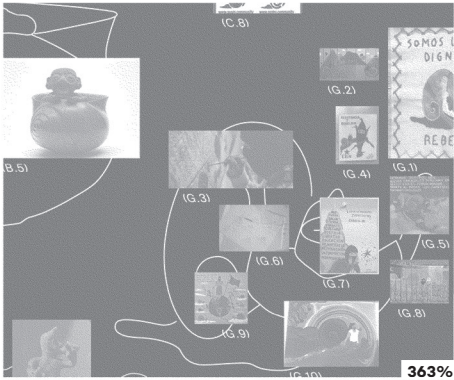
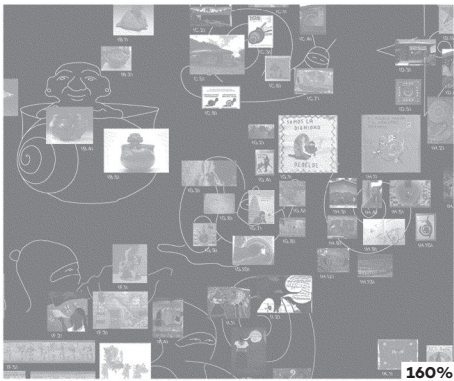
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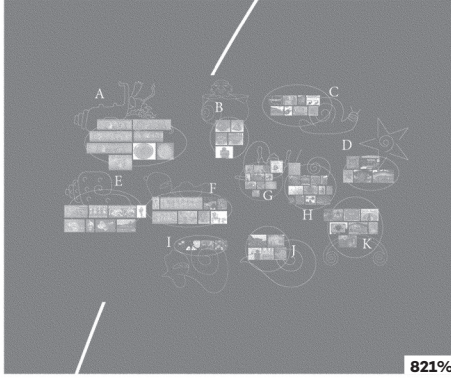
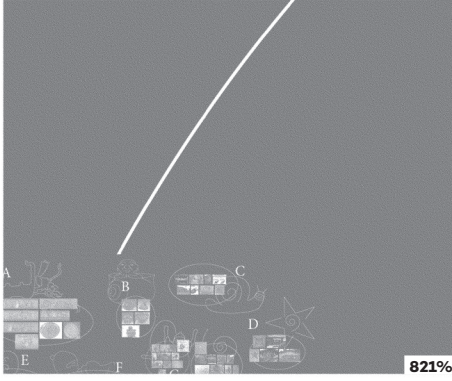
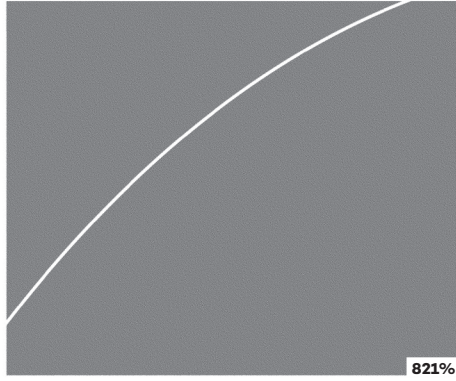
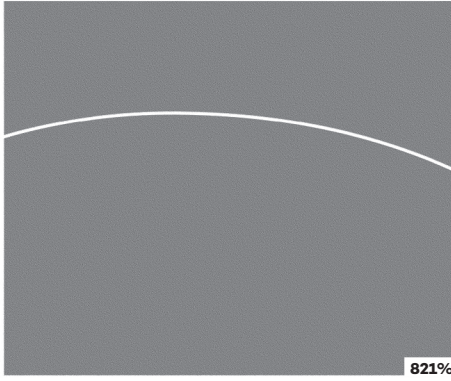
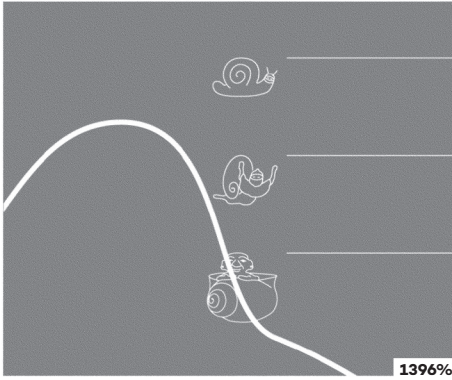
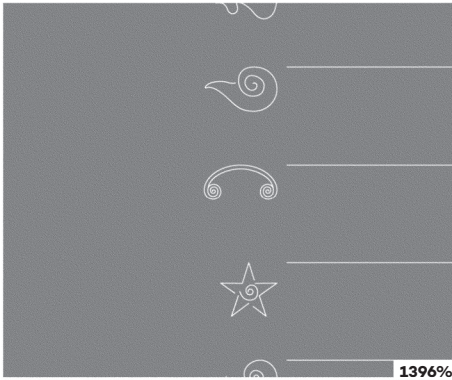
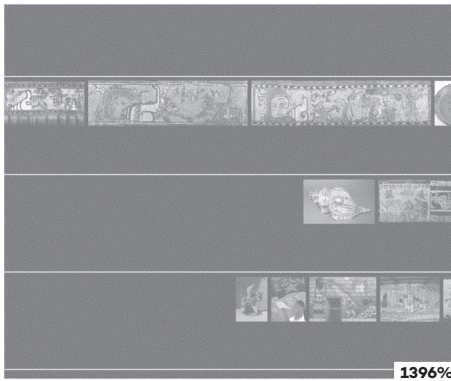
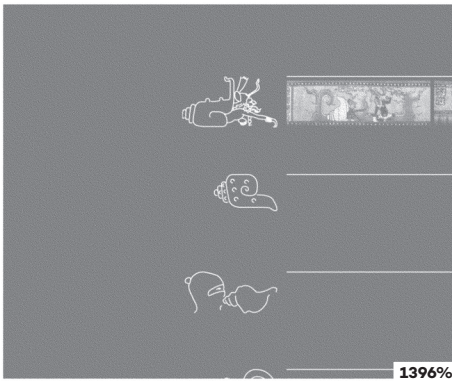


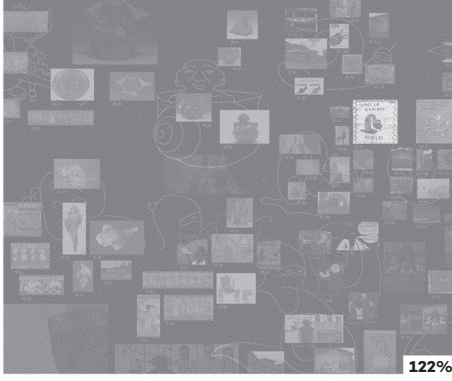
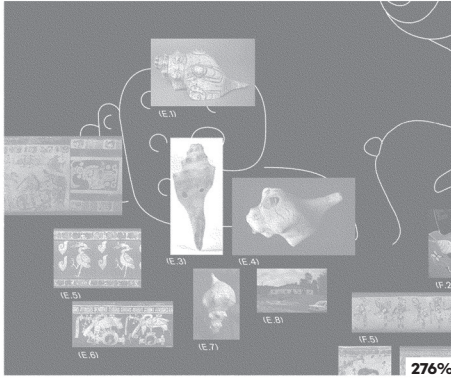
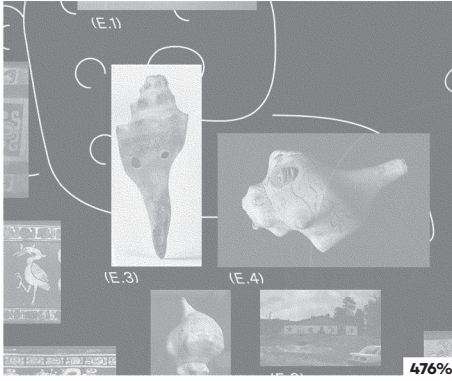
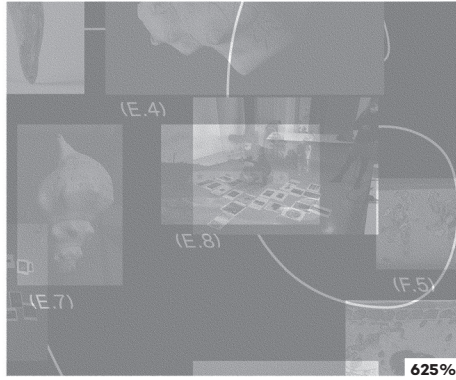
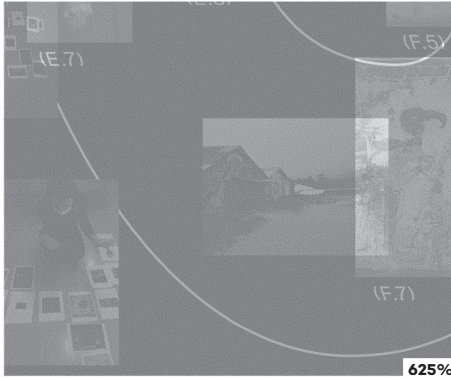
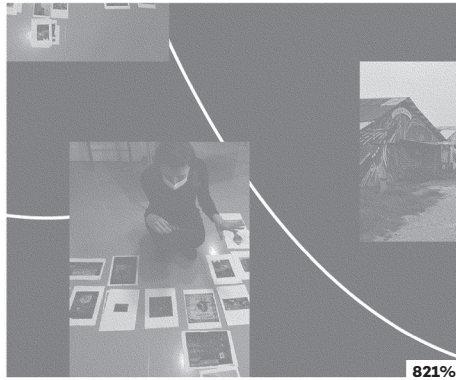
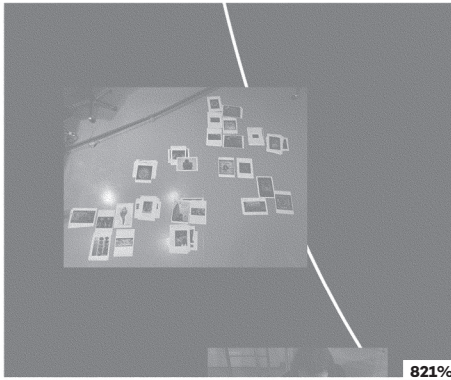
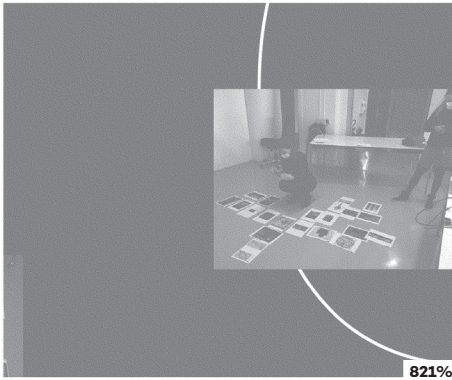
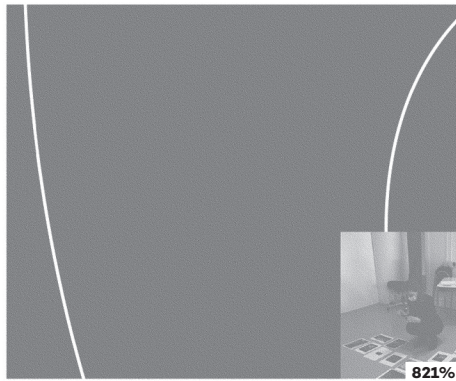
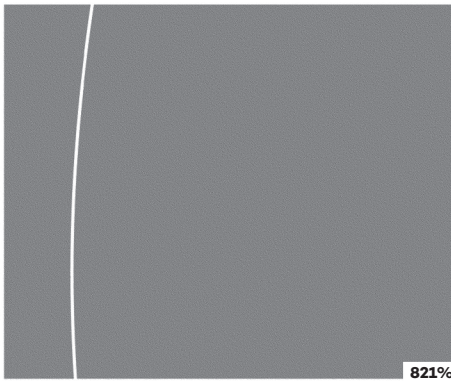
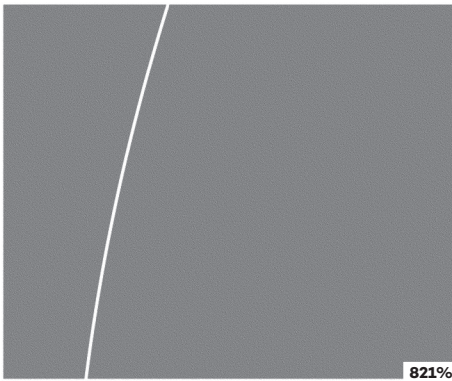
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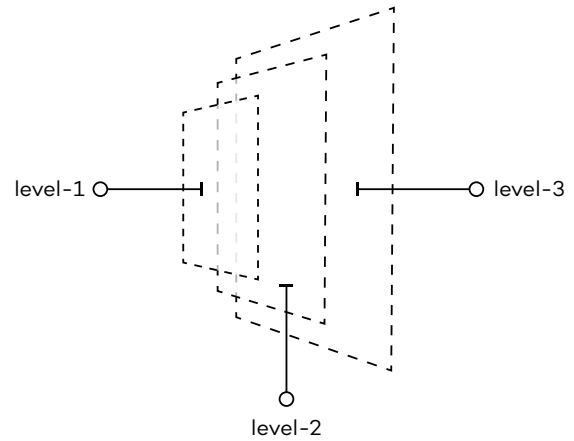




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A2. Polychrome vase, representing Chama, God N in a shell and a smaller version of the same, vegetation. Chama/Nebaj, 800–850 CE. K3124: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=3124&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1998. Public domain image.

A3. Polychrome vessel showing God N being pulled from his shell to be cut up by one of the Hero Twins who is holding a knife. Chama/Nebaj, 600–800 CE. Princeton Art Museum, Princeton.1974.18. K2847: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=2847&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1998. Public domain image.

A4. Polychrome vase showing an unusual scene with God N out of his conch shell. Chama, 750–850 CE. K8334: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=8334&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 2000. Public domain image.

A5. Pre-Columbian shallow ceramic bowl, dating from before 1492, Mexico. Memorial Art Gallery of Rochester, 1996.14. <http://magart.rochester.edu/objects-1/info?query=Portfolios%3D%221685%22&page=506>. Photo © Memorial Art Gallery of Rochester. Reproduced with permission.

A6. Polychrome vase showing a conch shell, God N, inscription Primary Standard Sequence. Dumbarton Oaks Washington, DC. PC.B.206. Published in Coe 1975. Polychrome vase. 600–800 CE. Published in *Ancient Maya Art at Dumbarton Oaks* Harvard University Press, 2012, p. 311. K2787: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=2787&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1998. Public domain image.

A7. Polychrome vessel showing God N in his shell with a text also mentioning God N. 600–800 CE. Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC: 79.232. K5380: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=5380&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 2001. Public domain image.

A8. Polychrome vase showing one of the Hero twins pulling the old God N from his shell while holding a stone knife in his other hand. 600–800 CE. Published in *The Maya Vase Book*, Vol. 6 p. 966. K6434: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=6434&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 2001. Public domain image.

B1. Maya figural rattle of God N, Jaina, Late Classic period, c. 550–950 CE. African Oceanic and PreColumbian Art auction, May 13, 2011, Sotheby's, New York. Sale Number: N08749, Lot 137. <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/african-oceanic-and-precolumbian-art-n08749/lot.137.html>. Photo © Sotheby's. Reproduced with permission.

B2. Large vase representing Itzamnaaj, Early Post-Classical period. Museo Maya de Cancún, Mexico. Photo © Paolo Codeluppi 2019. Reproduced with permission.

B3. Incense Burner, Pacific Coast, Guatemala, Middle Classic period, AD 350–500. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD: <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/80347/incense-burner-7/?fbclid=IwAROnjy9eVHzliOFcXYKpEOQRO6iRT20zQkBYXscbXp23qWSOFq7LcJy71VE>. Photo © The Walters Art Museum. Public domain image.

B4. Three-dimensional vessel in the form of snail shell with God N emerging and Chak or an impersonator holding a Kawil axe with flint in mouth with incised text, Early Classic period. Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA: 86.427. K1285 Astill: <http://www.mayavase.com/1285stills.pdf>. Photo © Justin Kerr 1980. Public domain image.

B5. Vessel in the form of a conch shell from which the bust of an elderly man emerges, Late Classical period. Museo Nacional de Antropología de México: https://mna.inah.gob.mx/colecciones_detalle.php?id=68401&sala=9&pg=6. Photo © Mediateca INAH. Reproduced with permission.

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C3. Cover of *Rufián* magazine, titled “Estética de la autonomía, autonomía estética,” no. 17, January 2014. Photo © Rufián magazine.

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C5. Caracol Jacinto CaneK (formerly CEDECI Earth University), San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2021. Reproduced with permission.

C6. Embroidery made by Zapatistas. Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2021. Reproduced with permission.

C7. Painting on fabric made by Zapatistas: <https://dorsetchiapassolidarity.wordpress.com/2017/01/01/zapatista-news-summary-for-november-2016/>. Photo © All Rights Reserved

C8. Autonomous University for Social Movements logo image, website screenshot: <https://ausm.community>.

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D2. Mural painting. Resistance and rebellion for humanity. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © ProtoplasmaKid 2018. CC BY-SA 4.0.

D3. Mural painting. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2019. Reproduced with permission.

D4. Mural painting. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico: <https://dorsetchiapassolidarity.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/oventic-6.jpg>. Photo © All Rights Reserved

D5. Paliacate “Aquí estamos, Resistimos” (Here we stand, we resist). Schools for Chiapas: <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/store/clothing-and-boots/bandana-clothing-and-boots/paliacate-aqui-estamos-resistimos-2/>. Photo © Schools for Chiapas. All rights reserved.

E1. Conch shell trumpet, Nayarit, Mexico, 200 BCE–500 CE. LACMA (M.86.296.50): <https://collections.lacma.org/node/253539>. Photo © LACMA. Public domain image.

E2. Polychrome vase showing birds, conch shell, deer, insects, and an inscription. Rio Hondo, 600–800 CE. Published in *The Face of Ancient America*, p.106. K2993: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=2993&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1998. Public domain image.

E3. Maya musical conch, Early Classic period, c. 250–450 CE. Christie's auction no. 18648, Pre-Columbian Art, Lot 46: https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-conque-musicalemaya-classique-ancien-env-250-450-ap-6256769/?lid=3&sc_lang=zh. Photo © Christie's. Reproduced with permission.

E4. Conch shell, 2nd century BCE–4th century CE, Monte Alban. The Metropolitan Museum, New York: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/313132>. Public domain image.

E5. Polychrome vase with a red background, waterbirds with conches, text on the rim and base. 600–800 CE.

K665: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=6665&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1998. Public domain image.

E6. Polychrome vase depicting waterbirds with fish in their beak, standing on an abstract section of conch shell marking the entrance to the watery realm. Published in *The Maya Vase Book*, vol. 4, p. 590.

K4687: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=4687&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1999. Public domain image.

E7. Conch shell trumpet. Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca, Mexico.

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E8. Mural painting, Comandanta Ramona auditorium. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2018. Reproduced with permission.

F1. Conch trumpet player, Early Pre-Classical–Late Classical period. INAH, Mexico City. Photo © Paolo Codeluppi 2019. Reproduced with permission.

F2. Detail of a painting on cardboard: <http://eskalequilombo.free.fr/EskaleQuilombo/revues/chroniques-zapatistes.htm>. Photo © All rights reserved.

F3. Mural painted during CompArte, 2018. Caracol Morelia, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francisco Lion 2018. Reproduced with permission.

F4. Mural painting. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. <https://profession.mla.org/dancing-with-the-zapatistas>. Photo © Diana Taylor 2013. Reproduced with permission.

F5. Polychrome vase depicting a hunting scene with a deer in a mesh backpack and a rabbit being cut up. 750–850 CE. K1373: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=1373&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1998. Public domain image.

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F7. Polychrome vase showing a dance scene with a person making a fire offering and a deity with a jaguar headdress holding two dance scepters. 600–800 CE. Published in *The Maya Vase Book*, vol. 3, p.397 K3247: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=0&y=0&vase_number=3247&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1999. Public domain image.

F8. War scene. Decapitated head, dismembered bodies, conch player with HASAL on penis. Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). K4625: http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_list.php?_allSearch=K4625&hold_search=&x=13&y=13&vase_number=&date_added=&ms_number=&site=. Photo © Justin Kerr 1998. Public domain image.

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G2. *Balumil-na* mural painting. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francesca Cozzolino 2018. Reproduced with permission.

G3. Painting murals, CompArte, 2018. Caracol Morelia, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francisco Lion 2018. Reproduced with permission.

G4. Painting made by Josué, 2018. Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2018. Reproduced with permission.

G5. Painting made by David, 2017. Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francisco Lion 2018. Reproduced with permission.

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G7. Painting made by Omar in January 2014. Schools for Chiapas: <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/store/artesania/paintings/caracol-iv-stretched-painting/>. Photo © Schools for Chiapas. All rights reserved.

G8. Mural painting, 2014. Caracol Realidad, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2019. Reproduced with permission

G9. *Feliz navidad*, painting by Lucio, 2005. Chiapas, Mexico: <https://sexta-azcapotzalco.blogspot.com/2017/05/como-seria-una-casa-donde-quepan-muchos.html?m=1>. Photo © All Rights Reserved.

G10. Mural painted by Promotores de la Educación and youth in the Horizonte region, 2018. Zona altos, Chiapas, Mexico: <https://radiozapatista.org/?p=27931>. Photo © Unknown. CC BY-SA 4.0.

H1. Embroidery made by Zapatistas. Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2017. Reproduced with permission.

H2. Postcard with the image of the painting made by Beatriz Aurora, 2003. San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2019. Reproduced with permission.

H3. Mural painting, *Resistance and rebellion for humanity*. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © ProtoplasmaKid 2018. CC BY-SA 4.0.

H4. American students from CELMRAZ (The Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Center of Mayan Languages, Tzotzil, and Spanish) painting a mural, 2018. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francesca Cozzolino 2018. Reproduced with permission.

H5. Mural painted by CELMRAZ international students, 2018. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francesca Cozzolino 2018. Reproduced with permission.

H6. Mural painting. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico: <http://www.kombirutera.com.ar/2014/01/ya-sera-ano-nuevo.html>. Photo © Kombi Rutera 2014. Reproduced with permission.

H7. Poster, CEDECI Earth University. San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2019. Reproduced with permission.

H8. Mural painting *laj jak'betutik li jme'tik balumil-e*. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francesca Cozzolino 2019. Reproduced with permission.

H9. Sketch of the mural painted by the international students of CELMRAZ. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francesca Cozzolino 2018. Reproduced with permission.

H10. DVD cover of the CompArte festival documentary, produced by Los Tercios Compas, 2018. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2018. Reproduced with permission.

H11. Painting on canvas by Gersam, 2018. Photo © Francisco Lion. Reproduced with permission.

H12. Mural painting, *Caracol Torbellino de Nuestras Palabras*. Chiapas, Mexico: <https://sipazen.wordpress.com/2013/12/07/chiapas-denunciation-of-harassment-and-attacks-from-the-whirlwind-of-our-words-caracol/>. Photo © SIPAZ 2013. Reproduced with permission.

H13. Women forming a spiral shape known as “Caracol Semillero de la Comandanta Ramona,” at the Second International Meeting of Women Who Fight, 2019. Caracol Morelia, Chiapas, Mexico: <https://www.citynews1130.com/2019/12/30/mexicos-zapatistas-host-women-who-fight-gathering/>. Photo © Photo SIPA Press/Isabel Mateos 2019. Reproduced with permission.

I1. Mural painting. Chiapas, Mexico. Chiapas, Mexico: <https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/12/388584.html>. Photo © All rights reserved

I2. Mural painting detail. Chiapas, Mexico: <http://eskalequilombo.free.fr/EskaleQuilombo/revues/chroniques-zapatistes-intro.htm>. Photo © All rights reserved.

I3. Mural painting. Chiapas, Mexico: <http://eskalequilombo.free.fr/EskaleQuilombo/revues/chroniques-zapatistes-intro.htm>. Photo © All rights reserved

I4. Mural painting. Chiapas, Mexico: <http://eskalequilombo.free.fr/EskaleQuilombo/revues/chroniques-zapatistes.htm>. Photo © All rights reserved

J1. Screen capture, Zapatista musical group “Los Originales de San Andrés del Caracol II de Oventic. Corridos Revolucionarios,” 2017: <https://komanilel.org/2017/04/13/pueblo-mio-los-originales-de-san-andres-video-clip-oficial/>. Photo © All rights reserved

J2. Mural painting. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2019. Reproduced with permission.

J3. Mural painting, 2014. Caracol Realidad, Chiapas, Mexico: <https://www.labellerevue.org/fr/dossiers-thematiques/educational-complex/entretien-giap>. Photo © Alessandro Zagato 2014. Reproduced with permission.

J4. Zapatista snail drawing, colored pencils on paper, 2005: <https://sites.google.com/site/edithlopezovallelanegra/obra/zapatistas>. Photo © Edith Lopez Ovalle 2005. Reproduced with permission.

K1. Embroidery made by Zapatistas: <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/gifts-of-change/>. Photo © Schools for Chiapas. All rights reserved.

K2. *Puy ta Cuxlejaltic* film festival banner, 2018. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico: <https://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2018/12/01/mexico-miles-de-bases-zapatistas-participaron-como-publico-de-un-particular-festival-de-cine/>. Photo © Noé Pineda 2018. All Rights Reserved.

K3. Mural painting *yai jk'opojel*. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Francesca Cozzolino 2017. Reproduced with permission.

K4. Painting on a basketball backboard, 2013. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico: <https://cronkite.asu.edu/projects/buffett/chiapas/for-zapatistas-revolution-moves-at-a-snails-pace-while-global-appeal-endures/>. Photo © Rachel Leingang / Cronkite Borderlands Project 2014. CC-BY-SA.

K5. Mural painting by Adrian. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2019. Reproduced with permission.

K6. Mural painting. Caracol La Garrucha, Chiapas, Mexico: <https://www.sipaz.org/dossier-le-chemin-du-caracol-lescargot-vers-lautonomie/?lang=fr>. Photo © SIPAZ 2005. Reproduced with permission.

K7. Mural painted by La RED students, 2017. Caracol Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo © Kristina Solomoukha 2018. Reproduced with permission.

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