

## **Tropical America and OnRamp Arts**

Take a sledgehammer to the logic of linear time. OnRamp Arts' 'Tropical America' invites you to weave through 500 years of Latin American history, collecting sugar cane and speaking to the gods along the way. Save lives instead of ending them. Follow a narrative that is not only intriguing, but soaked in history. A video game disguised as a puppet show, a woodcut for the Flash generation. Best of all become a Hero of the Americas, and help create a memorial to those whose history has been forgotten.

Developed in collaboration with teachers, artists and Los Angeles high school students, most from new immigrant families, Tropical America explores the causes and effects of the erasure of history in vivid and compelling ways. Entitled in tribute to the Los Angeles mural by David Alfaro Siqueiros, whitewashed in 1932 due to its controversial content.

The story of Rufina Amaya, sole survivor of the 1981 massacre in El Mozote in El Salvador, provides the contextual anchor and the impetus from which Tropical America begins. The player's challenge is to discover four pieces of evidence that will bring justice to the memory of the murdered villagers. As a thematic interactive video game, Tropical America features four inter-related, cross-cultural episodes culled from 500 years of Latin American history.

Each episode functions as a story within a story, revealing the profound connections between seemingly disparate events. What do the myth of El Dorado, the battles of Bolivar, the single-crop economy of Cuba, or the poems of Sor Juana de la Cruz have in common? And how did each of these contribute to a tragic December day hundreds of years later? Bearing witness, Tropical America reveals a forgotten terrain, the birthplace of contemporary cross-cultural life.

OnRamp Arts is a nonprofit arts organization whose mission is to create and produce innovative, compelling digital media projects that bridge new technology, the arts and local communities. OnRamp Arts has partnered with over 20 local schools and organizations, to produce projects that explore the multifaceted challenges of contemporary cross-culture life.

### **FACT SHEET**

- Tropical America is a free, bilingual, online game. Users can play in English or Spanish, as a boy or girl avatar.
- Tropical America displays an unique and evocative graphic style, developed from over 100 commissioned woodcuts by renowned Mexican printmaker Artemio Rodríguez.
- Tropical America was developed by Belmont High School students, most of whom are from recent immigrant families, in collaboration with artists and teachers.
- Tropical America's game design features both exploration and archive of the interconnections of historical events, creating a model new media 'textbook'.

- During game play, the player generates a database of related historic subjects to a parallel HTML research site, with source texts, images and online resources.
- Funded as an alternative media literacy program around issues of youth violence, Tropical America inverts the traditional 'first-person shooter' video game model.
- Curriculum tailored to major themes and events appropriate to humanities curriculum.
- Founded in 1997, OnRamp Arts is a Los Angeles based non-profit arts organization whose mission is to create and produce innovative, compelling digital media projects that bridge new technology, the arts and local communities.

<http://www.onramparts.org>

## **EPISODIC GAMEPLAY**

Your journey begins as the sole survivor of a terrible massacre - you must find four pieces of evidence to bring justice to the memory of your small village. In your quest, you will encounter profound and dramatic historic episodes of the Americas, including:

### **La Española, 1493**

Having exhausted the production of gold and precious metals in the West Indies, the Spanish Caribbean colonies turned to sugar as a new source of income, initiating a long and devastating history of slave trade.

### **Quiché Mayas, 1524**

The Popol Vuh is the sacred book of the Quiché Mayas. Within it, the religious concepts of the Maya's, as well as the stories of migration and the poetic accents of its culture come to the surface.

### **El Dorado, 1538**

After years of searching for El Dorado - the "the City of Gold" - a frustrated Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada retires and establishes Santa Fe De Bogotá, now capital of Colombia.

### **Peru, 1631**

El Inca Garcilaso De La Vega, one of Latin America's first historians, writes a book about the discovery of America as seen through the eyes of a native Indian.

### **Colonial México, 1695**

Viewed by some as a crazy, irreverent nun, Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz, the first Latin American feminist, emerges as one of the most important poets of the New World.

### **Caribbean Coast, 1713**

Benkos Bioho, formerly king of an African tribe, led the most important slave uprising at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Approximately a hundred black fugitives fled into the mountains and created the palenque of San Basilio, the first free black village in Latin America.

### **Battle Of Ayacucho, 1824**

Many perish in what proves to be the turning point for colonial independence for half of South America. Simón Bolívar's lover, Manuela Saenz, roams the battlefield collecting mustaches of dead Spanish soldiers.

### **Mexico, 1917**

Emiliano Zapata, a peasant farm worker fights to implement Article 27, to the Mexican constitution that would give the indigenous population a right to self-govern and work their

own land.

### **Yucatán, 1946**

The "House of Colors" in Bonampak is discovered in the chicle forests, and is the first time a white man has set foot in the area. Bonampak's frescoes make known to the scientific world this unsurpassable document of Mayan life in the eighth century.

### **Cuba, 1950's**

Although the proximity to the U.S. has helped the sugar industry to expand, the living conditions of the Cuban people were miserable, with 80% living in poverty. As a popular tourist destination of the rich and famous, Cuba earns the dubious distinction as the sex and abortion capital of the Western Hemisphere.

### **Chile, 1974**

Agusto Pinochet took power in Chile after the murder of Salvador Allende and orders the kidnapping and murder of many Chilean citizens.. The mothers, wives and grandmothers of those who disappeared, used quilting as a way to denounce the repression in their country.

### **El Salvador, 1981**

Over a thousand inhabitants of the village of El Mozote - wrongly accused of harboring communist guerillas - die at the hands of the Salvadoran army's Atlacatl battalion. Few even hear about the massacre until years later because people were too terrified to talk at the time.

### **The Lacandon Jungle, 1997**

In the south of México, Indian peasants headed by the masked Subcomandante Marcos, coalesce into one of the most important insurgent groups in the country's history.

### **Los Angeles, 2002**

David Alfaro Siqueiro's mural, whitewashed in 1932, remains closed to the public, covered by a rudimentary wooden shell designed to prevent further deterioration.

## Other Programs created by OnRamp Arts are:

### Inter: Re-Active

*Inter: Re-Active* is an innovative media literacy project for high school students emphasizing critical analysis of media images of violence and the creation of a digital response to those images.

Recognizing the impact of electronic games, or "gaming", on youth culture, *Inter: Re-Active* specifically addresses the experience of violence associated with participation in these games (video games in public arcades, games used on individual computers, web-based games, etc.) and requires students to conceptualize, develop and produce alternative games through a process of curriculum-based analysis and hands-on creation of new media.

### Digital Migrant:

**The Digital through the Eyes of the Migrant** is a two year project that will explore the unheard stories of Los Angeles' immigrant community.

#### Project Overview:

Guided by writer and director Juan Devis, a team of film artists (Directors of Photography, Editors, Production Designers, etc) and a group of families from Echo Park and its surrounding areas will gather every week to develop a collaborative feature length digital film that will stream chapter by chapter at

OnRamp's web site and later broadcast in its entirety on public television.

The families involved in the project will work both in front and behind the camera, creatively re-imagining and questioning their lives, as they introduce America to a segment of society that is seldom allowed to speak: the immigrant community.

#### Project Details:

\* Five families will each produce a narrative component within one feature-length film.

\* All instructive and production workshops will be bilingual and free of charge to participants, offering both creative expression as well as media industry skills training.

\*Throughout the year, families will learn every aspect of film and video production: from screenwriting, to acting workshops, to digital video editing.

\*The final film will be showcased in three venues: a international online premiere as streaming chapters from OnRamp's website; a broadcast local TV channels, and a series of community based screenings, targeting activist communities based on thematic subjects within the film.

**Timeline:** October 2002 – October 2004

**Turning From the Millennium** is a multimedia, online project that portrays an urban past through a perceived present and controversial future.

Working with youth participants from Belmont and Manual Arts High Schools in Los Angeles, OnRamp Arts' *Turning from the Millennium* project offers these youth an opportunity to explore a civic issue of high relevance- the past, present and possible future of their own neighborhoods- through new, multimedia technology.

**Open Studio/LA** is the collaborative partnership between **OnRamp, LA Freewaves**, and **Visual Communications**, committed to building an effective training program and a diverse network of information and creativity among Los Angeles arts communities.