Maria Thereza Alves (São Paulo, Brazil) has worked and exhibited internationally since the 1980s, creating a body of work investigating the histories and circumstances of particular localities to give witness to silenced histories. Her projects are research-based and develop out of her interactions with the physical and social environments of the places she lives, or visits for exhibitions and residencies. These projects begin in response to local needs and proceed through a process of dialogue that is often facilitated between material and environmental realities and social circumstances.

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A lake was desiccated in the region of Chalco near Mexico City in the early 20th century. A Spanish immigrant wanted the land underneath the lake to add to his possessions – he would become Mexico’s second richest man. This catastrophic event in 1908 caused the collapse of the region’s commerce and adversely affected the livelihood of 24 indigenous villages and towns. This man-made disaster in Chalco continues to have adverse effects that still plague the region with floods, contaminated water, land subsidence and the resulting destruction to infrastructure, lack of drinking water and most recently earthquakes.

The lake, now known as Lake Tláhuac-Xico (the names of the two communities that make up the area where the lake is returning), is now returning because pluvial waters are being captured by a depression that has formed as a result of land subsidence and the ensuing lowering of the lakebed due to the excessive pumping out of the underground water that is sent to Mexico City.

In 2009, Alves began working with the Museo Comunitario del Valle de Xico (Community Museum of Xico Valley) who requested that this history be made visible.