



# THE RHEA'S FOOTPRINT (OR HOW WE TRANSFORM SILENCES)

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Archivo de la Memoria Trans Argentina, Archivo LGBTIQ Salta, Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, Pancho Casas, Juan van der Hamen y León, Giuseppe Campuzano, Javi Vargas Soto Mayor, Jonas Van Holanda, Las Yeguas Del Apocalipsis (Pedro Lemebel & Pancho Casas) and Gloria Camiruaga, Lukas Avendaño, Sebastián Molina Merajver, Sebastián Calfuqueo, Río Paraná (Mag De Santo & Duen Sacchi)

[LA VIRREINA]  
CENTRE  
DE LA IMATGE

Ajuntament de  
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There is a special thread of continuity between voices, skins and stars that enables us to conjure up this visual essay in exhibition format. An essay formulated, perhaps, in the manner of those who listen to footsteps on the Earth, akin to the practices of healing with plants and to dances of transition and transformation, related to the temporality in which poetry or handicrafts are formed, somewhat outside the classic contemporary discourse on art. We present here a constellation of intuitions, knowledge and practices on the colonial invention of bodies based on the imposition of a hierarchy of skin, sexuality, gender and ethnic identity and the banning of certain individual and community erotic, visual and spiritual practices. We will attempt to attest to the powerful beauty of the invocations against the effects of the colonial trauma and the permanent resistance against it in our bodies. The exhibition *The Rhea's Footprint (Or How We Transform Silences)* enables us to chart a counter-history of the bodies of the constellations of the south, bodies that today we would term transvestite/trans/non-binary\*.

## VIOLENCE

Ensign Erauso recounts a string of events drained of emotion in his memoirs, written in 1626. Against a backdrop of murders and acts of deception, described without remorse or astonishment, he records in every chapter the attack on members of the Mapuche and Quechua peoples, the extreme cruelty with which Francisco Quispiguacha, an Indian leader who converted to Christianity, was treated and the torture he suffered, various fights to the death over cards, the killing of his brother in a duel, and even the eating of horses and cannibalisation of Spanish comrades during a crossing of the Andes. After committing crimes in various places in Argentina, Chile and Peru, Erauso was pursued, cornered and at last captured by the colonial authorities. He confessed that he had been born a woman and had taken on a male persona, reinventing himself during his travels with the army to conquer the New World. 'Being on

Castiel Vitorino, *Pele de pétalas* (Petal Skin), 2017  
Photograph printed on cotton paper

the point of professing, on such an occasion I left; that I went to such a place, stripped, dressed myself, cut my hair, and left there; I embarked, I reached port, I hauled, I killed, I wounded, I corrupted, I debauched till I ended up here and at the feet of your eminent lordship'. As a survival strategy, Erauso asked for benevolence and pointed to his body in his defence: 'Two ladies looked at me and declared [...] they found me to be a virgin [...]. His Illustriousness softened: [...] I revere you as one of the notable people of this world and I promise to help you in all I can'. The violent masculinity of the European colonial arm was celebrated, even in the body of a virgin. Erauso, the son of a well-to-do family from San Sebastián, was rewarded with financial support for life for his exploits in the genocide of the indigenous population and was recognised as ensign by His Majesty and the Council of the Indies. Moreover, his male identity was accepted in the Chapel of St. Peter's by the cardinals, who sealed their gentlemen's pact in Rome.

A contemporary of Erauso's, Heleno Céspedes from Seville, another trans man of the time, suffered a very different fate. There is no record of his journey through life except in documents of the Holy Inquisition, which punished him with public flogging. Whereas Erauso's portrait was painted by Juan van der Hamen y León—and attributed to Francisco Pacheco, the teacher and father-in-law of Velázquez, who, it is said, added a few brushstrokes to the canvas—but there is no such picture of Heleno, who remains faceless. All we have is the knowledge that he had been a freed slave, was of African descent and was guilty of deception. Heleno managed to remove his breasts thanks to his knowledge of medicine, and even though he was a man of peace and a surgeon at the royal court, he was subjected to public ridicule. Accused of having pacted with the devil in 1588, in the reinvention of anomalies through the use of modern science, he was described in his punitive dossier of the nineteenth century in the pathological terms of the time: hermaphroditism.

Even though the only aspect of Erauso's story we can celebrate is the fact that he survived as a trans person, he has

gone down in history, albeit as Catalina, La Monja Alférez (The Ensign Nun), an oxymoronic conflation of the two sole models of Western humanity. Catholic cloistered nuns and the soldiers of the conquest of the Americas, devout internalism and imperial expansion, constitute the terms in which the dispositif of gender gradually became established, with particular virulency in the colonies. The racial variable was extremely detrimental to Céspedes, but the Inquisition went on to double its efforts and implemented a policy to exterminate those who could not be expressly endorsed as meeting the requirements in said social functions.

In 1673, the chronicler Francisco Nuñez de Pineda y Bascañan reports on the presence of a machi weye in what is today Chile: 'Lucifer in his traits, size and dress, [...] weyes, in other words, abominable, vile, for taking on a woman's role'. Hence, Sebastian Calfuqueo writes poetically in his work *You Will Never Be a Weye* (2015) about the impossibility of embodying a community role, that subjective and social space that encompasses political and spiritual roles in a single person, as the machis weyes of Mapuche communities do. In his performance, Calfuqueo not only seeks to reappropriate an identity that has been erased but also, with a certain ironic gesture, through fancy dress and a synthetic wig, reveals the falsity and theatricality with which the role is currently judged and the surveillance and threat generated, even within his Mapuche family, in response to the possibility that he might be a transvestite. Consequently, we could say that the imposition of gender binarism—and with it, sexism—is constituted in and through the self-same Western mechanisms in which white supremacism—or racism—is constituted. In other words, the sexual and racial orders operate in a co-dependent manner to achieve the colonial economic success of the same territories in which Erauso committed his crimes.

López de Gomorra, another chronicler of the Indies, tells in his tales of the encounter with the sister of Chief Torecha dressed in real women's clothing. 'In all but giving birth, she was a woman', accepted and loved by her community. She was

torn from her family and friends and sent to be devoured by mastiffs in the public square in front of her loved ones, marking the start of the exercise in collective disciplining and punishment of anyone who loved, fell in love with, respected or valued colonised trans people. According to Marlene Wayar, it was then that the silence and solitude of transvestites began. This mark of *being* the embodiment, cause and reason of the community's ills has left traces in the present.

The printmaker Theodor de Bry—who never travelled to the southern hemisphere but who constructed the visual imaginary of propaganda about the colony—extolled these systematic hunts among the original peoples. The violence of the Dutchman's image in an *alumbrada*, a niche for the image, is connected with the custom of 'lighting the way for the dead', typical of Santiago del Estero (Argentina), a way of giving a body to the ancestor dragged away without ceremony or burial. The *alumbrada* is evidence that the dead individual has people who maintain him or her in their individual and the collective memory and in the permanent power that links him or her with the living.

A practice similar to maintaining the tie with the living—practices of memory and reparation—is pursued by the aesthetic and political projects of the Archivo de la Memoria Trans Argentina and the Archivo LGBTIQ de Salta, whose holdings contain letters, oral testimony, newspaper clippings and photographs of transvestite and trans survivors taken by their friends and families. These two archives are self-organised and run by their own protagonists and work to preserve and protect the memory of hundreds of people who succeeded in safeguarding handed-down albums of mementos. The people who set up these archives, with absolutely no material support then and now, perform painstaking care and reconstruction work. Guardians and constructors of their collective history of resistance, they devote themselves to conserving these personal instants, fragments of intimate biographies, that are sad, politically incorrect, intense and brief. Born into the fraternal love of their childhood years at first and then passionately



Juan van der Hamen y León, *Portrait of Catalina de Erauso. The Ensign Nun*, c. 1625, oil on canvas, 57 x 46 cm, Kutxa Collection

Archivo de la Memoria Trans, Gina Vivanco Fonds



Archivo de la Memoria Trans, Sandra Castillo Fonds  
 Archivo de la Memoria LGBTIQ de Salta, Marilú Fonds

desired erotically later on, they are placed by an ongoing corrective imposition into male voting lines, compulsory military service and men's prisons. Here, amid the collections of Vanesa Sander, Maria Belen Correa, Luisa Lucía Paz, Rosario 'La Uruguaya', Mary Lu, Mary Robles, Claudia Pía Braudacco, Fátima Rodríguez Lara, Magalí Muñiz, Néstor Humacata (brother of La Pocha), Gabriela Chocobar, Gina Vivanco, La Tajo and Ángeles Cielo Carrasco, we delve into a historical inversion, a sweet revenge, in which the weapons are sexy instruments, while the dogs, to which in the past they were handed over to be devoured by them, have been tied up and lie submissive and drooling at their feet

## THE SPACE

In the distant past, communities saw the footprint of a rhea drawn in the southern sky. The Guaraní gave the name *ñandú guasú* to the galactic ostrich that dwells in the Milky Way; the great river in which Wonlhoj stretches out, say the Wichí; from which the neck of the *suri* emerges, declare the Aymara, Calchaquí and Diaguita. Mapuches and Tehuelche see the *choique*, the *pampáyoj*, appear on the horizon and climb up to the sky. And every night, the Mocoví see the *amanic*, pursued by dogs, travel through the cosmos, the home of swift, powerful birds. "La Ave" (rhea) —*kairena*, *cay*, *pil-ya-pin*, *peú*, *iarwó*, *apacachodi*, *iará*, *juquí*, *sachayoj*<sup>1</sup>—has sex and from its sexual sweat later comes the sowing of the stars.

The relief of Abya Yala, the land of the *black* and *indigenous* diaspora, was demarcated by the colonial eye, a gaze that arrived on its shores from elsewhere. This mapping had a profound impact on its inhabitants' subjective perception of the world. The sky—like the plants, animals, words, spirits

<sup>1</sup>The name of the Rhea americana in various languages of communities identified as the Payaguás, Lules, Tonocotés, Angaités, Abipones, Pilagás, Mbyá Guaraní, Tobas and Vilelas, indigenous African peoples that speak Quechua.

of things and the things themselves—was dispossessed and the Crux was overlaid on the footprint of the sidereal rhea. This imposing of the cross was part of the same civilising venture in which bodies and erotic, spiritual and identity-related practices were wiped out, just as ancient constellations were erased from the sky. We know that *weye*, *muxe*, *bixa*, *guaxu*, *urquchi*, *ciguapa*, *omeguít*, *quewa*, *teví*, *cuña oye mbo cuimba*, *tida wena* and *q'irwsa*, among hundreds of other names, do not correspond to 'transgender', 'transexual', 'lesbian' or 'gay', nor are they a translation of these, and that even local appropriations of insults such as *marica* (fag), *puto* (rent boy) and *travesti* (cross-dresser) go further than the source of the insult itself.

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro takes his surname from the name imposed on his ancestor at the ranches in Brazil. 'Brasileiro' was a name given by colonists to those who performed the task of collecting brazilwood, whose red dye would alter the history of European textiles. The colonial discourse, incapable of imagining a sexuality outside the handbook of practices of the faith and genitality, incapable of appreciating a corporeality beyond the limits of the surface of the skin, established a racial and sexual regime that banished every practice of bodily intervention that linked non-Western cosmogonies with sexual pleasure, especially those connected with the construction of political power, economic independence and knowledge of healing. These prohibitions of communities' many forms of erotic interaction were related to primeval accumulation and to economic, sexual and racial control. In *Corpo-flor* (Body-Flower, 2016), the tale of a name that is heir to colonial botanical and racial classifications, of a body that stretches the limits of matter and the functions of the species itself, proposes the creation of another history of the body, in which another medicine and another ontology are possible. The aesthetics of Macumba enable him to shift—at last—bodily mutation away from the Western myth of 'gender transition': 'My skin is black and fertile, flowers that have never been catalogued grow from it. All my organs are orgasmic. I have an impossible body. A wild body made of blood, nectar and pollen'.

In Peru, Javi Vargas Sotomayor uses his body to reconnect and update two pre-Columbian categories of experience: stars as guides on the governance of community life; and bodies termed 'hermaphrodites' as sacred forces of transformation. In the seventeenth century, the territory of the Viceroyalty of Peru stretched across almost the whole of South America. Juan de Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamaygua, 'priest' of Cerro, tells the story of the birth of Amaro Topoynga (1613): he recounts that on that day all the ferocious animals were removed from Cuzco and the land was sown with stars to welcome the sacred body of Amaro, who was born under the constellation of Chuquichinchay, which protects 'hermaphrodites, Indians of two natures'. *Huaico epidemia* (Huayco Epidemic, 2017) no longer deals with the sacred body of a future leader but with the sexual sacred body, one that is 'dissident, dressed in feathers, in possible peril and engaged in a ritual that lies amid the aftermath of a *huayco*—a mudslide—caused by the effects of the El Niño current and global warming'. In contrast with Amaro, Chuquichinchay here protects the residual body of the neoliberal management of life in an intrinsic relationship with the rise of new diseases and epidemics such as AIDS and today Covid.

In the 1990s, a new phase of the neoliberal model began violently with the emergence of dictatorships made possible by U.S. foreign policy in the seventies in the Caribbean and South America. While the upper and middle classes—whites, creoles and Europeans—embarked on mass consumption in shopping centres and the first private neighbourhoods were created, the dismantling of the rule of law and its labour force—related to the usufruct of the land and industrial material—led to the impoverishment of much of the population already living and working in precarious conditions. In the documentary video *Entrenosotros* (Between Us, 1998) Sebastián Molina Merajver presents one of the stories of the 'Aldea Rosa' (Pink Village) that stretched to the shores of La Plata River, next to the Ciudad Universitaria. While some of the population moved to 'countries', those excluded from the neoliberal citizenry moved

to 'villages'. On the one hand, neoliberalism as a neo-colonial experience led to gentrification, a reordering of the space; and on the other, the gay village became a specific type of shanty town. The gentrification of the urban space led to public policies of burning, dismantling and expulsion. Queers and transvestites, indigenous people and protesters, whores and zhes were left on the street, not included in the mapping desired by the elite of Buenos Aires.

On the other side of the Andes, in Santiago (Chile), the *Open Museum* exhibition opened six months after the end of the dictatorship. *Casa particular* (Private Home, 1989), the video documentary by Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis (Pedro Lemebel and Pancho Casas) in collaboration with Gloria Camiruaga, was censored and removed from the exhibition: a Mapuche transvestite penis burst from the screens and horrified not only the museum space reclaimed for democracy, but also stripped bare the apparatus of neoliberal democracy itself: neoliberal freedom or death. *Casa particular* was filmed in the makeshift brothels on Calle de San Camilo in bloodstained Santiago, there where Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis 'scattered stars along the commercial avenue of the transvestite gender'. The video portrays the communal making of art by this gender: talking, dancing, work, politics, singing and the last supper. The Mapuche Madonna on the transvestite Calle de San Camilo would never get to see the video. She died not knowing the consequences her dancing dick had in relation to cultural policies and the history of art. 'She knew nothing', wrote Lemebel in *La muerte de la Madonna* (Death of the Madonna), 'she was far from all that, sewing her lace miniskirts to dazzle her nameless passer-by'.

Many of the faces that are now part of the documentary holdings of the archives of transvestite and trans memory and that look at us from these walls will have no idea either of the trace of life they leave in museums and on the cultural apparatus. Just like El Dorado for Spaniards, the transvestite community appears and disappears in plain sight. Giuseppe Campuzzano explains that transvestism is a ceremony, a

ritual, a liturgy that reveals the complexity of the colonial process incarnate. Got up as Our Lady of Pains, in a two-fold motion—dressed up as a virgin and as the appearance of the Virgin—the *Virgen de las Guacas* (Our Lady of Las Guacas, 2007) appears for devotion as a virgin and disappears, when 'artisanal surgery' is insufficient, as a transvestite. From time to time, passers-by caught off-guard and newly devout, both worship and abandon St. Transvestite Dolorosa.

In an environment in which people's lifespan is extremely short—thirty-five to forty years in our region—due in the main to murders by clients, lovers and police officers, and the difficulty of gaining access to basic rights—health, education, employment and especially housing—the trans and transvestite women in the archives reveal a lavish and determined search for beauty, an extreme vital urge inversely proportional to the social regime that summons them. A permanent, radical aesthetic search taken to its ultimate consequences. The transvestite-trans fantasy forges weapons of liberation using lipstick and wigs, contours the design of a brilliant reality in the midst of vulnerability.

Images from the holdings of the archives of Memoria Trans Argentina and LGBTIQ in the transvestite settlement of Salta now hang on the walls of what was once the palace of the legitimate wife of a viceroy of Peru. Their dazzling images dwell in a series of proliferations of chakanas, an overdue shelter that does not make up for the endemic lack of a home in trans and transvestite communities in Abya Yala. The chakana, a 'staircase or bridge', is also an astronomical chart and a symbolisation of the main relationships of correspondence and complementarity between life as a community and sexualities; it is the synthesis of philosophical reflection; it is a map, an architectural diagram, a cosmogonic framework, a spiritual guide; it is a home where one can stay; is also, like the rhea's footprint, the constellation of the Crux of the southern sky.

In this retelling of the story of so many comrades through their own eyes—almost all the photographs are the result of a friend's affectionate gaze—we want to pay tribute to Angelita

Carrasco, whose throat was cut by a client; Gina Vivanco, murdered by the police in a civil writ; Mocha Celis, murdered by a sergeant who shot her three times; Claudia Pía Braudacco, an activist involved in the law on gender identity who clicked the shutter of her camera at least 2,000 times, perhaps dreaming of this Archivo de la Memoria Trans; Diana Sacayán, the driving force behind the recently passed “Diana Sacayán - Lohana Berkins” Law to Promote Transvestite and Trans Access to Formal Employment, viciously murdered by her lover; Pocha Escobar, who turned her small home into a shelter for some ten friends; the beautiful Sandra Castillo and Vanesa Sander; the clear-headed co-conspirators of the dungeon and desk Lohana Berkins and Nadia Echazú; the street protester Maite Amaya; the Archivo de La Memoria Trans’ much-loved colleague Carla Pericles; and all the many others no longer among us for unjust reasons. The memory of all these women makes up in part for the absences; a means to engage in collective and retroactive mourning that has so often been prevented. We would also like to express our thanks in particular to the surviving women workers at the Archivo de la Memoria Trans Argentina, especially María Belén Correa, an activist since the 1990s, a pioneer and founder of the first organisation to include the word ‘transvestite’ in its name (Asociación Travestis Argentinas), currently in exile in Germany; Magalí Muñoz, Carola Figueredo, Teté Vega, Carmen Ibarra and Luciano Goldin, and the artists and curators Cecilia Estalles and Cecilia Sauri. In relation to the Archivo de la Memoria LGBTIQ de Salta, to the beloved and legendary Mary Robles, as well as her colleagues, Luis Suárez, Natalia Gil and Pablo Cosso. Also, all the activists, prostitutes, wives, workers in the popular economy, hairdressers, dressmakers, political figures, lawyers and driving forces of the movement, transvestite and trans aged over forty, survivors of this social genocide, who deserve their law of historical reparations by means of a salary for life. All the disappeared young trans men. And Tehuel Torres, for whom we continue to search.

## TIME

The West’s colonial civilising agenda, launched in the sixteenth century, is plain to see in one crucial aspect: the imposition of a single temporality. The Western arrow of time—past, present, future—modulates territorial boundaries, tangible and symbolic capital and the possibilities of existence. This ordering of time marked by a dated event—12 October 1492—has imposed the idea of a time before which there is no time: the time of the disappearance will be infinite; temporality will be a battleground.

The first *ese’ja* community demarcated for protection by the Peruvian central government in the Madre de Dios region of the country is called Infierno (Hell), a name that is a legacy of the European missionaries who described the Amazon as a green hell where infernal beings—Indians and other beasts—thrive. The territorialisation of the past has become one of the most telling means for capturing the coloniality of time. Entire surfaces will be attributed to civilisation’s past, to before it; an eternal present of developmentalist policies and of civilising Christian proselytising will enable the despoliation. In Infierno, the name of total deviance, the territorialisation of the past acquires mythological notes: an outside of all time. This ‘time of the outside’ was to justify the imposition of the missionaries, the massacres associated with rubber and the current ethnocide resulting from the cutthroat illegal extraction of gold in the region. Pancho Casas makes his way along the Madre de Dios River in order to move his body and position it in ‘the past’. *Ese E’ja* (2019) is not a performative act: it is a ritual giving up of transvestism. The itinerary is a rite of passage, of transmutation. Casas’s journey exposes the anthropological snapshot gaze when the camera captures him in the middle of the rainforest transforming himself into this *ese’ja* (people).

Lukas Avendaño talks about his *muxeidad* (the fact that he was assigned male at birth but dresses and behaves in ways associated with women), explaining that it is possible in a social

and cultural context that supports his existence. In this respect, he declares that he cannot be banished from his body-territory-memory. The forced disappearance of his brother, Bruno Avendaño, in 2018, had a profound impact by shattering these connections. With the photo of his brother displayed on his bare chest, dressed in mourning, he begins to search for Bruno and to ask for his appearance. The pattern of forced disappearance in Abya Yala has a tangible history: the enslavement and capture of indigenous peoples—African and American—for the purpose of forced labour, of course, but also the theft and plundering of ceremonial, household and artistic objects and their accumulation for colonial capital, materialised in casting in the case of precious metals and stockpiling in museums of anthropology, among other acts of looting. At the same time, materials have been degraded, as have practices, and this has been imposed on bodies: labour, utility or waste. Extermination maintains an unavowable tie with the concept of a time without a rite or a body present: that of disappearance. In *Justicia por Bruno* (Justice for Bruno, 2019–2020), Lukas sits, dressed in the traditional mourning clothes worn by Zapotec women in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and offers his hand to anyone who decides to support him in his quest: to establish a link to discover the whereabouts of his brother Bruno, an act of clairvoyance, of healing. The empty chair beside him enables every body to take the place of the body that is missing. To sit in the empty chair is to share not only in the search and collective mourning, but also the possibility of disappearance.

The establishment of a brief time to allow us to reveal our bodies in all their erotic and political complexity came about as a result of the subjugation of bodies for the purpose of forced labour. A delimited time and space that culminate in obedience to the Lord, in a reminder of the introduction of His time. The colony and its spiritual practice of univocal and monotheistic Christian proselytising created a time in which indigenous peoples, people of African descent, impure half-breeds and transvestites of a thousand genders were able to go out onto the

street with our ceremonial bodies: carnival. Carnival, the time of the colonist, a brief period lasting just a few days in which, in orderly fashion and in the epitome of disguise, we can walk about with our sexes open to the cosmos, our eyes turned to our feet, when to dance is to name and to laugh is to walk. In this sense, carnival is a space regulated, compressed and constrained by colonial evangelising, firstly, and then by the state, during which it is possible to embody, and also to instigate, everything that goes beyond the order established by the coloniality of power, knowledge and gender. It is a limited time during which the public presence of forbidden knowledge is possible. This is why the holdings of the archives of transvestite and trans memory are crammed with transvestites in feathers. ‘La Pocha’, a transvestite healer and the creator of ‘The Gentlemen of the Night’ troupe at the height of the dictatorship, when even the contradictory freedom of the brief interval of time of carnival was extinguished, brings the time of her ancestors to her little house of transvestites when she sews plastic garlands in the way that she had learned from the exquisite feather art of Yungas, where she was born. Featherwork is one of the most original practices yet also one of the most persecuted in both Abya Yala and Africa since colonisation began. Bodies dressed in feathers defy not only the Western dimorphic construct of the body, but other types of exclusions: human-animal, identity-multiplicity and especially monotheism-spiritual practices of ‘idolatry’ and bodily practices of ‘sodomy’. The feathered body of the rhea, its status as a sacred animal, constellation, shelter, footprint and route, marks the path of the importance of the ancient artistic practices consigned to the past and transformed into anthropological objects, just as the transvestite body in feathers makes a dramatic appearance during carnival, and other spaces taken for collective healing against planned disappearance are made to reverberate by it.

During carnival time, the earth is kneaded by feet to the sound of the acoustic box, drums and chanting; transvestites are desired and publicly praised, and the devil, it is said, has

been exhumed and walks the Earth. The devil, the sign of every monstrosity and all deviance, is invoked by Jonas Van Holanda to put a spell using the word on the deadly silence inflicted on bodies in the southern hemisphere in the name of God. The devil will be a present continuous in the bodies and thoughts of the process of proselytisation. *Innombrable* (Unnameable, 2017) is the language of the beast that mutates, confuses, changes its dress, that deceives with voices. It is the mouth that opens, pregnant with stars, and which talks in tongues to bury—once and for all—the monolingualism of the colonist, and to usher in, in the present, the failure of bodily coloniality.

Gregório de Matos e Guerra talks in his poem 'Preceito I', written in the seventeenth century, of *quilombos*, settlements in the Brazilian hinterland, where thousands of men and women went to receive *calundus* and *feitiços*. There they sought happiness, and the devil joined in their dancing. *Quilombos*, communal spaces of resistance put up by communities of the forced diaspora and of indigenous African descendants in Abya Yala, were home to religious practices such as *calundus*, which served a therapeutic public function of healing. These spaces came to characterised by their creation of a time of their own, the time that preceded colonial time: codices of movement, linguistic pluralism, spiritual transition, bodily healing and invocation were to restore lost multitemporality. In *Sagrado femenino de mierda* (Sacred Feminine of Shit, 2019), Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, a Macumba practitioner and a psychologist, draws on her black female body with testicles signs that invoke healing as the continuous movement of vital transformation and as an *exusiática* experience: trance and incorporation as a break with the colonial space-time control of race and gender.

## THE ORIGIN

The practice of giving testimony operates as a legal, police, journalistic, scientific, academic and artistic tool related to



Lukas Avendaño, *Justicia para Bruno* (Justice for Bruno), documentary video, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2021



Río Paraná, *Mil sucesos perdidos hasta ahora*  
(A Thousand Events Missed So Far),  
video-installation, 2021

the historical legacy of the Catholic and pastoral faith. In the mid-nineteenth century, it became one of the principal mechanisms for constructing Western knowledge and for ensuring an order of truth. To attest, in person in one's own voice, to a subjective point of view of individual experience is to pass sentence on an asymmetry of power perpetrated in a familiar paradox. Poor criminals, the mentally ill, homosexuals, hermaphrodites, indigenous people, migrants, blacks, women, trans people and relatives of the disappeared sit on the historical bench of what is remarkable, unique, anomalous: case or quota. A cynical inversion to which we have become accustomed: real majorities transform into legal minorities. The elite conceals its minority status by setting itself up as universal. Meanwhile, the real majorities continue to be held down, caught in mechanisms of invisibility. The subject of the testifying, curiosity or research becomes a stranger to itself and, through a personal account, the genealogical inscription of an enormous movement to which it belongs being blocked, the somatic order—the body, skin and corporeal dimensions—functions as the source, the ultimate substrate of legitimacy and confirmation of the truth of the matter. In the testimony, the personal body must, by metalepsis, demonstrate the existence of an ignored community. Its mere bodily existence being attested to, the collective route returns to square one.

In the transvestite and trans subjectivity, dreams take material form early on, argues Lohana Berkins, and Cartesian boundaries lose their solidity. The fantasy imaginary becomes the mainstay of subjectivity. This marvellous and sophisticated imagery that gives life, this poetic machine in itself, a transvestite or trans existence, was labelled by normalist doctors of the nineteenth century as 'cases of wild hallucination' and even today in Spain trans\* identities—and elsewhere around the world—are pathologised and subjected to veritable examinations. The power of the imagination, however, ensures safe passage; it is the scaffolding of an ego split and reconstructed. Fantasies provide success, brio and a love denied. The strength

of illusions, fetishes and talismans produces what reality can never supply. Viewed in this light, the fantastical lie is an escape from loneliness, the first refuge of the possible, the only place one can go: ways of avoiding the cruelty of the repeated wound on wound.

As the artistic team, and curators, of this exhibition, we in Río Paraná call on trans artists and activists from different diasporic genealogies in Abya Ayala to perform, at the height of the health crisis, an operation in relation to the demands of testimony. In unconnected, animist, egocentric terms, *A Thousand Events Missed So Far* invites us to create origin myths. We hope that by equipping ourselves with our own creation fantasies and giving free rein to them, they will expose the fictitious nature of all origins and in particular of the most legitimate. *A Thousand Events Missed So Far* is the outcome of a partnership between eight friends. With Carla and Mar Morales Ríos, Tito Mitjan Alayón, Poll Andrews, Noche Nacha, Lia Sirena and Say Sacayán, we ask ourselves: who can formulate linear and transparent narratives about themselves? Who accesses personal archives to narrate themselves? Who can abandon the ongoing search for their past? What are the fantasies that sustain us? If in the beginning there was no word and no copy, as poststructuralism states, what was there? *A Thousand Events Missed So Far* weaves, amid soft almost inaudible, contradictory whispers totally outside the normal course of occurrences, stories of devotion, family gossip, childhood revelations, testimony that runs counter to that which we tell ourselves to explain to ourselves in private: how did I come to be what I am?

Río Paraná

Curators: Río Paraná  
(Mag De Santo & Duen Sacchi)

La Virreina Centre de la Imatge  
Palau de la Virreina  
La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday  
and public holidays, 11 am to 8 pm  
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#petjadanyandú  
@riooo\_paranaaa  
@lavrreinaci  
barcelona.cat/lavirreina