



Adrià Julià

CONQUEST OF THE USELESS

15.10.2021 – 16.01.2022

This first retrospective of the work of Adrià Julià (Barcelona, 1974) offers a selection of projects carried out from 2006 to the present. Some of the themes investigated are the technological and social history of cinema and photography, the relations between utopian thought, architecture and colonialism and the links between machines and bodies, material exploitation and violence.

[LA VIRREINA]
CENTRE
DE LA IMATGE

Ajuntament de
Barcelona





Conquest of the Useless, which takes its title from Werner Herzog's book of the same name, is the first retrospective exhibition of Adrià Julià (Barcelona, 1974). It presents a selection of projects carried out from 2006 to the present.

Julià's works trigger very arduous processes of research into the historical, political and scientific regimes under which the successive cultures of the image developed. Based on an experimental understanding of the document close to that of the avant-garde filmmakers or their forerunners in optical engineering, his works adopt languages ranging from photography to performance, from expanded cinema to installations, and they invoke an equal variety of keys for understanding them. Julià operates with procedures analogous to those of the micro-historical tradition, as he rescues aspects that are sometimes anecdotal or neglected by the prevailing accounts and that he uses to address the contextual specificities through which he carries out each project.

Notes on the Missing Oh (2009–2015), a set of pieces about the trivialization and spectacularization of war; *Cat on the Shoulder* (2013–ongoing), on the links between machine, device and body; and *Ruinas da Fala* (2009–2011), in which Julià reviews the experience of the Fourierist phalansteries in Brazil during the 19th century, are a few examples that show his explorations on what we could call a technological archaeology of the production, distribution and consumption of images.

From another perspective, a possible thematic structure for this exhibition is offered by the symbolic and ideological use of architecture in the proposals *Truc Trang Walls* (2006) and, above all, *We Used to Talk About Objects as Found* (2010); the conflictive relations between central-European utopianism and colonization in *Marcus Spring Cottage* (2008); violence as an iconoclastic gesture in *Marginalia I – XI* (2017);

a reflection of an agonistic masculinity in *Hot Iron Marginalia (HELMETCAM)* (2017); and the prolongation and translation of imperialism through the Hollywood entertainment industry in *A Very White Flower* (2019). In these works, Julià analyses the potential of things that are misunderstood, fragmentary, unsuccessful and lacking in normative utility (the useless referred to in the exhibition's title), which express the dimensions, beauty and scope of certain endeavours.

Finally, the exhibition includes two projects conceived for La Virreina Center de la Imatge: the piece *Exercise for an Overexposed Landscape (# 3)* (2021); and *America's Sweethearts* (2021), in collaboration with the Centre d'Art La Panera in Lleida, a work on the closure of cinemas during the pandemic that recovers the paving of one of these establishments. The performances *The Penitential Tyrant: Dolores Is Pain* (2019) and *The Captain, the Girl and Politics as Applied to Appetite* (2010) are also presented weekly, at different times.

ROOM 1

Negative Inchon (Sequences)

-FUJI

From the series *Notes on the Missing Oh*, 2015

RA-4 chromogenic prints.

Unique prints

76.4 x 101.5 cm - 6 units

Negative Inchon (Sequences)

-KODAK

From the series *Notes on the Missing Oh*, 2015

RA-4 chromogenic prints.

Unique prints

Various sizes

Negative Inchon (Sequences) is a series of photographs made by directly projecting a 16 mm film as a negative onto analogue photographic papers. Julià made a 16 mm film of a YouTube video of the forgotten film *Inchon* (1981) and used the film as a negative. The expired paper—some Fuji and some Kodak—highlights the unsuccessful effort to capture motion in the film with the motion picture camera. The result of all this is a collection of imprecise images that appear nostalgic but are on the brink of being erased, travelling through different media, from their original source to their mass consumption.

Notes on the Missing Oh: The Score, 2011

Film projection, 16 mm, colour,
silent, 4'33"loop; light box, laser
prints, notation by hand on paper
Variable dimensions

Notes on the Missing Oh: The Score proposes a musical adaptation of the script of the film *Inchon* by We Break Cameras, an experimental rock band from Los Angeles, after an arrangement by Débora Antscherl. Paradoxically, the sound has been eliminated, so the actions of the members of the band while they play, their gestures, their use of their instruments and the noise of the projector supplant what should be an exercise in sonic translation but remains inaudible.

The two works are part of *Notes on the Missing Oh*, a project that Julià started in 2009 after finding some film reels in a warehouse in Los Angeles. They were the original reels of *Inchon* (1981), a Terence Young big-budget, star-studded film that is nevertheless considered one of the great fiascos of the Hollywood industry. Julià used the discovery of the reels and their state of deterioration and abandonment to investigate the production, distribution and circulation of images and the ways in which mass media culture turns war into a spectacle.

The project was first presented at Insa Art Space in Seoul in 2009, at the Seoul Museum of Art in 2010 and at the Project Art Centre in Dublin in 2011.

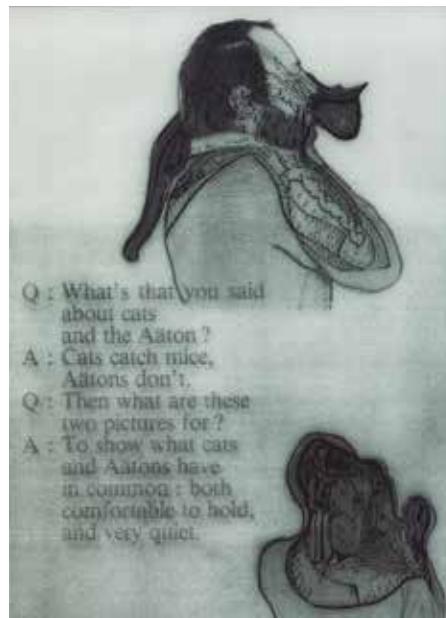
ROOM 2

Marcus Spring Cottage, 2008
Installation. Film projection,
16 mm, b&w, silent, 3'loop;
DIN A4 cut paper; tripod;
clips; painting on wall
Variable dimensions
Museo Nacional Centro de
Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

*Colts Neck Township Residents
Look Over the Wreckage of
the 123-Year-Old Phalanx
House which was Burned
Yesterday Morning*, 2009
Ink print on paper
28 x 35.5 cm

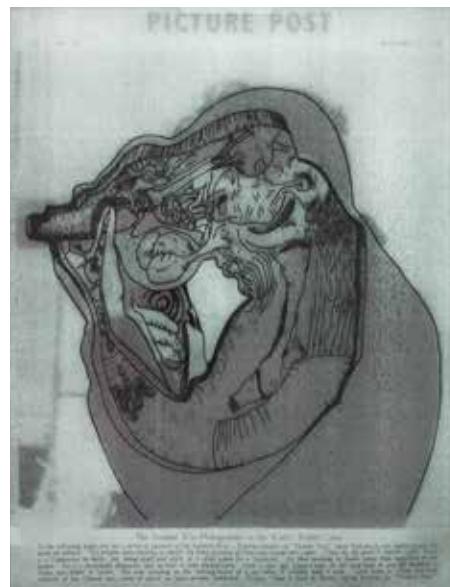
A Piece of History, 2009
Ink print on paper
28 x 35.5 cm

This work investigates the architectural project of the North American Phalanx (1843-1856), one of the first and most important phalansteries that were founded in the United States during the 19th century under the cooperative and utopian precepts of Charles Fourier. Julià analyses with precision the history and the consequences of these utopian architectures and texts by plotting out a route in the American landscape through the remaining ruins.



Camera Self-Portrait IV (Ääton 7A-Cat on the Shoulder), 2014

Camera Self-Portrait II (Eyemo-Capa), 2014





Marcus Spring Cottage, 2008

Se oye el pasar de las páginas durante las próximas líneas, 2009



This film installation is based on Marcus Spring's summer house. Spring was a Brooklyn merchant who supported the phalanstery but he never resided there permanently. In this work, a single image of the house is dissociated from the landscape surrounding it.

Two documentary reproductions complete the installation: one is of the photograph published by the Monmouth County newspaper after the phalanstery burnt down in 1972 and the other the leaflet announcing the sale of Marcus Spring's house in 1984, from which the promotional image has been removed. The title of this work, *A Piece of History*, comes from the sales blurb used by the real estate agent.

ROOMS 2 and 3

Se oye el pasar de las páginas durante las próximas líneas
(Hear the Turning of the Pages through the Next Lines),
2009

El brazo de _____ aparece por la derecha y le enseña algo en el libro al Capitán
(An Arm Belonging to _____ Appears Stage Right to Show the Captain Something in the Book), 2009

A la vez que equilibra entre los labios lo que ya es mitad cigarrillo mitad ceniza
(At the Same Time He Balances between His Lips What Is Already Half Cigarette, Half Ash), 2009

De repente, en lo que parece plena frase, inicio el paso otra vez hacia el público
(Suddenly, in What seems Like Mid-Sentence, I Start Walking towards the Audience Again), 2009

Con las manos en los bolsillos y más peso sobre una pierna que la otra, miro directamente al público tres segundos
(With My Hands in My Pockets and Putting More Weight on One Leg Than the Other, I Look Directly at the Audience for Three Seconds), 2009

*Me dirijo al Capitán. Tropiezo pero no me repongo con un salto.
No se oye nada
(I Head Towards the Captain.
I Stumble but I Can't Recover
by Jumping. Nothing
Can Be Heard), 2009*

6 gelatin silver prints
39 x 54 cm

These six photographs are part of the project *Ruinas da Fala* (2009-2011) which, together with *La Reunión* (2008) and *Marcus Spring Cottage* (2008), investigates the unsuccessful experiences of Fourierist communities on the American continent. Julià draws on the experience of the Saí Phalanstery (1841-1844) in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil. The images taken in the area where the phalanstery was located show a solitary maritime landscape with the Serra Geral foothills in the background. In the foreground, concrete structures appear as architectural foundations. It is not known whether they announce the imminent construction of a group of dwellings or perhaps the ruins of another speculative scheme. These photographs accompany the performance *The Captain, the Girl and Politics as Applied to Appetite* (2010), presented for the first time at the Soledad Lorenzo Gallery in Madrid in 2010. The script of the performance is a translation and adaptation of a fragment of Julià's film *Ruinas da Fala* (2009) which was initially exhibited at the 7th Mercosur Biennial, Porto Alegre (2009).

*El capitán, la niña y la política
aplicada al apetito
(The Captain, the Girl
and Politics as Applied
to Appetite), 2010*
Performance

ROOM 3

Truc Trang Walls, 2006
Single-channel video
installation. Projection of
16 mm film transferred
to video, colour, sound, 14' loop
Variable dimensions

Untitled
From the series *Truc Trang
Walls*, 2006
RA-4 chromogenic-print
4 u. (140 x 178 cm)

Truc Trang Walls records the process of building a “family monument”, a dwelling in a village in Vietnam. During the film we see bricklayers, dancers, neighbours and governors, as well as the film crew. They generate situations with no other script than their own theatrical but genuine behaviours. The half-built walls are transformed into a performative stage where the roles are mixed and confused.

A selection of photographs of a display case full of objects is exhibited along with the film. Thanks to a digital montage using superposition or collage, each object is shown sharply in focus. Both the objects and the house belong to Khoai Phan who, at the end of the war with the United States, fled Vietnam and settled with his family on the outskirts of Long Beach, California. Thirty years later, when Vietnam began to open up, Phan returned to his home town. There he built a house in the same architectural style as the Southern California homes in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

Theatre of Eclipse, 2006
Offset print, unlimited copies
27 x 47 x 86 cm

The poster *Theatre of Eclipse* shows images created during the investigation together with a text by the professor and essayist Juli Carson. The publication has been reproduced and is translated into the local languages each time the project is exhibited.

Truc Trang Walls was first presented in 2006 at the Room Gallery of the University of California, Irvine, near the largest community of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States and the American home of Khoai Phan.

ROOM 4

We Used to Talk About Objects

as Found, 2010

Single-channel video
installation, colour, sound,
22'28" loop
Variable dimensions

In *We Used to Talk About Objects as Found*, the mythical drag queen and performer Kevin Aviance performs improvisation sessions from a film script found in the archives of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts on the Robin Hood Gardens social housing project (1969-1972) by the architects Alison and Peter Smithson.

Aviance enacts the discussions, positions and ideas that generated this residential complex in Poplar, East London, playing the roles of both architects. A video recording of these improvised sessions was made at a time when the Tower Hamlets district had announced a redevelopment plan involving the demolition of the Robin Hood Gardens.

We Used to Talk About Objects as Found was originally presented in 2010 as a twelve-screen installation in the main hall of the former headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects in London.

Marginalia I - XI, 2017

11 sgraffito glass panels
170 x 95.6 x 1.5 cm each
Variable dimensions

Marginalia I - XI investigates the commercialization, exploitation and museumization of the Catalan Romanesque artistic heritage in American public and private collections. The eleven glass panels that make up the series copy the graffiti found on various Romanesque paintings belonging to the National Museum of Art of Catalonia (MNAC). These "interventions" carved on Romanesque murals are considered vandalism and form part of a parallel and marginal narrative that is difficult to study and date. By setting the graffiti in glass, isolated from the images they were intended to destroy, these iconoclastic gestures take on a very different dimension and acquire stylistic values susceptible to purely aesthetic contemplation.

The series is part of the proposal *Hot Iron Marginalia*, which was presented in 2017 in Tabakalera International Centre for Contemporary Culture in Donostia-San Sebastián and was opened that same year in Espai 13 of the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona.

ROOM 5

Hot Iron Marginalia

(HELMETCAM), 2017

Single-channel video
installation, colour, sound, 3'30"
loop, 4:3

Hot Iron Marginalia (HELMETCAM) uses material collected by Helmet Cams, which were introduced in American football in 1991, though they were quickly withdrawn because they produced extremely violent images. The hyper-subjective first-person viewpoint, in which the player is beaten and attacked while moving across the field, generates a testosterone visual file over which Julià superimposes a female voice reading fragments of *L'impossible* (1962) by George Bataille, a book that explores the limits of desire and eroticism and the death drive. The union between the stories told by the images and the

text recodes them both, producing semantic short-circuits surrounding the exacerbated masculinity of the athletes and the lyricism of the philosophical discourse.

Handheld Line and the Recording Finger, 2013

Film projection, 16 mm, b&w,
silent, 2'52" loop

There are two distinct sections to this film. The first is a sequence in which lines of light repeatedly move, vibrate and overlap on the same piece of film. Their movement corresponds to the body holding the camera recording them. The second section uses a mirror to record the last moment before the filming stops. The camera held in one hand records its reflection as in a self-portrait, and after a few seconds the hand raises a finger and the screen fades to black. This sequence occurs over and over.

Handheld Line and the Recording Finger is part of the investigation *Cat on the Shoulder* (2013 – in progress).

12 Tracks

From the series *Love. Destiny. Heroes*,
2013

Installation. 12 unique gelatin
silver prints; cut vinyl text
Variable sizes

This work translates into images the 12 musical themes of *Inchon* (1981). The analogue enlargement of each photograph is made of a translucent cast of the vinyl record of the film's soundtrack and corresponds to one of its twelve musical themes. The images are accompanied by the titles that "identify" the twelve tracks, as well as their duration.

This work is part of the project *Notes on the Missing Oh* (2009-2015).

ROOM 6

A Very White Flower, 2019

Wallpaper

375 x 739 cm

Stage and props for the performance *The Penitential Tyrant: Dolores Is Pain* (2019). The mural is the result of extensive research into industrial popcorn production and its links to the history and industry of Hollywood. It also presents images of the explosion of corn in the process of becoming popcorn, created with the same technology used to record the explosions of nuclear bombs in tests carried out in the New Mexico desert.

The work takes its title from a description that appeared in the *Florentine Codex* (1499–1590) by Bernardino Sahagún, a Franciscan missionary who, in Spanish and Nahuatl, narrated the life of the original inhabitants of Mexico before the Spanish colonization. Sahagún refers to some indigenous ornaments made with popcorn, which he describes as "a very white flower".

The Penitential Tyrant: Dolores

Is Pain, 2019

Performance

The three acts that make up this performance based on texts by Débora Antscherl and Adrià Julià feature the same actor, who in each act plays characters inspired by the work of the English romantic poet John Keats, the life of the Mexican actress Dolores del Río among the collection of indigenous Mesoamerican art belonging to horror film actor Vincent Price, and an interview with Berlyn Brixner (camera operator and head photographer for the Manhattan Project's Trinity Test), respectively.

The Penitential Tyrant: Dolores Is Pain was first presented at the Los Angeles State Historic Park in October 2019.

Film Script for Square Without Mercy, 2014
32 pétanque balls, plastic box
Variable dimensions

This work proposes the game of pétanque with thirty-two balls as a film script. The players or actors construct new sentences within the rectangular game space or the rectangle of the image.

The thirty-two pétanque balls were made at La Boule Blue, one of the oldest factories in Marseille, and were discarded as defective. They are inscribed with fragments of Siegfried Kracauer's essay *Two Planes* from 1922, in which he speaks of the "square without mercy", the same square that Walter Benjamin also described years later.

This work is part of the project *As if the Sea Indeed Was a Bottomless Reservoir of Well Preserved Anachronisms*, presented in 2014 at La Friche la Belle de Mai and the American Gallery of Contemporary Art, both in Marseille.

ROOM 7

Ruinas da Fala
(Ruins of Speech), 2009
Installation. Film projection,
16 mm, b&w, silent, 6'loop
Variable dimensions

Ruinas da Fala is a film made from the material discarded from a research project by the Department of Biology of the University of Joinville in Brazil, which aimed to document animal species considered non-native using still cameras activated by motion sensors. This region, located in the north of the state of Santa Catarina, in southern Brazil, was where the first Brazilian phalansteries were located in the mid-19th century.

This work was part of the eponymous installation that was presented for the first time at the 7th Mercosur Biennial in Porto Alegre.



Untitled. From the series *Truc Trang Walls*, 2006

We Used to Talk About Objects as Found, 2010





Ejercicio para un paisaje sobreexpuesto (# 2), 2019

Museu do Dinheiro
(Museum of Money), 2020
Giclée print
100 x 100 cm

Photograph taken in the Museum of Money of the Bank of Portugal in Lisbon. The image reproduces the former vault, where visitors are invited to touch a bar of gold obtained from Brazilian mines.

*Epiphanie medicorum. Speculum
videndi urinas hominum.
Clavis aperiendi portas pulsuum.
Berillus discernendi causas
& differentias febrium.
(Physicians' Epiphany.
A Looking Glass for Man's*

Urine. Key to Open the
Pulse Gates. Beryl for
Discerning the Causes
and Differences in Fever),
2020
Giclée print
100 x 100 cm

This photograph takes its title from the eponymous book published in 1506 by the German physician, publisher, and printer Ulrich Pinder. In it we see one of the book's illustrations, a table of diseases typified by the colour of urine. The chromatic and even etymological relationships between gold and rust, between monetary frenzy and clinical pathology, link the two pieces of this diptych.

ROOM 8

*Ejercicio para un paisaje
sobreexpuesto (# 3)
(Exercise for an Overexposed
Landscape (# 3)), 2021*

Gold emulsion and urine
photogram on paper mounted
on cylinders and metal frame,
rotating motor at one complete
cycle every 24 hours
330 x 171 x 80 cm

This large-format photograph was made using gold and urine, an unsuccessful photographic process conceived by Hercule Florence, one of the precursors of photography, in the mid-19th century, when he was living in Brazil. The photograph is a reproduction of the drawing that the sculptor Carles Grau created in 1775 to decorate the dining room of the Palau de la Virreina in the Rococo Empire style.

An earlier version of the same work was presented in 2019 at the Pinacoteca de São Paulo.

CORRIDORS

America's Sweethearts, 2021

Mixed media

Variable dimensions

America's Sweethearts explores the recent phenomenon of cinema closures after the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The title comes from the 2001 romantic comedy *America's Sweethearts* directed by Joe Roth, which featured some of Hollywood's top stars.

The work consists of a museographically subtle action but is the result of highly complex research and production processes. The artist removed various parts of the carpet covering the floor of a disused cinema and used them to cover some areas of paving of La Virreina Centre de la Imatge. Julià's recovery of this element and the new use that he gives it transform the work into an exercise in archaeology, a restorative gesture and, ultimately, a metaphor—or, rather a metonym—of where industrialized leisure activities are heading. However, when the carpet is placed in the museum with its traces of dirt reflecting a lack of respect for hygiene and social protocols, it clashes with a space that is subject to closely respected norms, triggering the temptation to differentiate high and low culture, audiences and consumers, sophistication and barbarism.

Camera Self-Portrait I
(*Scoopic*), 2014

Camera Self-Portrait II
(*Eyemo-Capa*), 2014

Camera Self-Portrait III
(*Aaton 7A-Beauviala*), 2014

Camera Self-Portrait IV
(*Aaton 7A-Cat on the Shoulder*),
2014

Camera Self-Portrait V
(*Éclair Cameflex-Fred Halsted*), 2014

Camera Self-Portrait VI
(*Bolex-Maya Deren*), 2014

6 lenticular prints
29.7 x 21 cm each

This series of lenticular portraits, which combines anatomical drawings with images that refer to avant-garde filmmakers, photographers, optical engineers and recording material, explores how technological innovations that were made in the field of photography and cinema transformed social, political and cultural systems.

These works are part of a broader investigation that was initiated in 2013 under the title *Cat on the Shoulder*, the principle—and the slogan—according to which the first 16 mm cameras were manufactured by the French company Aaton, which was founded in 1971 by the engineer and inventor Jean-Pierre Beauviala, Jacques Lecoeur and François Weulersse. One of the revolutionary features of these devices was the ergonomic design that shifted the centre of gravity to allow the camera to rest on the shoulder for comfortable filming.

Melted Camera, 2013

Mixed media

10 x 9 x 9 cm

After being subjected to high temperatures, the Bell & Howell 71 Eyemo 35 mm cinematographic camera is converted into

a block of solidified components. This iconic camera, which was used by reporters from the Spanish Civil War to the Vietnam War, becomes a kind of votive or technological relic.

Cover: *Ruinas da Fala*, 2009
 Inside cover: *A Very White Flower*, 2019



Curator: Valentín Roma

Performance sessions:

The Captain, the Girl and Politics as Applied to Appetite (2010)
Tuesdays at 7 p.m.

The Penitential Tyrant: Dolores Is Pain (2019)
Thursdays at 7 p.m.

Please confirm the times on the website of
La Virreina Centre de la Imatge

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Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday
and public holidays, 11 am to 8 pm
Free entry



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