

Denial and utopia. 1st National Performance Art Show

Denial: in Freudian psychoanalytical theory denial stands for inconsistent strategies, which are being put into place in order to face an unpleasant reality while allowing the person to maintain their self-image.

Utopia: concept of an idealized world that presents itself as an alternative to the real existing world, while being critical of it.

When I travelled to Mexico for the first time this summer, following an invitation to curate this show, it was with a mix of fear and curiosity. Fear because of the atrocities I had heard about Mexico on European news, curiosity because of the large history and the countless cultural achievements of the country. Upon my arrival in Mexico City, one of the first things I noticed was that hardly anybody talked about the violence I had heard so much about in Europe. Instead, everybody I met warned me urgently not to drink the local tap water. The thought that, from a Mexican point of view, drinking tap water was the most dangerous thing a European could do in Mexico, while Europeans feared a whole range of entirely different things travelling to Mexico, amused me.

But during the research for this show, I caught myself wondering about it this seemingly unimportant detail again and again. Finally, I came to the conclusion, that apart from a distorted presentation of Mexico in European media, a certain amount of denial seemed to be taking place in Mexican society in order for people to get on with their daily lives. Simultaneously, I registered an impressive amount of utopian thinking, like the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, the teachers strike in Oaxaca, or the union and indigenous protest marches that are regularly blocking traffic on the big avenues of Mexico City. Based on these observations, I decided to name the 1st edition of this *National Performance Art Show* at Ex Teresa Arte Actual *Denial and Utopia*, a name that is referring to these two diametrically opposed mindsets occurring in present Mexican society.

Regarding the development of this show, former director Carlos Jaurena presented me with one basic rule: he asked me to only invite *mexican born artists who are living in Mexico*, an idea I felt ambivalent about. One reason for my ambivalence was that many talented Mexican artists chose to live outside of Mexico, another reason was that many talented artists from all over Latin America are currently living in Mexico. I didn't really understand why they shouldn't be part of the show. After analyzing the situation, I decided to accept Carlos Jaurena's rule, but to turn the idea around and ask a selected number of artists to create original performances that were *dealing with the essence of Mexican identity from a critical point of view: those stories and feelings that are continuously censored, deformed, ridiculed, sensationalized or omitted in the mainstream media. But also those ideas, which can be envisioned for a brighter future of this country.* These premises might explain to some extent why a number of very interesting artists, who are living in Mexico, but who don't happen to be "Mexican" – to find out whatever that means exactly, is one of the goals of this show – are not part of this show.

In addition to this rule, two ideas were crucial in the development of this show: firstly, one of the *National Performance Art Show's* goals is to present artists from various Mexican provinces. While the *International Performance Festival* at Ex Teresa features only a small number of Mexican artists, who are usually living in the nation's capital, the *National Performance Art Show* seeks to explore the diversity of cultural representations in other provinces. Obviously, the experience of being Mexican in Tijuana, Querétaro or Oaxaca can be quite a different one than living in DF, but just as intricate, or even more so.

In order to represent the hugely varying experiences in Mexican society, the second aim of this show was to feature a selection of young artists and mid-career artists, side-by-side with internationally established names, which hopefully will also inspire a cross-generational dialogue between the participating artists.

With these two main goals in mind, I set out to select a "balanced" representation of cultural protagonists and to show a wider range of the historically and culturally complex Mexican society. Like in many other countries, the representation of performance art in Mexico is white and male dominated. Realizing this bias, I decided to put an emphasis on showing artists of various genders, who are habitually underrepresented in public art institutions, even though they are producing outstanding and socially significant art - art, in other words, that has much to offer on a national and international level.

In order to showcase each artist with the attention they deserve and to give the audience the option of a real involvement with each work, rather than just consuming it like free entertainment, another decision was to present only one artist each night. Additionally, there will be a live streaming of each performance, which means all performances can be followed live over the internet, all around the globe. The streaming will hopefully also generate a heightened international interest in Mexican performance art.

This having been said, I would like to cordially invite you to participate in this unique opportunity to interact with some of the finest contemporary performance artists in Mexico and to make the *1st National Performance Art Show* the starting point of a larger, necessary collective discussion. In order to stimulate this communal dialogue, there will also be an artist led Q&A roundtable discussion after each performance where you will have the opportunity to find out more about their ideas and motivations.

Participating artists are: Jesusa Rodríguez, Mónica Mayer, Gustavo Alvarez, Violeta Luna, Lechedevirgen Trimegisto, Sayak Valencia, Petrona de la Cruz, Anúk Guerrero, Lukas Avendaño, Claudia Algara, Santo Miguelito, La Bala Damiana Cactaceae.

Daniela Wüstenberg

Curator

SHORT BIO DANIELA:

Daniela Wüstenberg is an independent curator, currently based in London, UK, where she is pursuing an MFA in Curating from Goldsmiths College. Her work focuses on Latin American performance art and socially conscious multi media projects from all over the world. She is a fellow of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin.
