

Domino effect

An insightful overview of Adriana Lara's practice

by SARINA BASTA

Adriana Lara's work unfolds an eternal, diachronic present in which concepts and positions constantly echo and redefine each other. The artist experiments with continuous surfaces in fluid, surprising ways.

If it is easier to see the parts than the whole of Lara's work; she is particularly difficult to pigeonhole. The years 2002-2003 saw the Mexican artist's emergence in the international art scene following a residency at the Palais de Tokyo. Around those years she also made music under the name Lasser Moderna with Emilio Acevedo, and she produced a hit that reached the top of the charts in Mexico. She continues to curate exhibitions under the collective Perros Negros (recently at New Jersey in Basel) and to edit the journal *PAZMAKER*. She recently exhibited a large-scale piece in Documenta 13, and soon after had a solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Basel, which explored mathematical theories.

Art film 1: ever present yet ignored (2006) reveals elements of Lara's modus operandi. A male Italian voiceover attributes to "the artist" a "fluid, cyclical, mysterious rhythm of production." Is this artist generic? The film functions as an exhibition of Lara's work, one that breaks away from the usual temporal structures of a show. It is an exhibition in which the youth present — in mock existentialist modes of reflection — will be young forever. Lara's installations can be destroyed and then reappear because film, unlike an exhibition, can be rewound.

The sensual Italian voice announces a stream of appropriated philosophical statements, subtitled in English: "The future of art will be advertisement. No, sorry, that is the present." Cycles of art, fashion and trends never cease to intrigue Lara, whose interest in continuous time spans and structures is a critique of the disposable in consumer culture. Equally subject to critique are separations between what is art and what is life, and what is inside the gallery and outside, notably in the street.

The words "True artists are in the streets" greet the visitor to Lara's 2011 exhibition, titled "La Pintura (Lasser) Moderna," at Gaga Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City. The ubiquity of art in everyday life is underlined by my own encounter with the exhibition. I am puzzled by a woman wearing a black-and-white maid's outfit, hair accoutrement included, who vacuums

a spiral black-and-white carpet. She pauses to chat with gallery workers who must also traverse the carpet. I can't help wondering if this is a type of activation in which gallery workers are placed on stage. It turns out not to be, but the carpet does have that effect: people walking on it are in a sense performing themselves.

The exhibition as a whole takes as one of many premises an article denouncing the crisis of painting in Mexico, citing a discarded banana peel Adriana Lara presented at the New Museum (among other places) as a symptom. By incorporating this mention in the exhibition, Lara humorously points to divisions within the Mexican art world: what is conceptual and what is not, what is acceptable painting and what is not. She feeds into the thumbs up / thumbs down power of the intelligentsia on one hand, and the market on the other. But as in *Art film 1*, Lara is also portraying the exhibition itself.

The rug was a catwalk turned tableau-vivant for the opening night's inaugural fashion show of street performers wearing Hawaiian raffia skirts, printed fabrics and jewelry made from USB drives and DVDs. The different elements will later form the "combine paintings" placed on the wall. To Lara, painting embodies a seamless, limitless surface; a canvas is only a sample or a fragment. This is echoed within the lasser canvas in which a laser pointer shines past the edge of a white canvas onto the wall. Motif and frame are no longer unified.

In the film *La Pintura Contrataca* (2012) Lara captures urban street characters randomly wearing scarves. A scarf is but a portion of a larger ream of potentially endless fabric that can be tied, twisted and displaced, not unlike a computer-generated pattern — a surface where motif, materiality and ornamentation collapse together.

Stretching a printed surface as canvas and layering it is not irrelevant at a time when Warhol's printed, serial silk screens are included in the painting category at auction houses, selling at record prices. "Art exists outside the gallery," says Lara. "A thing is turned into art, art is turned back into a thing [...] art in everyday life is more ordinary and present, rather than something rare that is in constant need of replacement."

If "art is about something else" as enounced in *Art film 1*, it could be transposed to "art is somewhere else" in *La Pintura Contrataca*.

Opposite:

Adriana Lara,
"A Problem has occurred,"
2007. Exhibition view at
Air de Paris, Paris.
Courtesy Air de Paris, Paris.
Photo: Marc Domage.

1 (one) from Numbers
(Disambiguation), 2012.
Canvas, felt, cardboard,
wood, 200 x Ø 37 cm.
Coup, 2012. Acrylic on
canvas, 311 x 448 cm.
Courtesy the artist, Air
de Paris, Paris and Algis
Greenspon, New York.
Photo: Serge Hasenböhler.
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