

ATOPIA 2016
MIGRATION, HERITAGE AND PLACELESSNESS

Works from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection

Centro Cultural Metropolitano, Quito, Ecuador

August 10 - September 29, 2016

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Abraham Cruzvillegas
Autorretrato fronterizo y
chispeante abrazando el
retrato de Gilberto Bosques,
escuchando pirekuas y
tragando esquites afuera de
la cathedral, 2014
Photo: Francesca von
Habsburg, 2014

Atopia. Migration, Heritage and Placelessness is an exhibition developed by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, drawing from the foundation's collection of contemporary art. It proposes the use of the concept of the "atopic" to challenge the orthodoxy of space and site and to freshly engage with a discursive body of research that has long been determined by the notions of center/ off-center/ the local/ marginal/ the periphery—between what James Clifford calls localism and worldliness.

The past decades were marked by astounding social, political, and cultural re-alignments—the changing of borders, the displacement of people, the reformulation and reassertion of national particularities and identities: all these spatial redistributions have had an increasing impact on artistic and curatorial practices. Atopia proposes a notion of a shattered spatiality, marked by recent events, realignments, and speculations to trace the growing interest in place-

specific narratives, dealing symbolically with the gaps and slippages between topos and atopus, space and non-space, the global and the specific practices of cultural in-betweens and hybridization.

Atopia, a word mainly used in medicine and philosophy, literally means placelessness, out of place, unclassifiable and of high originality. It is, in its traditional use, at the same time, a category of otherness, difference, expulsion and exclusion, as it is a reference to the ineffable, the pristine, and the absolute. It is in this double connotation, in which the term becomes a productive figure for thinking in addressing the various ways in which artists have dealt with ideas of place, geography, migration, heritage, translation, the crossing of national, social, and cultural borders. The atopic is here but not here, it is a position which denies location, perhaps an attitude or gesture that relates to an “original” cultural or social experience but at the same time diffuses it or remains at distance.



Mario Jonathas de Andrade
The Uprising, 2012,
Film still: courtesy the artist

Thus the exhibition focuses on the practices and representations of the ways in which artists have accessed, rehearsed, participated in and negotiated concepts of “place” or “place of origin,” their past, heritage, and cultural ambiguities, with all the dilemmas such notions provoke. Origin / locality is not a neutral point of reference. What seems to be just a geographic denotation, comes with an apparatus of definitions and is grounded in systems of authority. Geography and place-bound symbolisms incorporates a (very rigid) signifying system through which individuals and collectives register and express their identities. As “writing about the earth,” the science of geography has traditionally bridged human and physical science to map out places of presence and embodiment. Gradually the geographic denotation of space has shifted in favor of a more fluid and multi-layered meaning, invested with personal and intimate affects and complicated by subjectivities and their interaction. Place-specific and locational narratives have thus become important figures of the artistic expressions of the past decade, but also projective sites of stereotyping and (post-colonial or ethnicizing)

simplifications. Artistic exploration of geographies through mappings, landscapes, descriptions of sites, places, collection of cultural objects, historical inscriptions and personal research, as well as the shifting political implications in language, writing and formal representation are at the nexus of the current exploration.

The exhibition looks at the countersides of the processes of aggregation and homogenization and addresses the ways in which a collection of 21st century art is constructed around the various experiences of difference, in which individuals and collectives participate in different cultural processes and realities. It therefore pivots around the specific systems and methods of exchange, translation, and its embedded critiques. A wide ranging production of visual and spatial works catalyze the reexamination of the agency of the artist in the production of such locational inquiries. It also implies strategies for re-claiming certain histories and place-specificities by way of reasserting territorial representations. The way “localism” is understood in this particular context is not as a reaffirmation of common simplifications but is instead based on productive inquiries and internalization of paradoxes and transitions, which evade categorizations or nostalgic impulses. It also shows how shifting political and economic realities have created new tales of places, and how their histories have sparked the impulse to document the rapid processes of transformation set into motion by new “continental shifts”.



Installation view:
Atopia. Migration, Heritage
and Placelessness
Works from the TBA21
Collection, Museo de Arte
Moderno Bogota, Colombia
Photo: © Sebastián Cruz
Roldán & Santiago Pinol, 2016

Atopia, a migrating exhibition, developed in collaboration with MAZ, Guadalajara, Mexico and MAMBO, Bogota, Columbia explores the questions addressing spatialized artistic practices and relationships in the works of contemporary artists from the TBA21 collection, especially but not exclusively artists from Latin America.

With the works by Allora & Calzadilla, Jonathas de Andrade, Taysir Batniji, John Bock, Monica Bonvicini, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Mario García-Torres, Carl Michael von Hausswolff and Thomas Nordstad, Mathilde ter Heijne, Sanja Iveković, Brad Kahlhamer, Los Carpinteros, Paulo Nazareth, Rivane Neuenschwander, Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, Alex Rodríguez, Paul Rosero Contreras, Allan Sekula, and Do Ho Suh.

Centro Cultural Metropolitano

Centro Cultural Metropolitano is located in the Historic Center of Quito. The building occupies the space of the former Jesuit building complex where, for over four centuries, institutions and notables of great importance in the political, cultural and educational history of Ecuador have resided.

Following the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, part of the building was converted into “Cuartel Real de la Audiencia de Quito”, and as such hosted, as prisoners, several heroes of Quito’s Independence. It was the principal location of the Universidad Central, until 1958. After the university’s relocation, it was transformed into a municipal building that housed the Library Federico González Suarez and Alberto Mena Caamaño Museum.

Currently, Centro Cultural Metropolitano is an institution dedicated to cultural services, attached to the Secretary of Culture of Quito’s Municipality, and has become a social space filling the demands for activity, exchange, and debates on various artistic and cultural practices.

INFORMATION

Atopia was initially developed in cooperation with Viviana Kuri Haddad for the Museo de Arte de Zapopan, Guadalajara, Mexico (May 14 - October 5, 2014); traveling to the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (March 2 - May 29, 2016), Atopia was adapted in collaboration with Andrea Wild, exhibition coordination, and Valentina Gutierrez Turbay as co-curator.

Museo de Arte de Zapopan (MAZ)

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About Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

Founded in 2002 by Francesca von Habsburg in Vienna, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) represents the fourth generation of the Thyssen family's commitments to the arts. After more than 14 years of collecting, commissioning projects, and engaged exhibition practice, TBA21 has established a highly respected collection of more than 700 contemporary artworks in the field of new media, including film, video, light, sound and mixed-media installations, sculpture, painting, photography, and performance. TBA21's unique collection is the result of its ongoing commitment to commissioning and disseminating numerous art projects, including multimedia installations, sound compositions, endurance performances and contemporary architecture. This has led to its pioneering reputation in the art world. The foundation sustains a far-reaching regional and international orientation through a number of collaborations with other cultural partners around the world, and explores modes of presentation that are intended to provoke and broaden the way viewers perceive and experience art. In 2015 Francesca von Habsburg decided to dedicate the foundation's ongoing program to becoming an agent of change by focusing on the complexities and urgencies of the "age of anthropocene," as well as today's pressing challenges caused by climate change, with a special focus on the marine eco systems.

Supported by

As one of the leading insurance groups in Central and Eastern Europe, the Vienna Insurance Group and its main share holder clearly perceive its social responsibilities and have been reliable sponsoring partners for Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary and other cultural projects for many years. Numerous museums and galleries have insured their collections with Vienna Insurance Group. The main objective for cooperating with cultural institutions is to promote the international exchange in the field of arts and culture.

