



Fundació "la Caixa"

José Roca challenges concepts of scientific authority and objectivity in "la Caixa" Foundation's Sala Montcada

Political botany

Uses of science, uses of history

Botany and conflict; scientific outlook and political agenda; classification and exclusion systems; botanical taxonomy and exploitation of natural resources. The validity of these concepts, which have been coupled since the times of the conquest and colonization of the New World, has not expired with processes of "independence". In fact, the authority of science to validate political strategies is still invoked by the new forms of colonialism and has even been deployed in the legal field to serve the interests of transnational capitalism. Under the title, *Political botany. Uses of science, uses of history*, Colombian curator José Roca challenges concepts of scientific authority and objectivity in "la Caixa" Foundation's Sala Montcada through the videographic work of two deeply critical and reflective artists: Spaniard Juan Luis Moraza and Colombian José Alejandro Restrepo. Moraza analyzes contemporary documents in which science is used as a supraethical support mechanism for business operations: the incorporation of transgenetic crops in Latin America from seeds manufactured by large American and European corporations. On another note, Restrepo carries out "disarchiving" (or, the opposite of the cataloguing that relegates historical fact to the overused and outdated format of the archive), establishing genealogies for the state of things, and indicating their causes.

The exhibition *Political botany. Uses of science, uses of history*, curated by José Roca, can be visited at "la Caixa" Foundation's Sala Montcada (Montcada, 14), from 5 March to 9 May, 2004.

The work presented by Juan Luis Moraza at “la Caixa” Foundation's Sala Montcada is made up of the pseudo-documentary *Archaeology of Hell*, as well as pieces of sculpture and real and fictitious documents exhibited in a “scientific” showcase. The display establishes a museographic link with the work of José Alejandro Restrepo, which consists of the video installation *Psychotropic Impressionism*. In addition, the two artists are to participate alongside Mauricio Nieto in a discussion session that will take place Saturday, 6 March (at 11 am) at “la Caixa” Foundation's Sala Montcada.

For the work presented at “la Caixa” Foundation's Sala Montcada, Moraza has researched the databases of advocates and critics of transgenic crop implementation in Latin America, as well as videographic and press archives related with this issue. The artist's main concern is the scientific story linked to genetic development and the way that its dissemination is triumphalistically made to serve exploitation rather than knowledge.

Restrepo's video installation *Psychotropic Impressionism*, shows a large green field with green spots. The video footage, taken from Colombian television, shows a plantation of poppies grown to produce opium and heroin consumed internationally. The bucolic atmosphere is violently disrupted with the sudden appearance of a plane that dusts what are, in fact, illegal crops. The projections at forced angles on the walls, ceiling and floor of the video installation impede the visual apprehension of the image and subtly alter the perception of space, in a clear reference to the mind-altering effects of psychotropic drugs. The growing of poppies (a non-native plant unknown in Colombia until recently as a raw material for drug production) is the result of contradictory economic factors originating in the West: the demand of the North American and European market; its eradication as dictated by the impositions of US anti-drug policies and the pressures of producing corporations (which are, in many cases, the same ones that produce transgenic seeds).

If in the 18th century the scientific community classified nature to facilitate its exploitation for the good of the empire, modern science uses an inverted strategy: it produces the nature that best fits the economic agenda of the ‘empire’ and imposes it upon those who determine the policies to apply in ‘developing’ countries. Industrialized agriculture and genetically modified organisms (protected by patents that result in not only the payment of royalties to the production company by the grower, but also dependence on the same type of seeds) establish a new form of subordination to a foreign power, no longer only political, but scientific and

technological. In reference to the Royal Botanical Expedition, historian Mauricio Nieto stated: "Natural history is a field with which to build a domesticated nature and a colonized humanity." The domestication of nature through genetic engineering on behalf of private capital perfects this equation to an unprecedented degree.

JOSÉ ROCA - Barranquilla, Colombia, 1962. Lives and works in Bogotá.

Director of Temporary Exhibits and Museology at the Luis Ángel Arango Library (Bogotá). Conducted the Independent Studies Program of the Whitney Museum (New York). In 2002, won the Whitney Lauder Curatorial Fellowship of the ICA from the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia). Among his most recent projects are *Carlos Garaicoa: The ruin; The utopia* (Bronx Museum, New York); *Define "Context"* (APEX art CP, New York); *TransHistorias: myth and memory in the work of José Alejandro Restrepo* (Luis Ángel Arango Library, Bogotá), and *Traces of Friday: art, tourism, displacement* (ICA, Philadelphia). He is part of the curators' group for the Polygraphic Triennial of San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2004. Roca publishes *Column of sand*, a bimonthly contemporary art and culture critique, on the Internet.

JOSÉ ALEJANDRO RESTREPO - Colombia, 1959. Lives and works in Bogotá

Studied Fine Arts at the National University (Bogotá), and the School of Fine Arts (Paris) from 1982 to 1985. Considered a forerunner of video art in Colombia. Restrepo regularly shows his work in Europe, Latin America and the United States. Noteworthy among his individual exhibitions are: *TransHistorias: myth and memory in the work of José Alejandro Restrepo* (Luis Ángel Arango Library, Bogotá, 2001); *Anaconda* (Aphone/l'Usine, Geneva, 1992), and *Record* (Bogotá Museum of Modern Art, 1986). Has taken part in a wide array of international group exhibits and received many awards, such as First Prize at the Biennial of the Bogotá Museum of Modern Art (1995).

JUAN LUIS MORAZA - Vitoria, Spain, 1960. Lives and works in Madrid

Holds a doctorate in Fine Arts from the University of the Basque Country, and is a professor of sculpture at the University of Vigo. Has been holding individual exhibitions and participating in group shows since 1980. Significant among his individual exhibits are *SILVER* (House of America, Madrid, 2003); *INTERPASSIVITY* (Koldo Mitxelena, San Sebastian, 1999); *ANAESTHETICS. Algologues* (Andalusian Modern Art Center, Seville, 1998); *Ecstasy, status, statue* (Pablo Gargallo Museum,

Zaragoza, 1995), *Ornament and law* (Sala América, Vitoria, 1994). Moraza has published the books *Ma(non É)DONNA. Images of creation, procreation and contraception* (1993) and *Six sexes of the difference* (1990). He coordinates the humor and puzzles section of the magazine "Acción paralela".

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5 March to 9 May, 2004

"la Caixa" Foundation's Sala Montcada

Montcada, 14
08003 Barcelona

Information

www.fundacio.lacaixa.es/salamontcada

Tel.: 902 22 30 40

Hours:

Tuesday to Saturday, from 11 am to 3 pm and from 4 to 8 pm

Sundays and holidays, 11 am to 3 pm

DISCUSSION SESSION

Saturday 6 March, starting at 11 am

Discussion session on the exhibition *Political botany*, with the participation of artists

Juan Luis Moraza, José Alejandro Restrepo and historian Mauricio Nieto.

Location: "la Caixa" Foundation's Sala Montcada.

Free admission