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THE POLITICS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION

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Barbara Matas Moris

THE POLITICS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION

(Films 2010-2020)

List of films:

Chica Pop, 5' video, col. English/Spanish 2011

<https://vimeo.com/34007938>

La Puta, la Santa y la Viuda, (The Whore, the Saint and the Widow) 9' 48",

16mm/videoHD col. Spanish, 2018

<https://vimeo.com/302665989>

Loin encore plus loin (Further, Even Further) 7', video/archive footage col.

French/Spanish, 2015

<https://vimeo.com/131236065>

Politics & Eggs, 10' 50", video B&W/col. English, 2018

<https://vimeo.com/296862958>

List of contents

	Page No
Acknowledgments	4
Abstract	5
Introduction	7
Section 1: Chica Pop (2011)	16
Section 2: La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda (The Whore, the Saint and the Widow) (2018)	26
Section 3: Loin, encore plus loin (Further, Even Further) (2015)	45
Section 4: Politics & Eggs (2018)	54
Conclusion	61
Bibliography	66
Filmography	69
List of Illustrations	71

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my parents for showing me from an early age the importance of art, film and politics; teaching me to live a creative life, with humour in spite of all circumstances, even exile. Life has certainly been a creative adventure with them as parents.

I also want to thank my daughter Eva, the love of my life, for her support and patience during this time. She has given me the strength to bring this PhD to completion, I hope this will inspire her to also persevere in life.

I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Margherita Sprio for her wise guidance. Her knowledge, experience and generous nature have been fundamental to me for the completion of this PhD by Published works. Together with this, she has helped me to achieve a much deeper understanding of my own practice as an artist and as an academic.

Abstract

I am a visual artist who has been making film and videos since completing a Masters of Fine Arts in Moving Image at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 2002. I situate my practice amongst Experimental and Avant-Garde filmmakers and visual artists, however, unlike many of them I work with narrative, humour and specifically play with Hispanic American themes and aesthetics. This commentary focuses on four of my films made in the last ten years: *Chica Pop* (2010), *Loin, Encore Plus Loin* (*Further, Even Further Away*) (2016), *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda* (*The Whore, the Saint and the Widow*) (2018) and *Politics and Eggs* (2019).

I write, direct, perform and edit my own work with very limited external funds. I make low budget films, shot at home or in the street, using myself, friends and family as actors. This is done in combination with imagery obtained from the internet which I alter in post-production in order to create artisanal animations and video collages. This purposeful artisanal approach to animation, video-collage, rough sound and image treatment helps me to position my work in an ironic confrontation with mainstream cinema and in affiliation with avant-garde/experimental filmmaking and earlier Counter Cinema.

My work draws from my familial experience of living in exile. My parents were exiled from Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1989). My father, Percy Matas is also a filmmaker and together with Raul Ruiz made a series of films about the Chilean exile in France (1973-1978). These films were performed and made by Chilean exiles and their families and became an historical document of Chilean exile in

France during the 1970s. This approach to making film in the first person greatly influenced my own practice as it made me aware of the politics of self-representation.

Self-representation is at the core of my work, however, through this PhD research I have found many other unsuspected connections between my films that encompass the modes of production, including humour, post-production techniques, Hispanic American themes and aesthetics. I have realized how my experience of exile is always present in my films together with issues of cultural identity, displacement and gender. Analysing my films retrospectively has helped me to recognize the continuity and progression in my work, providing me with a clearer idea of where my practice needs to go in the future.

The analysis of these four films serves as a platform from where to engage in a broader discussion about self-representation in film. My intention to underscore connections between the personal experience and politics represents an example of how self-representation can still establish the personal as political in film. Reclaiming self-representation as a powerful political tool even in our time of social media's exaltation of the visual, the personal still remains political.

Introduction

Background to my films 2010-2020

I am a visual artist who has been making films and videos since completing a Masters of Fine Arts in Moving Image at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 2002. CalArts' approach to the moving image helped me expand my understanding of cinema and embrace a more experimental way of making films.

I situate myself amongst other Experimental and Avant-Garde filmmakers and visual artists, however, unlike many of them I work with narrative. I am above all a storyteller, I write, shoot, edit and perform in my own works. I create elaborate and surreal scenarios where my characters are confronted with ludicrous realities, combining humour, intimacy and the absurd. The stories are told from the perspective of the "outsider" who is mainly female, even if in some cases I also perform male roles. The exilic nature of my films relates to Hamid Naficy's work on Exilic and Diasporic filmmaking in several ways: I convey the 'other' based on my own experience of being an exile, as well as a woman in relation to patriarchy and as an experimental filmmaker in relation to mainstream cinema.¹ My works delve into the representation of the 'Other' through the Self, with the intention of harnessing the act of self-representation as a political act.²

¹ Naficy, Hamid., 2001. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton University Press; 2001

² Tidd, Ursula, 1999. The Self-Other Relation in Beauvoir's Ethics and Autobiography. *Hypatia*, 14 (4), pp. 163-174.

I make low budget films, shot at home or in the street, using myself, friends and family as actors, in combination with imagery obtained from the internet which I alter in post-production in order to create artisanal animations and video collages. This purposeful artisanal approach to animation, video-collage, rough sound, image treatment and narrative structure helps position my work in an ironic confrontation with mainstream cinema and in an affiliation with avant-garde³, experimental filmmaking⁴ and counter cinema as defined by Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey in relation to Mulvey's work on Jean Luc Godard and the complexities of the female representation in his form of counter cinema.⁵ My experimental approach to narrative helps my work express a memory-like quality, looking into the character's subjective recollection of an event.⁶

My practice draws on my experience of exile from Chile – 1973-1989 and when my family and I lived in France, Spain and the US. Yet, my true exile began when my parent's exile ended and we returned as a family to Chile (1989). Like many children of exiles, I did not adapt back to Chile very easily. Since this experience, I tried living in Chile many times but I always left again. After many failed attempts I realized I was more comfortable living abroad, continuing with the lifestyle I grew up in, continuing to live as a foreigner. This feeling of otherness is at the core of the four films I have selected from my body of work, for this commentary. Each of these films

³ Brenez, Nicole, 2006. Cinémas D'Avant-Garde (Avant-Garde Cinema) Cahier du cinema, les petits cahier, SCRÉREN-CNDP.

⁴ O'Pray, Micheal, 2003. Avant-garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions (Vol.17). Wallflower Press.

⁵ Johnston, Claire. "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema." *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film*. Patricia Erens, ed. New York: Horizon Press, 1979, pp 133–143.

⁶ Naficy, Hamid., 2001. An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking. Princeton University Press; 2001

explores different aspects of exile, cultural identity and gender through self-representation and an artisanal approach to film production.

Self-representation is a key element of my films, starting with my first video *Querida Gertrudis: (Dear Gertrude, 1995)* and I have used myself as the subject in the twenty-five films and videos that I have made. My use of self-representation has been influenced by my father, Percy Matas, also a filmmaker who worked with Raul Ruiz on a series of political fiction films about Chilean exile in France during the 1970s. In the films *Dialogo de Exiliados* (Raul Ruiz 1975)⁷ and *Los Transplantados* (Percy Matas 1975)⁸ exilic non-actors stepped in front of the camera to become the protagonists of their own fictions of exile. The films were shot in our home in Paris, I was five years old and living with my parents, in what was also one of the sets of the films. The crew was formed by Chilean exiles with no technical training, and all household members performed in these films, including myself. Having Chilean exiles and their families perform ‘themselves’, contributed towards making these films a unique historical document of the experience of Chilean exiles in France during the 1970s.⁹ With this in mind, our self-representation became a political act. This is in line with Naficy’s exploration of the characteristics that differentiate Exilic and Diasporic cinema where he analyses authorship and the complexities of representation of the self, found in cinema made by exiles. I approach self-representation in the same way Raul Ruiz and my father did, whereby stepping in front of the camera and willingly becoming the subject, I advocate the political

⁷ *Dialogo de Exiliados* (Exile Dialogue) 1975, Raul Ruiz.

⁸ *Los Transplantados* (The Uprooted) 1975, Percy Matas.

⁹ Naficy, Hamid., 2001. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton University Press; 2001.

argument of the second-wave feminists that “the personal is political”¹⁰ and assume self-representation as a political act.

Whilst contrasting knowledge that I have gathered on the theme of self-representation through the key works by Amelia Jones¹¹, Boel Ulfsdotter¹², Hamid Naficy,¹³ and Margherita Sprio,¹⁴ I realise my use of self-representation goes beyond an artistic gesture or comment on contemporary art practices; it’s rooted and motivated by an overwhelming sense of otherness and distinct feeling of displacement. This occurs on two levels: as a woman in relation to the patriarchy and as an exile in relation to the issue of cultural identity. Naficy’s description of exilic film resonates with my own practice,¹⁵ however, as a child raised in exile with a difficult relationship with my country of origin; my motivation for making films is not exactly the same as the one from an exilic filmmaker; my films are the consequence of a life in exile, a form of exile that is irreversible. The children of exiles are doomed to live between two or more countries, it is a condition unlikely to change as we do not have a clear idea of a country we aim to return to one day. Unlike my father and other Chilean exile filmmakers, I am not making films for my country of origin, however, the mechanisms of authorship described by Naficy fully represent my own.¹⁶

¹⁰ See Hanisch, Carol, 1969. The Personal is Political. *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation*.

¹¹ Jones, Amelia. *Self-image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject*. London: Routledge, 2006

¹² Ulfsdotter, Boel, and Anna Backman Rogers, eds. *Female Authorship and the Documentary Image: Theory, Practice and Aesthetics*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

¹³ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton University Press, 2001.

¹⁴ Sprio, Margherita. "Filmic Performance—Authenticity and The Apple." *Wide Screen* 1, no. 1 (2009).

¹⁵ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton University Press, 2001. pp.7 to 9.

¹⁶ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton University Press, 2001. pp 109 to 112.

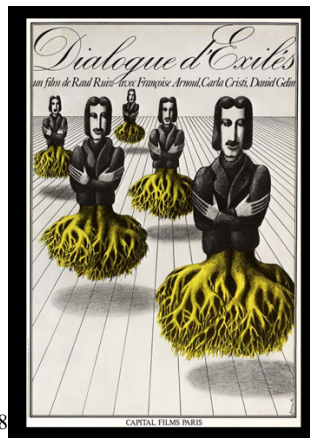
As is explored by Margherita Sprio where she examines performance in relation to realism and the use of non-actors in fiction films performed by the real person; I too address performative aspects in my work.¹⁷ I am not an actor but I perform narratives that I have lived as well as fictional narratives based on life experiences. I also have friends and family participate in my films, who are not actors either, but at some level represent the character of the film. This offers a looser interpretation of the function of realism in my work.

Something similar occurs with Chilean films made during exile (1970s) in France by my father and Raul Ruiz. Chilean exilic non-actors performed for the camera, fictional versions of their reality as exiles, which made these films transcend docu-drama and yet have the importance of a unique visual historical document for posterity. This goes beyond showing the reality of the protagonists, as these films also show the fictional fantasies of exiles during that moment in history.

¹⁷ Sprio, Margherita. "Filmic Performance—Authenticity and The Apple." *Wide Screen* 1, no. 1 (2009).



18



19

During my time at CalArts I found significant similarities between the previously mentioned Chilean exilic films and certain characteristics of the Avant-Garde and Experimental cinema, best described by Michel O'Pray as he establishes the crossroads between Avant-Garde and Experimental film acknowledging the difficulty entailed in finding an accurate definition for Avant-Garde film and Experimental cinema. However, Murray Smith sums it up well:

The Avant-garde is an 'artisanal' or 'personal' mode. Avant-garde films tend to be made by individuals or small groups of collaborators, financed either by filmmakers alone or in combination with private patronage and grants from arts institutions. Such films are usually distributed through film co-operatives, and exhibited by film societies, museums, and universities.²⁰

¹⁸ Los Transplantados (The Uprooted) 1975, Percy Matas.

¹⁹ Dialogo de Exiliados (Exile Dialogue) 1975, Raul Ruiz.

²⁰ O'Pray, Michael. *Avant-garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions*. Vol. 17. Wallflower Press, 2003.

The Avant-Garde's commitment to a personal approach to filmmaking, aesthetics and modes of production, align with my own experience of filmmaking. The experimental aspect of my work comes through my use of materials, technology and approach to narrative.

I became interested in films made by filmmakers with a range of nationalities during different times in history, who spoke about their personal version of exile. Notably Jonas Mekas' *Reminiscences of a journey to Lithuania*²¹ (1972), where he addresses his experience of exile and adaptation to his new home in NYC, the film feels like a window into the director's uprooted emotions; presenting a first-person account of his experience of exile and integration into a new country. There is also the work of Leticia Parente, *Marca Registrada*²² (*Trademark*, 1975), where she recorded herself sewing the words 'Made in Brazil' into the sole of her foot in black thread, branding her body as a product under the country's military regime; establishes the personal as political while addressing the many types of exiles there are. Parente's form of exile took place in her home in Rio de Janeiro, where she cloistered herself as a realm of resistance during the 1970s Brazilian dictatorship. I also recognise my own feelings of uprooting and displacement in Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1976)²³, as she read the letters her mother sent her from Belgium whilst living in NYC. Born in Belgium to Holocaust survivors from Poland, this film explores the aftermath of exile, the fragmentation of families and the struggles of their children to find a sense of belonging.

²¹ Jonas Mekas, *Reminiscences of a journey to Lithuania* (1972)

²² Leticia Parente, *Marca Registrada* (*Trademark*, 1975),

²³ Chantal Akerman, *News from Home* (1976)

The essence of being uprooted explored in these films also exists in my work, but it is presented differently, usually through elaborate narratives, dark humour and a Pop Art quality that plays on the similarities between Hispanic American and Kitsch Aesthetics. Almodóvar's early films²⁴ and George Kuchar's *Hold Me While I'm Naked* (1966)²⁵, are examples of this connection. They share an irreverent sense of humour, postmodern spirit, kitsch aesthetics, a Queer essence, and were unapologetically challenging the conventions of their time. As Naficy's argues, these films reinforce the notion that the exilic experience is not exclusive to political exiles, but to all outsiders to the patriarchy:

Exilic authorship is also a function of the filmmakers' mode of production. In fact, in their multiple incarnations or personifications, the authors are produced by their own production mode.²⁶

With this in mind, my films also approach the exilic experience with a wide prism, putting forward the feeling of rootlessness and displacement of marginal characters to the patriarchy. My tragicomic narratives are intrinsically feminist, with a purposeful artisanal approach to production and postproduction. My films, delve into issues of cultural identity, in particular Hispanic American identity and harness self-representation in a playful manner yet with a political intention.

In order to better contextualise my practice, I have analysed four of my films made between 2010-2020. The four films I have chosen are: *Chica Pop* (2010), *Loin*

²⁴ Pedro Almodóvar, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980); *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982); *Dark Habits* (1983)

²⁵ George Kuchar, *Hold me while I'm naked* (1966)

²⁶ Naficy, H. *Accented Cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton University Press; 2001 pp.35

encore plus loin (2016) *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda* (2018) and *Politics and Eggs* (2019). These films capture the key elements, themes and methodology that distinguishes my work: narrative, production/postproduction practices, cultural identity, Hispanic-American Aesthetics and self-representation.

The analysis of these four films serves as a platform from where to engage in a broader discussion about self-representation in film today. The intention of my work is to underscore connections between the personal experience and politics. It aims to explore how self-representation can still establish the personal as political in film; reclaiming self-representation as a powerful political tool even in our time of social media's exaltation of the visual, the personal remains political.

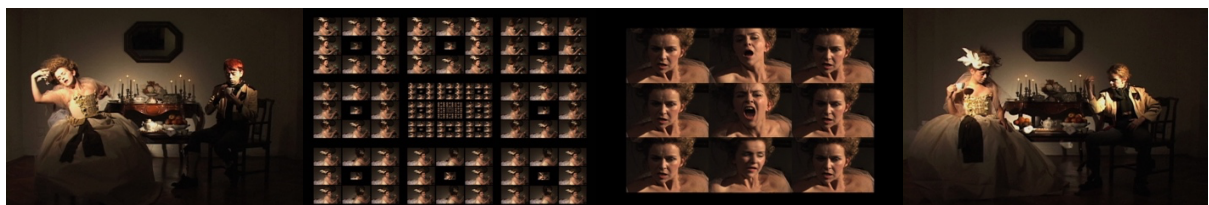


CHICA POP

2011 Video Mini DV, 5' English/ Spanish.

<https://vimeo.com/34007938>

Chica Pop is directly linked to my experience of exile and re-adaptation to Chile, and the film was shot during my last attempt to settle in Chile (2005-2010). When we returned to Chile in 1989, my parents and brother re-adapted successfully, I did not. From that moment on I have tried to live in Chile several times but I always end up leaving again. In 2005, after separating from my husband in France, I returned to Chile with my four month-old baby, hoping to bring up my daughter close to my family and with a clear cultural identity. During this time, I stopped making my own work until I was invited to participate in a collective art show at Scola Italiana in Santiago de Chile, where I presented a video-installation, *3 Cuadros Musicales* (Three Musical Tableaux, 2010).



27

²⁷ Images extracted from, *3 cuadros musicale* (3 musical tableaux) (2010)

This show led to another collective show in Artespacio Gallery in Santiago de Chile (2010) and to Kunst-Chile Gallery (2010-2015) inviting me to work with them. Chica Pop was made during this time as part of my resurfacing practice.

Chica Pop is a personal reflection, which contrasts the role art has played in the process of re-adaptation to democracy in Spain and Chile. During our years of exile in Spain (1978-1985) as a child and adolescent, I had witnessed Spain's cultural process of adaptation to Democracy after Franco's dictatorship and it was very different to Chile's re-adaptation to Democracy.²⁸ Even though La Movida ²⁹ was deeply influenced by international cultural movements, it took pride in embracing Spanish aesthetics and culture. Pedro Almodóvar 's early films³⁰ were essential to the movement of La Movida and therefore to Spain's process of re-adaptation to Democracy.³¹ They mixed typically Hispanic characters, settings and imagery with elements of classical Hollywood films. This combination rendered a Kitsch Hispanic visual universe, which celebrated popular aesthetics and cultural traits of Spanish and the Latin American working classes, constituting a political stand.

During the dictatorship in Chile, folkloric imagery became associated with leftist politics and as people learnt to be afraid of being associated with the left, commercial art avoided using folklore as part of their artistic expression unless they belonged to

²⁸ Chilean democracy began when a Constitution established a transition and from March 11th 1990 to January 16th 2000; several organic constitutional laws were approved, leading to the final restoration of democracy. However, democracy is still being renegotiated put dates in brackets here as proved by the recent plebiscite where it was agreed to change the Constitution, inherited from the dictatorship.

²⁹ This was a contra-cultural movement that took place during the transition after Franco's death in 1975.

³⁰ Including, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980), *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982), and *Dark Habits* (1983).

³¹ The Spanish transition to democracy, known in Spain as *la Transición*, began after the death of the dictator *Franco* in November 1975 and ended with the failure of the 1981 attempted coup d'état. At its latest, the Transition is said to have ended with the first peaceful transfer of executive power after the victory of the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) in the 1982.

the artistic political undercurrent. The military government admired the US for its capitalist success and the CIA's implication in the Chilean coup d'état. The dictatorship imposed an Americanized aesthetic, everything that looked "gringo"³² was celebrated and so we slowly grew ashamed of our native and Hispanic origins. The risk of avoiding folkloric references in our art is that it reinforces the understanding that art belongs to and represents the Chilean upper-middle classes, which are mostly formed by European progeny; echoing our patriarchal and aspirational class system, gender inequality and racism against indigenous peoples of Chile. With this in mind, Chica Pop, is not a rejection of all international cultural influences in Chile, but a playful re-adaptation, which adds a Latin twist to Warhol's images of icons, re-establishing and celebrating Latin aesthetics, while acknowledging our influences from abroad. In order to achieve this Hispanic/Latin twist I approached the making of this film in an artisanal/ home-made manner. I shot the videos in the living-room of my apartment in the city centre of Santiago de Chile, I painted the backdrops by hand, used paint instead of makeup on my face, found the props in the dressing-up shop in my neighbourhood and also used some of my daughter's toys. The same artisanal approach was used in post-production. I edited on FinalCut 7, staying away from using sophisticated editing tools to create effects, I used the most basic tools the software had to offer, the ones which were most similar to editing on celluloid, showing any mistakes and asymmetries.

I created the split screens manually as well as the superimpositions, the only images where I altered the colour is the bottom right image of Elizabeth Taylor, where I

³²Someone considered a foreigner from the perspective of Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America.

altered the gamma setting giving an effect of constant colour transformation; and part of the three Elvis' tableaux to interpret Warhol's use of saturation and desaturation used on his Elvis paintings. Sound was also treated in the same artisanal way and I found sound tracks on the internet and altered them in FinalCut 7 in order to form the sound track of each section of the video. I used a camera on a tripod and carefully staged each scene to emphasize the similarities amongst the different images and continue my exploration of the *tableau vivant*³³, a method I had used in several of my earlier works, notably *Elephant Legs* (2002).



I became interested in the *tableau vivant*, after seeing Pasolini's *La Ricotta* (1963), and particularly the re-enactment scenes of a crucifixion painting.³⁵ Together with this, I was interested in reading about the history of the *tableaux vivant* through other films such as Raul Ruiz's *Poétique du Cinema* (Poetics of Cinema)³⁶ where he explains the use of the *tableaux vivant* as an activity of entertainment of the French Royal Court whereby they would re-enact paintings of religious or historical

³³Representation of a scene, painting, sculpture, etc, by a person or group posed silent and motionless.

³⁴Two images extracted from *Elephant Legs* (2002).

³⁵*La Ricotta*, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1963).

³⁶Ruiz, R., 2006. *Poétique du cinéma*, 2 (Vol. 2). Dis voir.

moments. This process of reinterpretation of the image true to the *tableaux vivant*, echoes Warhol's process of reinterpretation of movie stars.³⁷

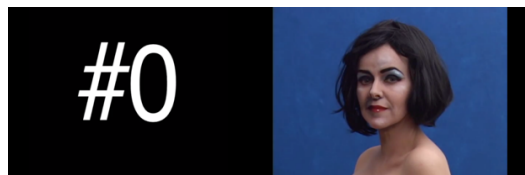
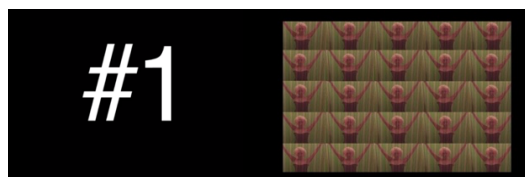
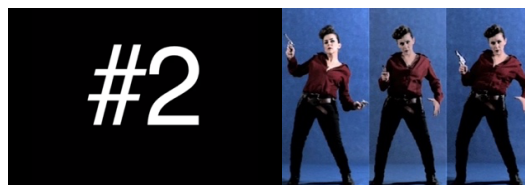
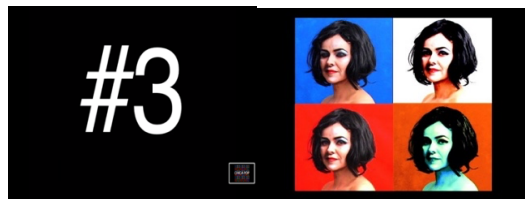
Chica Pop focuses on: 13 canvases of Elizabeth Taylor "Liz" (1962-1965) photo-emulsion screen print on canvas; 22 canvases of Elvis Presley "Elvis" (1962-1963) and the canvas of Marilyn Monroe "Marilyn Diptych" (1962); works made by Warhol in NYC during the early 1960's.³⁸ The silkscreen process used for these paintings insinuates a systematic repetition and mechanisation parallel to the making and promotion of these stars. I took these three iconographic images representative of Pop Art, modernity, post-modernity, contemporary art and America, and commented on our fascination with North America and our own endless intent to repeat and imitate them in every aspect of life, amongst them art.

Chica Pop comprises three acts, each of which represents one of Andy Warhol's iconic celebrity portraits – 1. Elizabeth Taylor; 2. Elvis Presley; 3. Marilyn Monroe. Chica Pop, presents its three acts in the form of a workprint, as large numbers indicate the beginning of each part simulating a countdown (1. Elizabeth Taylor 0,55"; 2. Elvis Presley 1'.32"; 3. Marilyn Monroe 2'.15"; 0 Elizabeth Taylor 0'.5") we go from 3 to 0. 0 being the ending when we return to the image of Elizabeth Taylor, but this time she is not acting or holding a pose, she is silently smoking a cigarette whilst looking into camera.

³⁷ Danto, Arthur C. *Andy Warhol*. Yale University Press, 2009.

³⁸ Bergin, P., 1967. Andy Warhol: the artist as machine. *Art Journal*, 26(4), pp.359-363. Offers further relevant information on the subject.

The order in which the videos are presented in Chica Pop represents the order in which they were shot. They also represent the gradual augmentation in movement, postproduction alterations of the footage and the sound modifications of the original soundtracks taken from the Internet, as seen below.



ELIZABETH TAYLOR (#3)

Warhol's interpretations of both products and personalities, granted equal weight to soup cans and movie stars. Warhol's mechanization of the painting process through photo-emulsion silkscreen applied onto the canvas, allowed him to reproduce the same image over and over, quickly and efficiently. I tried to capture this intention of mechanisation, by taking the same publicity photograph for

Taylor's film 'Butterfield 8'³⁹ which Warhol used as the basis for the screen print to his "Liz" series and much like him, I create several of the same images with alterations of vibrant flat blocks of colour.

I painted three backdrops: one blue, one white and one red, in order to represent the three colors of the French flag (Liberty, Equality and Fraternity) and taped them to the wall. I sat facing the MiniDV video camera looking at the monitor, I played with two lights and the reflector until I found the most similar angle to Warhol's painting of Elizabeth Taylor. I then painted my face using black paint for the shadows and eyebrows and white paint for the highlights. The gesture of blinking was important to me not only as a way to bring movement into the image, but also a micro-homage to the moment when the woman blinks in Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962).^{40 41}

I recorded five minutes for each tableau, knowing I would be using a maximum of 1 minute per image, as I wanted each act to be short and play on a loop in a gallery. Later in the editing stage I brought together the 4 tableaux on the screen, altering the gamma setting of the fourth tableaux, showing the never-ending possibilities of images in the process of the mechanization of the image. This was representing our changing democracy and understanding of liberty, equality and fraternity depending on our moment in History, as seen below.

³⁹ Butterfield 8, Daniel Mann (1960)

⁴⁰ La Jetée, Chris Marker (1962)

⁴¹See, Grace, H., Kit-Sze, A.C. and Yuen, W.K. eds., 2015. *Technovisuality: Cultural Re-Enchantment and the Experience of Technology*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

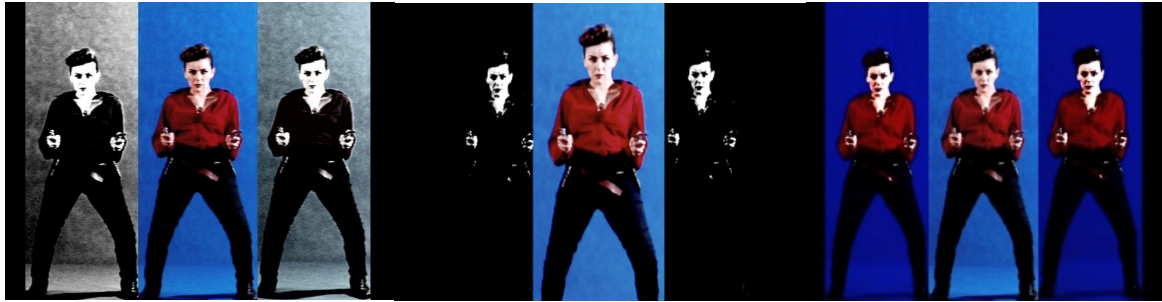


I downloaded Richard Brooks' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958)⁴² - after Brick Pollitt (Paul Newman) injures himself while drunkenly revisiting his high school sports-star days, he and his tempestuous wife, Maggie (Elizabeth Taylor), visit his family's Mississippi plantation for the 65th birthday of his hot-tempered father. Big Daddy (Burl Ives) demands to know why Brick and Maggie haven't yet given him a grandchild, unlike Brick's brother Gooper (Jack Carson) and his fecund wife, Mae (Madeleine Sherwood). The film deals with Maggie's sexual frustration as she is not desired by Brick. I subtracted the soundtrack of the film, editing Maggie's laughter together with her piercing conversation with Brick as she tries in vain to convince him to still find her desirable. I added an echo effect to her voice, obtaining a slightly mechanic feel, emphasizing the element of repetition in the piece.

ELVIS PRESLEY (#2)

I painted one long piece of thin cardboard a tone of Cerulean blue to create the backdrop which expanded from the ceiling down through the floor where Elvis was to stand. I borrowed cowboy boots, black jeans and a belt, my daughter's plastic gun-set and wore a man's red/burgundy corduroy shirt I found in the flea-market. In order to achieve Elvis' famous hairstyle I squirted my hair and styled it using black shoe polish to acquire a darker tone and firm hold.

⁴² *Cat on a hot tin roof*, Richard Brook (1958).



As seen above, I imitated Elvis's pose based on the publicity still from *Flaming Star*, Don Siegel (1960), whose photographic still formed the basis of Warhol's *Triple Elvis* painting (1963). I performed the actions knowing I would have three versions of me on the screen, so the movements were carefully studied in order to complement each other and also to create a sense of the movement in crescendo. It went from stillness to very slow movements and then up to a faster speed. I was aware I would emphasize this rhythm in post-production, but I wanted it to be as true to the footage as possible. I also wanted to evoke the superimpositions of *Double Elvis*, *Triple Elvis* and *Eight Elvises* (parts of the same series by Warhol on Elvis, in 1963)⁴³, so I decided to create a dancing three headed Elvis.



⁴³ Andy Warhol, *Double Elvis*, 1963. Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 6' 11" x 53" (210.8 x 134.6 cm), Andy Warhol, *Triple Elvis*, 1963, silkscreen ink and silver paint on linen, 82 ¼ x 72 inches (208.9 x 182.9 cm), Andy Warhol, *Eight Elvises*, 1963, silkscreen ink and silver paint on canvas 200 cm x 370 cm (6.5 ft x 12 ft)

As seen above, they share the same feet and legs, and like the mythological Hydra de Lerna⁴⁴, my Elvis dances to Joe Cuba's *Bang! Bang!* (1960)⁴⁵, which was a musical hit that initiated the Nuyorican Movement,⁴⁶ formed by intellectuals, artists, writers and musicians of Puerto Rican descent living in New York City. Together with this, I used the Latin Boogaloo sound, which brought light to Latin style music made by Latin-American immigrants by fusing African American Rhythm and Blues, Soul music, Mambo and Son Montuno through songs written in both languages: Spanish and English. During post-production I altered time/speed, brightness and contrast as well as colour saturation.

Performing as a man holding two guns, came very naturally to me. I had already performed as a male character in several of my previous work, notably *Santita* (2002) and *Tres cuadros musicales* (2009). But this impersonation felt much more playful and powerful, perhaps the feeling of empowerment came from the combination of cowboy boots and guns, but assuming the role of a male sex symbol made me feel mighty.

MARILYN MONROE (#1)

I painted 5 backdrops: red, blue, orange, pink and green. I used the same red background that I had used for the Elizabeth Taylor film, but painted a new blue

⁴⁴ Greek mythological serpent of multiple heads

⁴⁵ *Bang! Bang!* Joe Cuba sextet, album *Bang! Bang! Push, push, push* (1965)

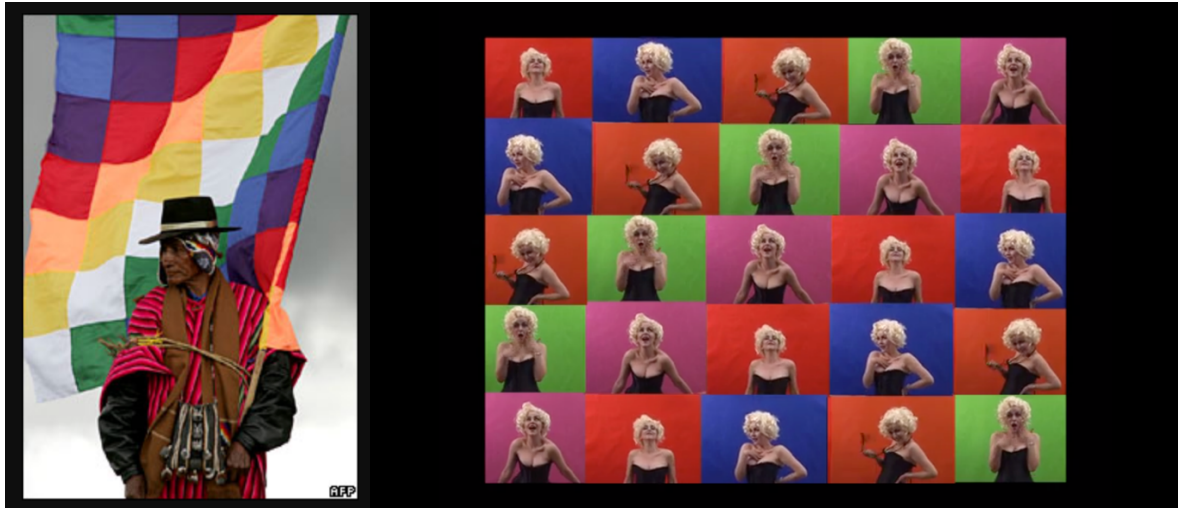
⁴⁶ The Nuyorican movement is a cultural movement involving poets, writers, musicians and artists who are Puerto Rican or of Puerto Rican descent, who live in or near New York City, and are known as Nuyoricans. It originated in the late 1960s in neighborhoods such as East Harlem, Williamsburg, and the South Bronx as a means of validating Puerto Rican experience in the United States, particularly for poor and working-class people who suffered from marginalization and discrimination.

backdrop with electric blue paint. As in Warhol's Marilyn Diptych (1962) I decided to divide the screen into 25 windows in post-production. My idea was to form an overall choreography composed of 25 windows. I wanted colours to clash between them and movement to come from the unity of all parts, as in a Busby Berkley film.⁴⁷ I would use each square as Busby Berkley would use a showgirl and create a choreography composed by the ensemble of the squares/showgirls, and the patterns created by their movement and colour, as seen below.

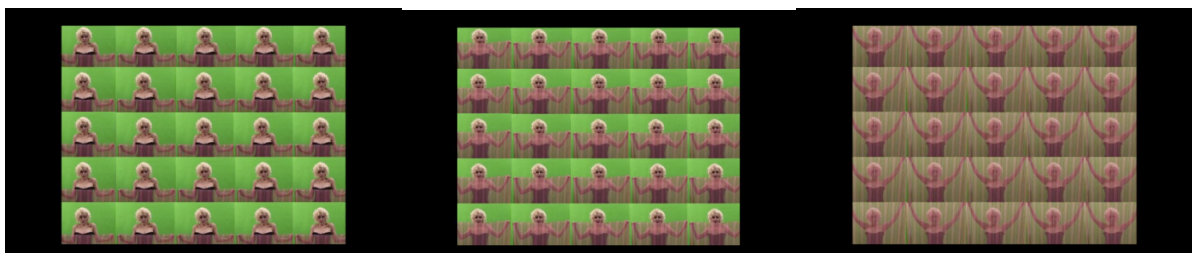


I created patterns that evoke motives used by the indigenous people of Los Andes and the altiplano area of the north of Chile. For example, I used the Wiphala /Aymara Flag, which represents the Aymara and the indigenous people of Los Andes, as seen below.

⁴⁷ Busby Berkley (1895-1976) was an American film director and musical choreographer; he devised elaborate musical productions that often involved complex geometric patterns. For further reading on his films, see Rubin, M., 1993. *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the tradition of spectacle*. Columbia University Press.



I adjusted the camera and two lights to capture me from the waist up, leaving space for movement and finding the adequate Marilyn gestures in which I would hold the pose. On the internet, I found the song, *I Want to be Loved by You*, sung by Marilyn Monroe in the classic film, *Some Like it Hot* (Billy Wilder, 1959), and altered it creating a new soundtrack. I allowed the camera to record me as I was looking for the poses, finding them and holding them as if I was posing for a photo. The time between the poses insinuates the act of performance. Unlike in Warhol's Marilyn Diptych (1962) my Marilyn doesn't fade out of frame, she covers herself with a semi-transparent veil making it harder for us to see her.



48

⁴⁸ Images extracted from the Marilyn section of *Chica Pop* (2010)

ENDING (#0)

Chica Pop ends with the number 0. The background is blue, the woman is no longer performing but is still wearing Liz Taylor's wig, she is smoking a cigarette as she looks into camera. The music from her act lingers in the background adding a sentiment of afterhours haggardness. Despite her femme-fatal attitude we sense something is off as she confronts the camera out of character, breaking the fourth wall. Still in costume, the artist has lost their identity and has become a version of their own work, a subject in and out of camera.



49

Chica Pop, questions the mechanization of the artistic process by using an artisanal approach to its production and in the process creates a reinterpretation of Warhol's iconic celebrity portraits. The film explores my understanding of Hispanic American aesthetics and is the starting point for other films on the subject, notably *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda (The Whore, The Saint and the Widow, 2019)*.

⁴⁹ Images extracted from the ending sequence of Chica Pop (2010).



LA PUTA, LA SANTA Y LA VIUDA

2018, Film/Video, Narrative.9' 47", Spanish.

<https://vimeo.com/302665989>

Like Chica Pop, this film is composed of three parts and delves into issues concerning Hispanic American identity and aesthetics, as well as addressing gender issues in Hispanic-American culture. Each segment of the film is dedicated to a different Hispanic-American female archetype and presents these characters through a purposeful use of Latin American and Hispanic aesthetics.



50

The short films that make up *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda*, were shot in different countries, during different time periods and using a range of equipment:

⁵⁰ Titles at the beginning of each section of the film.

- 1- "Santita" (small female saint) Valverde, California. 2002, 8' 14". Spanish. Kodachrome 16mm.
- 2- "Monjamonjamonja" (nun-nun-nun) San Lorenzo del Escorial, Spain, 2012. 2' 35". Video HD.
- 3- "Toros" (Bulls) San Lorenzo del Escorial, Spain 2012. 3' 49". VideoHD.

I assembled these three films in 2018, as new connections between them became evident to me with the passing of time. Together, they evoked a much larger theme than they did individually and they captured my relationship to religion based on my experience of Catholic boarding school.⁵¹ Each film is about a Hispanic woman confronting patriarchy, religion, superstition and an overwhelming feeling of judgment and exclusion from society. *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda*, renders a wide view on the multi-faceted Hispanic female experience.

⁵¹ Las Carmelitas Descalzas de la Caridad, San Lorenzo del Escorial, Madrid, Spain.



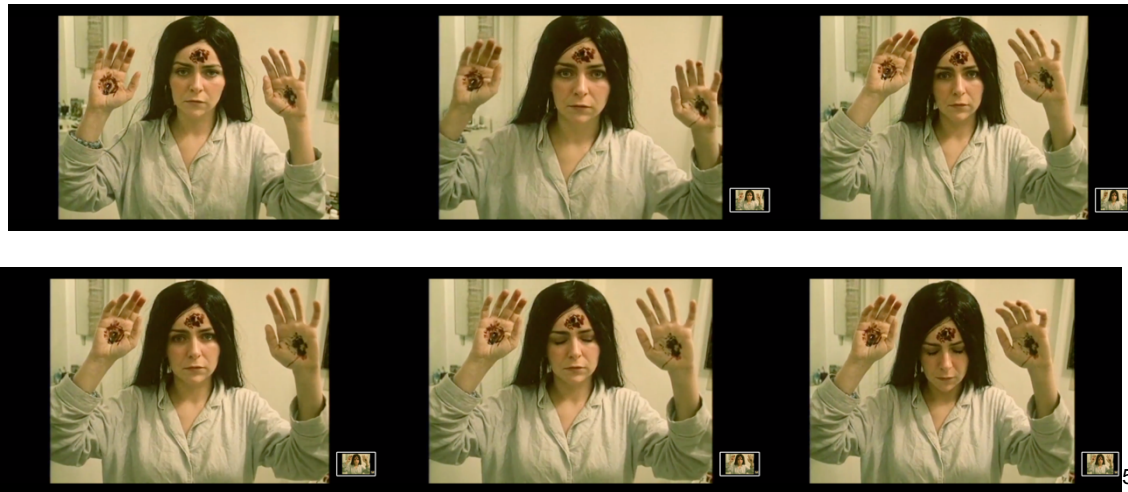
Santita

The original “Santita” (little female saint) was shot in Valverde, California in 2001, 8' 14". Spanish. Kodachrome 16mm film.

<https://vimeo.com/12116471>

[password: lobo1](#)

“Santita” tells the story of a young Latina girl who lives with her mother in the outskirts of Los Angeles, in a small town called Valverde. The women in Santita's family suffer from Stigmata until they lose their virginity and when they do, they immediately become pregnant and consequently single mothers. Santita, is now 15 years old, she suffers from Stigmata and even though she knows the destiny that awaits her if she has sex, she can't help but dream of love and being stigmata free. However, the villagers are very excited about the prospect of having a stigmatized/miraculous person in the village as they think it will bring tourists and investors to the area. Unfortunately for them, Santita decides to have sex regardless of the consequences and proudly joins her mother and grandmother in their tradition.



During my first year at CalArts I lived in Valverde, with my partner at the time Robert Fenz,⁵³ students had recommended this small town to us because of its proximity to CalArts and cheap rent. The people of Valverde, mainly Mexican immigrants reminded me of the people I had got to know five years earlier when I had worked as a scriptwriter for Telemundo⁵⁴, writing principally re-enactments of crimes committed by Latinos, our audience was principally the Latino community in the USA. During this time, I became fascinated with the cultural differences and similarities amongst the different Hispanic-American nationalities that coexisted as immigrants in the USA, under a common label “Latino”. Even though in Los Angeles most immigrants were Mexican, I felt our language, culture and immigrant status brought us all together. The village of Valverde reminded me of San Lorenzo del Escorial, where I attended Catholic school with a girl whose mother suffered from Stigmata and had tourists from all over Spain came to see her on Sundays as she became popular for her ‘miracles’.

⁵² Images extracted from a sequence of *Santita* (2001)

⁵³ For more about Robert Fenz please see: Brenez, Nicole. "Contemporary Experimental Documentary and the Premises of Anthropology: The Work of Robert Fenz." In *Experimental Film and Anthropology*, pp. 63-77. Routledge, 2020.

⁵⁴ Mexican/Hispanic Television Station broadcasted in the US.

Santita, comments on religion, gender, social conventions and sexual stereotypes such as the Whore and the Saint, within the Hispanic culture.

As in most of my work, the production required a quick trip to a dressing up store as this time I had to prepare for different characters, Santita, her mother and Jony, the neighbor, as seen below.



I carefully storyboarded the film, as it was shot on celluloid and I was afraid I would run out of stock, we used 10 rolls of 30.5 m each which meant 2' 45" per roll. The stock was Kodachrome 25 ISO and we pushed the film two stops in order to gain light, increase grain and contrast as well as color saturation, turning it into 100 ISO. This was an unusual way of working with Kodachrome 25 ISO (sensitivity to light).

My intention was to try and tell a very complex narrative, evoking a South American teleserie (Hispanic TV soap operas) but with no dialogue. We shot the film in our house using Robert's Bolex and a tripod (Robert did the camera) and one light which we only used for the night kitchen scene, we didn't record sound. We also shot outside the house and around Valverde, as seen below.



It took two days to shoot the film. Weeks later we received the workprint and I digitalized the footage, switching to digital as the price of working with film was prohibitive to me and an impediment in my production. I was frustrated by my lack of knowledge of the software and eventually took the film to Victoria English⁵⁵, but in spite of my effort I realized the film was not working, I was not able to convey such a complex narrative without dialogue. I incorporated a soundtrack made up of music by Hector Villa Lobos, Dinu Lipatti (piano) and Chopin (waltzes). My attempt to apply narrative to the structural form I was being taught at CalArts was not working. I put *Santita* aside for years thinking I would go back to it and re-edit or use it as part of another film. In time it became part of *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda* (2018). Ironically, the title changed from the *Santita* to *La Puta* (Little Saint to the Whore) as the protagonist follows her mother's example and gives up her virtue in order to become a single mother, viewed in her community as a "whore". This blending of *Santita* and her mother's destiny is represented by the superimposition of the ending scene where Santita assumes her mother's place in the kitchen table, drinking black coffee, as seen below.



⁵⁵ Editor, working in Los Angeles, California.

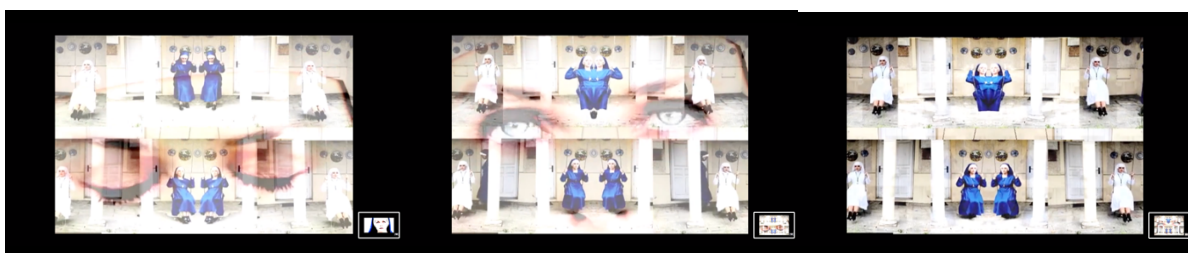


“**Monjamonja**” (nun nun nun) 2012. 2' 35”. Video HD. Spain

<https://vimeo.com/86619567>

password: lobo

This film is about a nun who falls in love with another nun from her convent. Whilst facing the gossip of her community and her immense sense of guilt, she tries in vain to stay away from her temptress, praying for forgiveness and redemption. However, in spite of her efforts her mind wanders, imagining her and her loved one together, freely expressing their love for each other in the convent.



In 2011, I returned to San Lorenzo del Escorial, where I lived with my family during our first years of exile in Spain and later attended boarding school^{56 57} During my time at

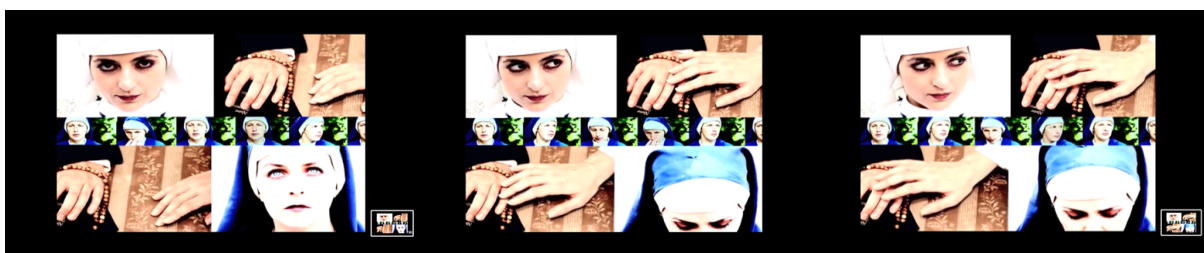
⁵⁶ Small village in the mountains, one hour away from Madrid, Spain.

⁵⁷ Carmelitas Descalzas de la Caridad de San Lorenzo del Escorial.

boarding school there were rumors of several sisters being in lesbian relationships. There was one in particular sister, Emilia, who made it her job to abruptly brake into our rooms hoping to find us engaged in something naughty, she was also in charge of making sure we were bathing with our bathing robes on, for it was a sin to wash naked.

When said Monja, monja, monja quickly in Spanish the word monja (nun) becomes jamón (ham), This was one of the games we use to play behind the sister's back, this film materializes the gossip of tumultuous love affairs that we imagined the sisters having. I shot the film in the house of my childhood friend, musician/composer Tocho Guisado who provided us with his aunt's habits, his cousins and friends from the village agreed to act as the nuns, Jose Manuel Silvestre, came from Madrid with his video HD camera and helped us shoot the film in Tocho's garden, two blocks away from the Covent. We shot everything in one day, all the women in the film had gone to catholic school and knew how nuns carried themselves in their habits.

I did not use a script; I only storyboarded a few key scenes in order to make sure that the love story would come across. We rehearsed several movements, positions and delicate gestures that would embody those of the nuns we had all known.

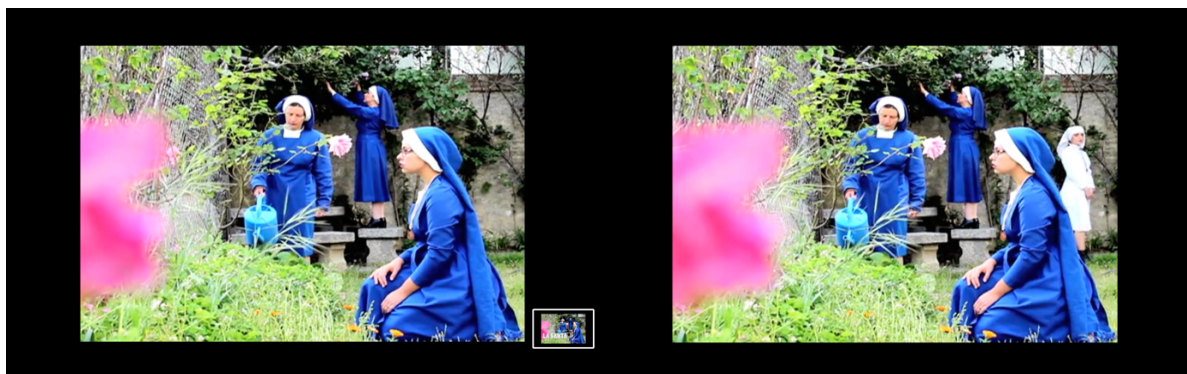


58

As in previous films I used the tableaux vivant, but this time I allowed for minimal movements to occur. My intention was to create the same slow perception of the passing of time I had experienced during my time in boarding school and juxtapose it

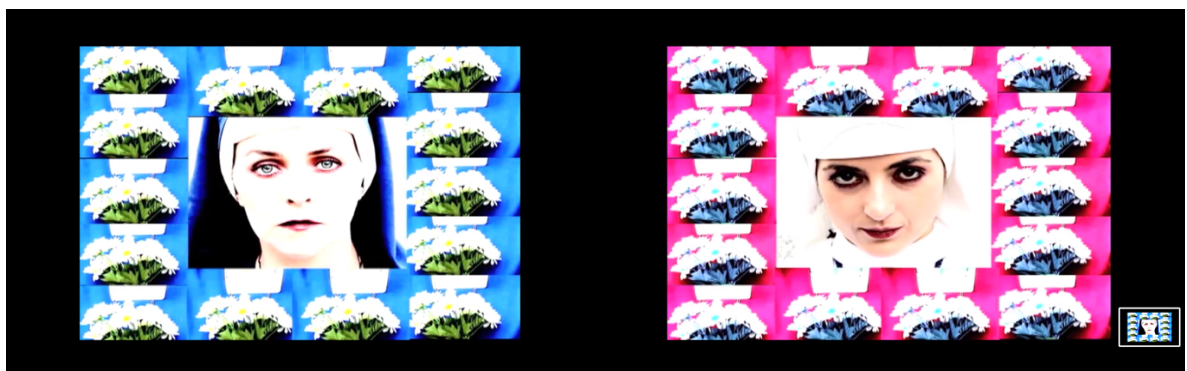
⁵⁸ Images extracted from *Monjamonjamonja* (2012)

with the fragmented day dream of our protagonist nun. In order to achieve this, I choreographed the nun's positions so they would hold a pose while our two protagonists would move, setting them apart from the scene. Our protagonist moves only when she is alone or with her loved one, but stands still when she is in a group as if she was trying to blend in and remain unnoticed, as seen below.



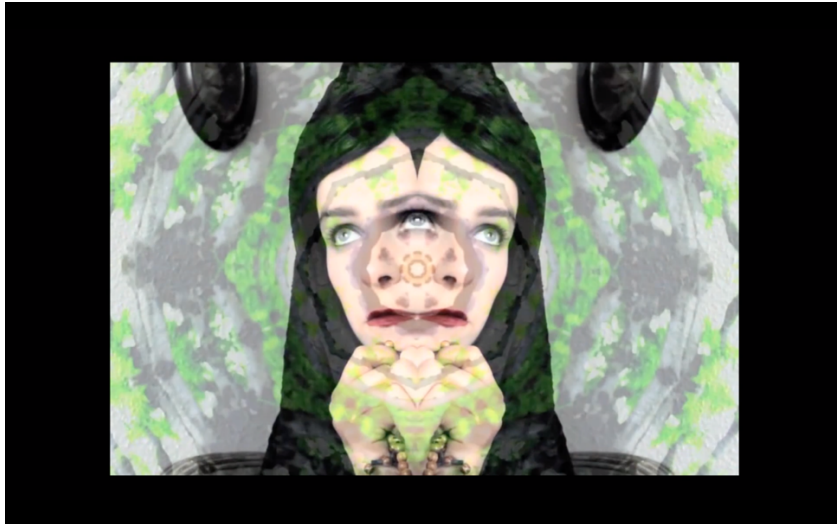
I looked for the minimal gestures that would express details of feelings I was looking for: praying, a hand reaching for another hand, a gaze...etc.

As most of my films *Monjamonjamonja* took shape in postproduction, through extreme saturation and contrast of the images and a series of video-collages used only to represent the protagonist day dreams and also to introduce her and her love interest, as seen below.



The film ends with the protagonist nun praying to stop having these sinful feelings, as she finally confronts the camera and by doing so, also confronting herself, as seen below.





“**Toros**” 2012. 3' 49". VideoHD. Spain

<https://vimeo.com/91496346>

password: lobo31

Toros, is the second film I made in 2012 in San Lorenzo del Escorial, Spain. Like *Monjamonjamonja*, I shot the film in Tocho Guisado's home and the film was screened at the first IVAHM.⁵⁹ The film was projected and accompanied by live classical musicians who interpreted the music composed and conducted by Tocho Guisado.

In order to recreate the widow's character, we used Tocho's mother's Manton de Manila⁶⁰, flamenco comb, a black dress and a black wig. This film is inspired by one of the many village mythologies - the sexual predator widow. As a child I heard many tales in the village about such widows. These women were frowned upon and unless they were very wealthy, they were excluded from the community, village gatherings, religious celebrations, attending bullfights, even church on Sunday.

Our widow was married to a bullfighter, and the village comes together to salute Olé's coffin as they pass by. She is walking behind her dead husband's coffin crying, at some

⁵⁹ International Video Art Festival, Madrid, Spain.

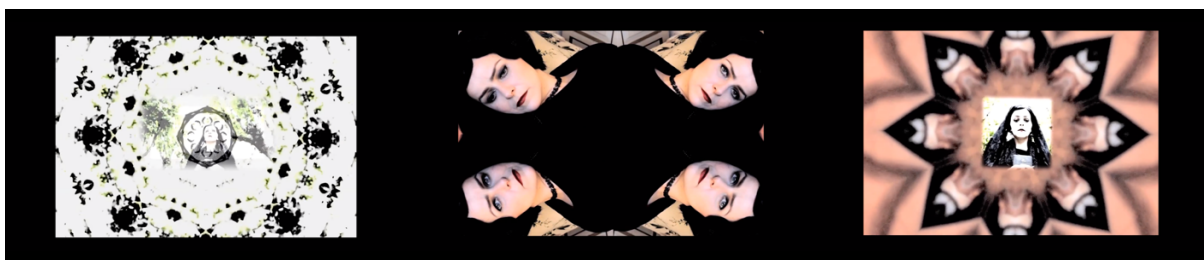
⁶⁰ Manila shawl

point she stops crying for him and starts to cry for herself, as she realizes that the same villagers that are cheering today, will condemn her tomorrow and become her jailers.



61

We shot the film in one day, using a Video HD camera. Most of the shooting was done inside Tocho's house, which remained decorated exactly as it was when we were children. I edited the film to a piece of music Tocho had composed. I used a similar approach to the color correction I had used in *MonjaMonjaMonja*, saturating color but instead of bringing out tonalities of blue, I reinforced the green and reds. I also contrasted and emphasized brightness. I incorporated kaleidoscope effects to represent her feelings of dizziness and also used superimpositions and split screens, as seen below.



The connections between *Santita*, *Monjamonjamonja* and *Toros* go beyond their form they share a similar camera style and post production processes, through color correction, superimpositions and split screens; but they are principally connected

⁶¹ Images extracted from *Toros* (2012) where we see the widow walking behind her dead husband's coffin.

through their thematic: three stories that portray the impact that religion and social conventions have over the Hispanic-American female experience.

When I set out to make *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda* I approached the task of editing them together in the same way that I recycled imagery and sounds that I find on the internet, by altering them in postproduction until they unite. In order to achieve balance in *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda*, I had to cut *Santita* down from 8'14" to 4'6". I did not have to alter the original edit of *Monjamonjamonja* nor *Toros*, but I did decide to change their soundtrack leaving Tocho Guisados's music for the original short formats and future presentations of our collaboration. In order to create a new soundtrack, I searched on the internet for Radio Romántica.⁶²

I recorded part of a program and used its jingle. I also found Antonio Molina's version of *Dos Cruces*⁶³ (two crosses) on the internet and decided this tormented love song would be ideal for the film. I thought wind sound could also bring them together and help the transitions from one to the other. I found a recorded mass from Andalucía, with a young woman singing *Ave Maria* with her guitar and used the song to accentuate certain moments throughout the film. In order to express the criticism and gossip these women were confronted to I also included a recording of an anonymous Cuban man saying 150 insults to women, that I found on the internet together with Spanish whispers and finally I also found in the internet a soundtrack for a porno film from the 1970's, the film was not titled. I extracted a few sections where we could hear their lovemaking of a man and a woman and used them in *La Puta* and *La Viuda*, but not in *La Santa*, as her fantasies did not include a masculine voice.

⁶² Romantic popular radio station from Chile.

⁶³ Antonio Molina, *Dos Cruces*, Vacaciones en España 1972.

Having the same sounds come in and out of the three films helped create a thread between them and bring attention to the similarities that exist amongst the three and obtain a religious, romantic and tormented mood.

The title for the new film had to represent them all, in order to think of them in this context I renamed them all: *Santita* (little female saint) became *La Puta* (the whore); *Monjamonjamonja* became *La Santa* (the saint) and *Toros* became *La Viuda* (the widow). Having these three adjectives describe our female characters also facilitates the understanding of the stereotypes they each represent.

Recycling footage from past films, bringing several films together in order to create a new film is constant in my practice. Some examples of this approach to work are; *Un Jardin Pour Eva* 2019, 2'32", Video HD/Mixt Media, English. which is composed by *Flashback Nuclear* (2014), 2'37", Video HD/Mixt Media, English, and the original *Un Jardin Pour Eva* (2014), 1'49", Video HD/Mixt Media, French. The two original videos were made during the same period of time in Barcelona and commissioned by

H2O Gallery for a group exhibition on the subject of the "Nuclear. Both films are composed of footage I recorded of myself together with imagery found on the internet. These films emphasize the video-collage aspect of my work and the simple, artisanal animations.

In *Flashback Nuclear* I cropped parts of my body together with images found on the internet and made a series of "nuclear" monsters: a woman-fish, a woman-alien, a mushroom cloud with woman's legs and eyes, as seen in the photos below.



I accompanied these images with fragments of Orson Wells' *War of the Worlds* ⁶⁵ and Charles Mingus' *Oh Lord don't let them drop that Atomic bomb on me.* ⁶⁶

The original *Un Jardin Pour Eva* spoke about the cycle of life represent by a cycle of a garden.



The version that unites both films, uses *Un Jardin pour Eva* as the introduction to what was *Flashback Nuclear*, as a before and after of a nuclear destruction.

Another video that also serves as an example to my approach to video-collage is *Hain 2018 3'54"* Selk'man, where I make video images composed of recording of myself together with imagery found online of the Selk'nam and Mapuche peoples of Chile. ⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Images extracted from *Flashback Nuclear (2014)*

⁶⁵ Welles, Orson, 1938. "The War of the Worlds".

⁶⁶ Mingus, Charles, 1962, *Oh Lord don't let them drop that Atomic bomb on me.* Oh Yeah! Atlantic.

⁶⁷ Images extracted from *Un Jardin Pour Eva (2014)*

⁶⁸ Mapuche and Selk'nam peoples are indigenous to Chile, the Selk'nam were exterminated and with them died their rich culture and language, I try to honour this language in the film by having the voice over of a man pronouncing some of their words. The Mapuche people in spite of being large in number are terribly recriminated by society and the state. I have indigenous blood from my mother side.



The images above are examples of these type of compositions and reflect the ways in which I play with super-impositions and colour-correction creating tableaux where the original image is almost unrecognizable. I also add texture and volume to these images digitally manipulating grain and altering it until I divide colour into the particles of the grain. I use exaggerated grain in order to express the distorted way in which I feel I represent Chile and its people, with the fogginess and unclarity of time and distance. The same occurs in my film *Loin encore plus Loin* (2015), where grain also helps me visually articulate the way in which I relate to Chile, fragmented, blurry almost as a fragment of the past.



⁶⁹ Images extracted from *Hain* (2019)

⁷⁰ Images extracted from *Loin, encore plus loin* (2015)



Loin (encore plus loin).

(Further, even further) 2015, 6'55", French. Video.

<https://vimeo.com/131236065>

This film revisits and builds on an earlier film, originally made for my thesis for my MFA in film and video from CalArts in 2002.

Electra Latina was a creative documentary inspired by Pasolini's *Notes towards an African Orestes* (1970).⁷¹ Pasolini's film had had a great impact on the way I thought of fiction and documentary, its crossroad and its potential. The freedom with which Pasolini takes us to 1970's Africa looking to explore the process of readaptation into a democratic system by filming the preparations for making a film version of the *Oresteia*⁷² set in Africa. The aspect of the film that most struck me was the way in which he takes us scouting for locations and actors with a voice-over of his thoughts – perhaps, this young woman will be my *Electra*. He attributes roles of the *Oresteia* to people in what seems to be a random way based on a certain gesture, facial expression or attitude that embodies the spirit of the character. The process of

⁷¹ *Notes towards an African Orestes*, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1970)

⁷²Trilogy of Greek tragedies written by Aeschylus in the 5th century BC, concerning the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, the murder of Clytemnestra by Orestes, the trial of Orestes, the end of the curse on the House of Atreus and the pacification of the Erinyes. Pasolini makes a parallel between the *Oresteia* and the Democracy in certain countries in the African continent in 1970.

finding and defining the essential gesture of the character is very similar to the way in which I work with Tableau vivant by holding statically the pose that I consider to be most demonstrative of what I'm trying to convey.⁷³

I also admired the looseness of the filmic style, filming notes meant there could be a roughness to the footage which also added to its veracity and documentary nature. Originally, my student film was going to be titled *Notes for an Electra Latina*; my initial intention was to apply the Oresteia, focusing on the beginning of Democracy to Chile in the same way Pasolini had done in *Notes towards an African Orestes*, where he makes a parallel between the Oresteia and the return to Democracy of certain African countries in 1970. I was going to be Orestes, returning to Chile to save my Electra, which would be interpreted by my family and together we would look for Athena and restore a true democracy in Chile. However, not long after my arrival to Chile my family made it clear that they didn't think I was Orestes, but Electra. They thought I struggled letting go of the past, our years in exile, the dictatorship, etc. I embraced their observation and changed my role in the film to Electra.

I edited the film in Los Angeles, and the post production process took nine months, while I was editing I was also working through family issues, this process served as therapy and helped me understand aspects of our life in exile and re-adaptation to Chile, that I had not addressed before. During the post-production process the film had become much more personal than I had anticipated and I eventually changed its title to *Electra Latina*.

⁷³ French for "living picture", is a static scene containing one or more actors or models. They are stationary and silent, usually in costume, carefully posed, with props and/or scenery, and may be theatrically lit.



Electra Latina: 2002 Video, 34'33" English/Spanish

<https://vimeo.com/375084831>

Password: ELECTRALATINA2019

I began shooting Electra Latina in Silver Lake, Los Angeles, which at the time, before its gentrification, was a Latino area. My intention was to narrate the Oresteia through a selection of tableaux vivant interpreted by Hispanic people of my area. Unlike in the Pasolini's film, I made them aware of their role and invited them to participate by posing for the camera (statically, as if I was taking a photo), and/or saying lines their characters would say. Below are some examples of people posing.



Once the narrative of the Oresteia was understood, I establish myself as Orestes, through intertitles and people addressing as Orestes. I was returning to Chile as

Orestes with the intention of saving Electra (my family) and finding Goddess Athena in order to initiate the process of Democracy.⁷⁴



75

I travelled to Chile during summer break and stayed for two months, I filmed in the streets of Santiago and Valparaiso, where I asked people passing by to participate in the film.



76

I also interviewed my family on several occasions. Early on in the making of the film my mother refused to engage in my game and call me Orestes assuming her roll of Electra, as I explain earlier, she believed I was the only Electra in our family because I was the only one who was still bitter about the dictatorship, Pinochet, our life in exile and had failed to re-adapt to Chile.

⁷⁴ Greek Goddess, daughter of Zeus, symbol of freedom and Democracy.

⁷⁵ Titles intruding me as Orestes, people saluting me as Orestes.

⁷⁶ Examples of participations of people in the streets of Santiago and Valparaiso.



77

In 1985 my father and brother were allowed back in Chile, my father returned immediately, three years later my mother and I did too. My parents and brother readapted to Chile without any difficulties, I on the other hand was not able to adapt, I had left Chile when I was only a few months old and had been raised in Europe, I did not understand Chilean mentally and felt like a foreigner in what was meant to be my country. My exile begins when my family's exile ended. Maybe that is why I was an Electra and not an Orestes in spite of all my efforts.

Having worked for National Television (year 2000) as a content advisor for the documentary and reportage department and during this time I had got to know the people who worked at the station who had access to archival footage from the military cut in 1970 and the protests that took place of Pinochet's arrest in London and his eventual return to Chile.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Extracts of the scene where my mother tells me I am not Orestes but Electra.

⁷⁸One of the editors of the National Television secretly gave me this footage.



79

I had been living in London for five years at the time of Pinochet's arrest; it felt like poetic justice that he would be arrested in the country which had given me the home he had taken away from me. I became involved in Chilean politics; I had always participated but as my parents' child not out of my own interest. This stirred up so many emotions I decided to return to Chile thinking this time I could make it work, if Pinochet was going to be judged I could finally be happy living in Chile, close to my family. This occurred in the year 2000, a few months after my arrival to Chile, Pinochet was sent back to Chile a free man, where he comfortably lived until his death in 2006. A few months after Pinochet's return to Chile I left Chile again, this time to live in Los Angeles California and Study at (CalArts). A year later I had returned to make a film about the Oresteia, however, I was not Orestes I was instead a bitter Electra.

I shot a total of 30 hours in Chile plus 7 in Los Angeles and 3 hours of archive footage I was given by National Television; I had 40 hours of footage, very limited knowledge of Final Cut Pro and was still trying to process a lot of the emotions the film had brought back to the surface.

⁷⁹ Images extracted from *Electra Latina's* sequence of protests from both sides during the time of Pinochet's arrest in London and his return to Chile.

It took nine months to edit the first cut of *Electra Latina*, I graduated with honours but the film always felt incomplete to me. It felt too personal and chaotic, perhaps this film would never feel completed to me as I have been unable to really resolve the issue it address, my readaptation to Chile. I showed it at Docopulis in 2003 and then kept it to one side, thinking one day I would return to it, re-edit it and make it into another film.⁸⁰

Many years later, in 2016 my daughter and I were living in Paris. I was a mother in the city where I had been a child; perhaps this made me look back at my childhood and the consequences of our exile in my life and now in my child's life. I remembered the final voice-over from *Electra Latina* - sometimes a moment in history affects the lives of many people who were not participants in that moment of history. I decided to try and re-edit *Electra Latina*, incorporating my daughter into the narrative. It finally felt as if I was ready or in a place in life where I could look back into it and make sense of it so that Eva (my daughter) could understand our trajectory, our family back in Chile which she doesn't see very often and also see members of our family who have passed away since I shot *Electra Latina*. I didn't want to use voice-overs or interviews, nothing that could add realism to the film. I wanted the film to feel like a dream, the timeless element of childhood's ghosts and simply evoke my feeling of exile and family, without a traditional narrative.⁸¹

I used the soundtrack from a scene from Raul Ruiz's *Diálogo de Exiliados* (1975), a film produced by my father and where all my family participated and performed.⁸²

⁸⁰ Documentary Film festival in Barcelona, Spain.

⁸¹ This feeling of exploration into the subconscious ghosts from childhood is present in several experimental film works however it is in the work of Louise Bourgeois and female surrealist artist such as Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, that I find it more purposefully addressed.

⁸² *Diálogo de Exiliados* (exile dialogue) 1975, Raul Ruiz.

The specific scene shows a conversation in French between an Algerian and a Chilean man, the Algerian man keeps asking the Chilean man where he comes from, presenting him many alternatives of countries -Do you come from Italy, Egypt, Romania? - to what the Chilean replies -No, further, even further-. At the end of the conversation between the two men, the Algerian man gives up – I'm, sorry I don't know where you come from- the Chilean replies – Further, even further- which in French is: *Loin, encore plus loin*, the title of the film. The soundtrack of *Loin, encore plus loin*, consists of this scene and a few seconds of sound from my daughter's music box with the song *La vie en rose*.⁸³

During the shoot of *Electra Latina*, I had asked several of my family members to hold photos to the camera and explain where we were and who was in each photo, as seen below.



I did the same with Eva and had her hold the same photos of our family everyone else had held for *Electra Latina*, together with new photos of her life, as seen below.

⁸³ Piaf, Edith, 1947, *La vie en Rose*. Columbia.



I later edited these images together with the images of the rest of the family and by doing this I felt I was visually making her part of the family.

I pushed contrast and grain, decreased saturation until achieving a black& white, which I pigmented at times through digital manipulation. This image distortion unified all the footage from different countries and times adding an uneasy feeling that helps better express my experience and views on exile in the past and the present.



Loin, encore plus loin, is a love letter to my family, a document in which Eva can see herself amongst her Chilean family, even if she doesn't know them very well and didn't get to meet some of them. She can have a sense of our past and understand why these family members have not been present to see her grow up. The film focuses on the domino effect exile has on families for many generations.



Politics & Eggs

2019. HD Video. France/ UK. 10' 50" English. B&W / Colour.

<https://vimeo.com/296862958>

Politics & Eggs was shot in the spring of 2016 in Paris, a few months before I moved to London, and it was made as a farewell film and homage to Paris – or at least to my version of Paris. This film represents my return to working with narrative and the incorporation of dialogue into my practice. Humour, intimacy and the absurd come together in this narrative, told from the perspective of a couple confronted by a ludicrous reality where eggs are the currency for self-worth. We get to know this reality through Mike's and Corine's peculiar breakup, as they talk about love, politics and of course about eggs, whilst they are sat in a Bistro.

The film is divided into three parts, Introduction 25": We meet Mike on his way to meet with Corine as he is attacked by an egg thief, performed by my daughter Eva, this sequence is shot handheld, with no sound.



⁸⁴The bistro scene 6' 5": We see Mike and Corine having a long conversation, which was originally a 30' long take and was cut down to 6' 5", through abrupt edits intending to add a feeling of passing of time. We took 3 takes of the entire dialogue, in postproduction I decided to only work with one of the takes. The scene was shot with fixed camera on a tripod and sound. I wanted the sound to have a similar quality to some bistro scenes of the Nouvelle-Vague films, notably Agnes Vardas' *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962) and Godard's *Maculin Féminin* (1966).^{85, 86}

The sound-man struggled to record the sound in the bistro, during postproduction I tried to clean it while maintaining enough ambient sound to disrupt the understanding what our characters were saying. I incorporated the voice-over of Corine and Mike voicing their thoughts during their meeting, inspired on Alain Renais' *Hiroshima, my love* (1959).⁸⁷



88

⁸⁴ Images extracted from the first scene of the film *Politics & Eggs* (2019)

⁸⁵ Varda, Agnes. *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962)

⁸⁶ Godard, Jean-Luc. *Maculin Féminin* (1966)

⁸⁷ Renais, Alan. *Hiroshima, my love* (1959)

⁸⁸ Images extracted from the Bistro scene of the film *Politics & Eggs* (2019)

During the bistro scene there are two short sequences meant to be flashbacks they are tinted in order to achieve a dreamlike quality and set them apart from the rest of the sequence. As in *Electra Latina*, I used playful interactions with people in the street as I asked them to hold the egg paniers and act as if they were theirs, as seen below.



The use of large titles over the image begins with Mike's and Corine's introduction, I made still-frames of the images where the titles would go and used them as superimpositions or video-collages. The titles (white, yellow and red) are there to reaffirm in a comical way what they have just said, as seen below.



The ending sequence, 3' 16". We see Mike leaving the bistro, running into the egg-thief again, a homeless man begging for eggs, several random people with egg paniers. When he arrives to the Pompidou's exterior esplanade, he has a conversation with Corine in the form of wall graffiti, as seen below.



89

As the conversation with Corine's graffiti ends a voice-over begins, Corine tells us about a letter she received from Mike a few days after their rendezvous. The tone of the film slightly changes and becomes more poetic. The use of superimpositions and video-collage echoes my previous films.



90

The last scene of the film takes place in front of the statue of Jean D'Arc, in Place des Pyramides 75001. This statue has been used as a political symbol by the right

⁸⁹ Images extracted from the scene at Pompidou from the film *Politics & Eggs* (2019), where Mike converses with Corine's life graffiti.

⁹⁰ Images extracted from *Politics & Eggs* (2019, examples of use of superimpositions and video-collage.

wing in France; I find this very unfair to Jean D’Arc and purposely reclaim her and free her from her political stigma in the film.⁹¹



92



93

Mike has a panic attack, while standing at the feet of Jean D’Arc, images become distorted as he battles to understand reality, his mental state is represented by movements in reverse, tinted images that remind us of the flashbacks from the bistro scene and hallucinations where he sees Corine, as seen below.



⁹¹Reviving a tradition from the Far-right leagues, on every May Day the Front Nationale holds an annual celebration at her feet.

⁹² Images extracted from the scene Jean D’Arc, from the *Politics & Eggs* (2019)

⁹³Images extracted from the scene where Mike offers his last egg in sacrifice to Jean D’Arc, *Politics & Eggs* (2019)

The film ends with a scene that goes from black and white, as Mike is holding his last egg and Corine's hand takes it away from him, we suddenly see Mike, confused, confronted to a reality, represented by real colour, as seen below.



The use of black and white in the film represents my romantic view of Paris, the Paris that was captured in the films of the Nouvelle Vague (1958-1968) as well as in Surrealist films such as Man Ray's *L'étoile de mer* (1928)⁹⁴ and Buñuel's *An Andalusian Dog* (1929)⁹⁵ which embody the spirit of Chilean Surrealist writers Vicente Garcia-Huidobro⁹⁶ and Teresa Wills Mont⁹⁷ as well as Nicanor Parra's Anti-poetry (antipoesía)⁹⁸ all great influences in my approach to narrative.

Politics and Eggs, marks my return to a more traditional approach to narrative form, after sixteen years of experimenting with images in order to express a story without

⁹⁴ Ray, Man. *L'étoile de mer* (1928)

⁹⁵ Buñuel, Luis. *An Andalusian Dog* (1929)

⁹⁶ Vicente Garcia-Huidobro, 1893- 1948, Chilean poet, he promoted the Avant-garde literary movement and created the *Creationism* literary movement. For further information on Huidobro: Camurati, Mireya. *Poesía y poética de Vicente Huidobro*. Vol. 27. Fernando García Cambeiro, 1980.

⁹⁷ Teresa Wilms Mont, 1893- 1921, Chilean poet and anarcho-feminist. For further information: Weintraub Yadlin, Marcela. "Melancolía y subjetividad femenina en el Diario íntimo de Teresa Wilms Montt." (2007).

⁹⁸ Nicanor Parra, 1914-2018, Chilean poet and physicist. He is considered one of the most influential poets in the Spanish language of the 20th century, often compared with Pablo Neruda. Creator of the literary movement *Antipoesía* (Antipoetry). For further information: Benedetti, Mario. "Nicanor Parra o el artefacto con laureles." *Los poetas comunicantes* (1972): 41-63.

dialogue. I was accepted into CalArts with a short film shot in London during the winter of 1998, film *Dear Clemence two points* (1998, 10' Video, colour. English)⁹⁹ a narrative about a Hispanic woman, murder, love and religion, with dialogue and voice-overs; however, once I was admitted instead of continuing to develop my narrative skills, I tried to fit into the school, and stayed away from dialogue. The Department of Moving Image at CalArts was renowned for being experimental, following the legacy of the American Avant-Garde with professors such as James Benning, whose Structuralist-Observational films shaped the distinctive style of the School. Within this milieu my work was perceived as being kitsch, Latino and Queer. This interpretation of my work confused me because of all the assumptions it implied, about my sexuality and well as the lack of acknowledgement of Hispanic-Latin-American popular aesthetics, which seemed strange considering we were only 50 km away from Mexico. Regardless, everyone else at CalArts was supportive of my artistic voice. During this period of time I made several films which explored themes around Hispanic- American culture identity, gender and religion; while trying to adapt my style to the structured and cinematic approach I was being taught at CalArts. I learned to consciously approach film as an artistic medium of experimentation and understood the political importance of re-claiming film as an art form, working with moving image for a purpose other than for economic gain. *Politics and Eggs* (2018) is the film that represents the completion of a full circle back to my starting point, narrative. It is after this film that I became more self-reflective of myself artistic trajectory and why, after its completion, it made sense to start the process of further analysis through a PhD by published work.

⁹⁹Matas Moris, Barbara. *Dear Clemence two points* (1998)

CONCLUSION

I began writing this commentary for my PhD by Published works to examine the processes, techniques and use of self-representation in my work. The analysis of my four films selected from the last ten years: *Chica Pop* (2010), *Loin, Encore Plus Loin* (*Further, Even Further Away*) (2016), *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda* (*The Whore, the Saint and the Widow*) (2018) and *Politics and Eggs* (2019) has enabled me to examine the ways in which these films deal with the politics of self-representation and their role in experimental film today. Writing this commentary has enabled me to find unsuspected connections amongst my films with respect to their modes of production, shooting strategies, post-production and use of self-representation.

In order to embark in this analysis, I first had to position my work amongst the work of other artists. Trying to define my practice was very challenging for me because my films are at the crossroad of experimental and narrative, comedy and tragedy, Hispanic American and European/ American cinema. The hybrid nature of my films felt as though my work didn't really belong within existing discourses. In a way my films were as exiled, unrooted and displaced as I am.

Writing this commentary has helped me situate my practice amongst other experimental filmmakers and visual artists. I now realize that my approach to narrative structure, low budget/artisanal modes of production and postproduction, appropriation of internet-imagery and sounds, recycling/ re-editing of my own work and most importantly the use of self-representation, evoke methods, techniques and

a general approach to filmmaking affiliates my work to that of other experimental visual artists.¹⁰⁰

Once I was able to define my work within the debates of experimental cinema history and started writing about each film, unsuspected connections began to emerge between the films such as their exilic quality.¹⁰¹ I realized how my experience of exile is always present in my films through the examination of cultural identities, displacement and gender - making these characteristics of my work part of my original contribution to knowledge.

The four films selected are low-budget films produced with an artisanal and intimate intention, which emphasizes their low-budget quality. The relevance of this aspect of my work has become much more evident to me through writing this analysis. Embracing and emphasizing the low-budget quality of my work is a conscious decision on my part to situate my work in an ironic opposition to mainstream cinema.

The writing of this commentary has also helped me discover concealed connections about the shooting process among these four films as they all share a similar approach to shooting, through static camera, long shots, natural or simple lighting, the use of the tableaux vivant and/or minimal movement. This way of shooting is also aligned with my intention to highlight the artisanal nature of my films and stay away

¹⁰⁰ Rees, Alan Leonard. *A history of experimental film and video*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.
Brenez, Nicole. *Cinémas d'avant-garde*. 2006.
Mulvey, Laura. "Feminisms: Women artists and the moving image." (2015).

¹⁰¹ Naficy, Hamid. *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton University Press, 2001.

from elaborate camera movements that might better simulate reality and real time. This form of shooting helps my films express a quality similar to the process of memory as if the film was a subjective recollection of the character.

The importance of post-production in my work has also become much more evident to me through this analysis which brings light into clear connections among the methods, techniques and editing process that all of my films have in common. My films are made at the post-production stage. What might take me a day or two to shoot can easily take months to then edit. My artisanal yet elaborate approach to post-production, includes strong alteration of images by colour correction, contrast, brightness, grain, titles and intertitles, superimpositions that exist in my work in an intention of emphasizing feelings. These superimpositions sometimes develop into video collages, which combine footage I have shot together with internet found imagery, at times creating naïve animations. Outside of the superimpositions I rarely use fades for transitions, the cutting is abrupt and the continuity of the film relies on the content, not the image.

I rarely use diegetic sound and even when I do, for instance in the café scene of *Politics & Eggs* (2019) I mix diegetic and non-diegetic sounds such as, life dialogue and ambient sound with voice overs. However, most of my work is made of sounds I find on the internet, which I later alter and mix until creating a unique soundtrack to co-exist with the images. The same approach to recycling images and sounds taken from the internet applies to my own work, *Loin, Encore Plus Loin* (Further, Even Further Away) (2016), *La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda* (The Whore, the Saint and the Widow) (2018) are examples of how I revisit old work and films to re-use the footage

in a different context and looking to create a new film, I re-edit it and give it another life.

This commentary has brought focus on the exilic nature of my films that are made from the perspective of an exiled; foreign and autochthonous to the Hispanic-American, European and North-American cultures in equal parts. They observe cultural identities, emphasize their popular aesthetics while examining gender stereotypes, from the perspective of the outsider.¹⁰²

I now realize that my experience of exile and failed re-adaptation to my country of origin, Chile, is present in all of my films; as is my use of self-representation which also draws from my familial experience of living in exile and my father (Percy Matas) and Raul Ruiz's series of films about the Chilean exile in France (1973-1978).¹⁰³

These films were performed and made by Chilean exiles and their families and became an historical document of Chilean exile in France during the 1970s. This approach to making films in the first person greatly influenced my own practice as it made me aware of the politics of self-representation.

I write, shoot, edit and perform in my films; my intention to underscore connections between the personal experience and politics represents an example of how self-representation can still establish the personal as political in film.¹⁰⁴ Reclaiming self-representation as a powerful political tool even in our time of social media's exaltation of the visual, the personal still remains political.

¹⁰² Naficy, Hamid. *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton University Press, 2001.

¹⁰³ *Los Transplantados (The Uprooted)* 1975, Percy Matas.
Dialogo de Exiliados (Exile Dialogue) 1975, Raul Ruiz.

¹⁰⁴ Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal is Political." (1969).

At a personal level, analyzing my films retrospectively has helped me to recognize the continuity and progression in my work, providing me with a clearer idea of where my practice needs to go in the future. Gaining this knowledge and new perspective on my practice has enabled me to appreciate the importance of the narrative element in my work and become aware of the exilic and feminist intrinsic qualities of my films, which I look forward to push further in my future films together with the modes of production, methods and techniques which emphasize the artisanal condition of my practice.

This analysis contributes to a wider understanding of exilic and diasporic cinema; as a second-generation exile, correlating my films to the exilic experience evidence that exilic, diasporic and accented film go beyond the first generation of exiles and is at the heart of the practice of the generations after. The analysis of these four films serves as a platform from where to engage in a broader discussion about the politics of self-representation in experimental and avant-garde film and video today, as an artistic action with the political intention of preserving the personal as political.

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List of illustrations

Description	Page Number
1-Poster of Los Transplantados (The Uprooted) 1975, Percy Matas.	9
2-Poster of Dialogo de Exiliados (Exile Dialogue) 1975, Raul Ruiz.	9
3- Title of film Chica Pop (2011)	13
4- Images from film <i>3 Cuadros Musicales (Three Musical Tableaux)</i> (2010)	14
5 - Images from film from <i>Elephant Legs</i> (2002)	16
6- Images from film from <i>Chica Pop</i> (2011). Titles to each sections of the film	18
7- Images from film from <i>Chica Pop</i> (2011). Section 3	20
8- Images from film from <i>Chica Pop</i> (2011). Section 2	21
9- Images from film from <i>Chica Pop</i> (2011). Section 1	22
10- Images from film from <i>Chica Pop</i> (2011). Section 1. Wiphala flag.	24
11- Images from film from <i>Chica Pop</i> (2011). Section 1	24
12- Images from film from <i>Chica Pop</i> (2011). Section 0	25
13- Title from film from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018)	26
14- from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) Titles of sections	26
15- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) Stigmata sequence	29
16- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) Characters	30
17- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018). Location	30
18- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) ending sequence	31
19- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) La Santa	32
20- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) La Santa. Double exposure	32
21- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) La Santa. Video collage	33
22- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) La Santa. Beginning sequence	34
22- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) La Santa. Protagonist	34
23- Images from <i>La Puta, La Santa y La Viuda</i> (2018) La Santa. Ending sequence	35
24- Image from <i>Toros (Bulls)</i> (2012)	36
25- Image from <i>Toros (Bulls)</i> (2012). Mourning sequence	37

26- Image from <i>Toros (Bulls)</i> (2012). Double exposure and video collage	37
27-Images from <i>Flashback Nuclear</i> (2014)	40
28-Images extracted from <i>Un Jardin Pour Eva</i> (2014)	40
29-Images from <i>Hain</i> (2019)	41
30-Images from <i>Loin, (Further even further)</i> (2015)	41
31-Images from <i>Electra Latina</i> (2002) Title	42
32-Images from <i>Electra Latina</i> (2002). Los Angeles	44
33-Images from <i>Electra Latina</i> (2002). Stablishing Orestes	45
34-Images from <i>Electra Latina</i> (2002). Santiago de Chile	45
35-Images from <i>Electra Latina</i> (2002). Mother sequence	46
36-Images from <i>Electra Latina</i> (2002). Archive footage, Chile	46
37-Images from <i>Electra Latina</i> (2002). Family photos to camera	49
38-Image from <i>Loin Encore Plus Loin (Further even further)</i> (2015)	49
39-Images from <i>Loin Encore Plus Loin (Further even further)</i> (2015). Family photos	49
40-Images from <i>Loin Encore Plus Loin (Further even further)</i> (2015)	50
41-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019).	51
42-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Beginning sequence	52
43-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Bistro sequence	53
44-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Paris street sequence	53
45-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Intertitles	53
46-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Paris streets	54
47-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Double exposure and video collage	54
48-Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Jean D'Arc scene	55
49- Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Egg sacrifice	55
50- Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Panic attack	55
51- Images from <i>Politics & Eggs</i> (2019). Ending sequence	56

