

From where do you look at the sun? 17.09–05.11.23

A project organized by Helvetropicos

Artists:

Diego Felix de Atucha Elsesser
Leonardo Bürgi Tenorio
Veronica Casellas Jimenez
Sofia Durrieu
Patricio Gil Flood
Vicente Lesser
Lisa Lurati
Ramiro Oller
Gina Proenza
Jorge Raka
Sergio Rojas Chaves
Paulo Wirz

Curator:

Adriana Dominguez

¿Desde dónde miras el sol? is the first collective exhibition organised by Helvetropicos, a platform created in 2022 to activate the exchange between artists living in Switzerland who share a genealogy of affection¹ with Latin America, and at the same time, to enhance the collaboration among art spaces, platforms and artists located in different Cantons. With their initiative, Helvetropicos set in motion a process of reflection and collaboration between 12 artists, a curator and the team of CAN— who generously opened its doors to the first public event of the collective.

The exhibition is based on a simple idea: “asking each artist to close their eyes and direct their imagination towards their own west, thinking of other possible ways of knowledge, evoking without specific location”. At first glance, it would seem that *¿Desde dónde miras el sol?* is an exhibition that asks that we orient ourselves. If we are to answer the question in the title, we would have to identify a center, position ourselves, and from there, look at the sun. We would have to know where we stand, and which direction we are facing towards. Except that it doesn't. This exhibition is in fact the opposite: a proposal for disorientation and re-orientation.

The first element of disorientation, because of the context we find ourselves in, is the emphasis on the relation with Latin America: exhibitions of this kind do not take place often in Switzerland. Even more disorienting, is the fact that the exhibition is not about Latin America (a highly questioned name, by the way) or about “Latin American Art”, because such a thing does not exist. What exists is a group of people who carry two or more cultural identities in their bodies, who share languages, affections and cultural codes associated with Latin America, and who choose to address in their works—or not— aspects of their personal histories or topics related to that particular territory. As artist Pablo Helguera said, “nationality is not a content”.

Interested in diverse and for the most part unrelated topics, each artist looks at the sun from a different position. However, regardless of where they stand, or if they look at two suns instead of one, no one can escape the fact that the sun sets on the west. Cardinal points have a re-orienting effect, and yet, they can also be rather disorienting. Specially when we think about the division of the world in “East and West”. If Europe is The West and Asia is The East, the rest of the world is invisible, or doesn't exist. This division is clearly outdated, but it still permeates our understanding of the world. And far from being the west, The West (which now includes all the rich countries in the world) is in fact the center.

As Sarah Ahmed explains in her book *Queer Phenomenology*, “orientations depend on taking points of view as given” (having a center). And if social and political relations are arranged spatially, as she argues, re-negotiating them requires disorientation. That is why the genealogy of affection with Latin America is important in this exhibition, because it points to a re-negotiation of the space. *¿Desde dónde miras el sol?* proposes that we lose the center and instead, look at multiple centers. That we disorient and re-orient ourselves, but never in a straight line.

1. In the context of this exhibition, “Genealogy of affection” means having a close relation to the territory known as Latin America as the result of either migration or family ties.

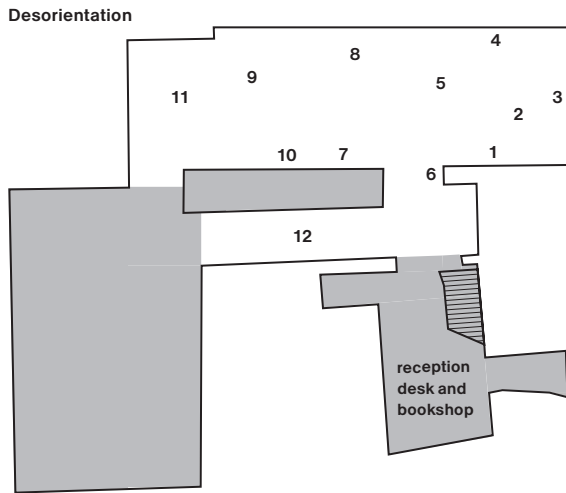
In order to do this, the exhibition is thought as a journey that goes from disorientation to re-orientation and back. Located in the area named “Desorientation” are the works related to disorientation. Looking or interacting with this group or works calls for displacement, whether because they demand that bodies move in ways which are not usual in a museum, or because they question who or what has the right to inhabit certain spaces (in nature or in society). These works address the construction of otherness, point to the existence of worlds beyond the physical world, look at familiar things from non-familiar angles, question notions such as “the exotic” and purposely mix or overlap categories in order to highlight paradoxes.

In parallel, the space named “Reorientation” contains the group of works that carry movements towards re-orientation. These works erase the margins between the so-called centers and peripheries. They inscribe new symbolisms to objects or mechanisms of our social and political everyday life such as furniture, construction materials or money. They challenge cultural stereotypes and even objects themselves. They make reference to rituals and to the collective, bringing forward ideas of how to interact socially and politically in different ways.

There is no right or wrong way to visit the exhibition, no clear beginning or end. The movement can go from disorientation to re-orientation or the other way around. Further, disorientation and re-orientation are not actions contained in themselves, so aspects of both are to be found in all the works. Visitors are encouraged to explore different journeys through the exhibition and decide for themselves which works have a more disorienting or re-orienting effect for them.

Changing directions, or deviating from the path, means not knowing where one will end up. And such is the intention of *¿Desde dónde miras el sol?: “risking departure from the straight and narrow [path] makes new futures possible”*. If we give up the idea of the center, all the deviations could point to new ways of inhabiting spaces together. After all, what brings the works and participants of this exhibition together is that we are all situated in this territory, in Switzerland. And this territory is as much a part of us, as we are a part of it.

–Adriana Domínguez



1. Lisa Lurati
owl's eyes, stage for the night, 2023
cyanotype et acrylic on linen, patinated bronze, brick

- Leonardo Bürgi Tenorio
mirando el reflejo de nuestra sombra, 2023
2. *el desierto*
aquarium, sand, pencil drawing, soldering drawing, railways, collage, indoor plants, neophyte plant (*opuntia, crassula, kroenleinia, mammillaria, echeveria, parodia*)
3. *la selva*
terrarium, soil, collage, light, indoor plants, neophyte plants (*rumohra, moss, philodendron, robinia, spathiphyllum, peperomia, pilea, piper, tillandsia*)
4. *la selva*
terrarium, soil, pencil drawing, soldering drawing, light, indoor plants, neophyte plants (*rumohra, moss, aillanthus, bromelia, pilea, canistropsis, peperomia, piper, tillandsia*)
5. *el lago*
aquarium, sand, pencil drawing, neophyte plant (*eichhornia*)
6. *el humedal*
aquarium, sand, soldering drawing, indoor plants, neophyte plants (*cyperus, salvinia, pistia*)
7. *la selva*
aquarium, soil, pencil drawing, soldering drawing, indoor plants, neophyte plant (*pachira, calathea, monstera, aillanthus, robinia, tradescantia, spathiphyllum, rumohra, copper solder*)
8. Gina Proenza
After the revolution, who's gonna pick up the garbage?, 2023
rope, wiper motor, steel, fabric

- Ramiro Oller
Skinny angel of dead tongues, 2023
polyurethane painting, steel
9. *Almost II*, 2023
paper, graphite, spray
10. Sofia Durrieu
Mise-en-abyme, 2022
wood, steel, cotton, camera, cotton paper, ink, copper, acrylic
11. Sergio Rojas Chaves
Has anyone tried this?, 2023
wood, paint

About the artworks

Diego Felix de Atucha Elsesser

Me gusta acá (how to say goodbye and stay for dinner), 2022-2023

Diego's work was originally inspired by two stereotypes: the figure of The Gaucho (the southern version of the cowboy) and the artisan, a nomad that travels selling objects, found or self-produced, that he/she places on top of a blanket. Mixing elements of both, the artist created an installation that puts in crisis both stereotypes and objects themselves. Most of the things are not what seem to be: a blanket made of latex, with a reproduction of the artist's finger in plaster, painted with coffee wine and iodine, featuring a ring made of resin, cow meat and bronze.

Leonardo Bürgi Tenorio

mirando el reflejo de nuestra sombra, 2023

Leonardo's installation consists of six terrariums in which he creates micro-landscapes, invoking a variety of human fantasies of control, desire and the need of connecting. The vegetation in the terrariums includes common exotic indoor plants, as well as neophyte plants which are considered invasive, pointing to the contradiction of specific foreign flora being valued and romanticised in contradiction of the one categorised as a threat. A tension that reflects contemporary discourses around globalisation.

Veronica Casellas Jimenez

Non-ordinary states of reality, 2023

The sound installation by Veronica is inspired by the “whistling vessel”, a clay instrument original to the pre-Columbian Andes region, capable of mimicking the sounds of nature. While making her vessels, Veronica was surprised to hear the sounds of her native Caracas at dusk: “a cacophony of creatures singing together”. confronted with a reading that she had not considered -tackling the complicated legacies and relationships between the pre-columbian lineage of the instruments and the Swiss context- she chose to literally cover the vessels with Banana leaves to protect them from view, as it is done with certain foods in Venezuela, America and tropical regions. This shield offers an opportunity to experience complicated histories through other lenses and to appreciate different systems of knowledge while acknowledging the ones we have been hegemonized by.

Reorientation



13. Veronica Casellas Jimenez
Non-ordinary states of reality, 2023
clay, banana leaves, motion sensor, rope, wood, speakers, amplifier, raspberry PI A 3+ mixer, cables
14. Jorge Raka
Robert Smithson's Periphery, 2023
various material
15. Patricio Gil Flood
Sistema mundo, 2023
wood, paint, prints
16. Vicente Lesser
(El diablo va a la pega para esconderse en los escombros del presente), 2023
aluminium, metal, video screens
17. Paulo Wirz
Embarcação, 2023
wood, mirror, personal objects, found objects
18. Diego Felix de Atucha Elsesser
Me gusta acá (how to say goodbye and stay for dinner), 2022-2023
Reproduction of authors left pinky finger in plaster, painted with coffee, wine and iodine, ring made of resin, cow meat and bronze on latex, trackpad drawings on 80s three-hole scholar paper sheets and latex binding, the possibility of a stranger singing a song on the opening night.

Sofia Durrieu
Mise-en-abyme, 2022

Mise-en-abyme deals with the construction of the figure of the hystérique in 19th century France. The work aims to reveal how otherness is isolated and pinned down through rationalizations and classifications, and consequently, to address the system of cruelty –based on fear– by which our culture approaches what is not understood. Instead of consuming the image of the other from a safe distance –flattened and reduced– the use of a popular iconographic-related device (the peep through broad) invites the visitor to insert their own body into the portrait of the hystérique, to adopt its contortions, and take the place of *the other*.

Patricio Gil Flood
Sistema mundo, 2023

Based on a theory that tries to explain global interactions, the graph in Patricio's work is a constellation of elements towards a speculative poetic approach to paper money and its material, its mode of production and its circulation. The work investigates the relationship of paper money with our everyday life, its myths, uses and poetic speculations, in order to construct a non-linear narrative of an object that seems to be disappearing and being replaced by other, even more invisible means.

Vicente Lesser
(El diablo va a la pega para esconderse en los escombros del presente), 2023

Bricks have been an important and recurring motif in Vicente's investigation and work. They are the basis of all construction. At the same time, carry a symbolism for Chile's political history: "El Ladrillo"(The Brick) is the reference book that was used to develop the ultraliberal theory for the authoritarian government of Pinochet, but it is also a self-defence object that has been used in riots. The lever, on the other hand, associated in this work with a Mapuche legend about two snakes (earth and ocean) that fight each other, as a metaphor of revolution and contra-revolution.

Lisa Lurati
owl's eyes, stage for the night, 2023

Lisa's work is a linen canvas made using cyanotype, a photographic printing technique. The subject of the work is an excerpt of an imaginative forest, where the flora has been freed from its typical verticality. The image was inspired by a memory of a recent trip to the Colombian Amazon, and also takes references from the artist's work in an agricultural project in Ticino. The bronze elements resemble eyes, but are also a pair of suns set inside galactic spirals, announcing the existence of a reality parallel to ours, a world outside of this world.

Ramiro Oller
Skinny angel of dead tongues and Almost II, 2023

Using the mask of cuteness, Ramiro's works give access to an experience where what at first sight seems simple and obvious, becomes complex and disorienting. His big format sculpture and the drawing accompanying it, open ambiguous forms and camouflaged figures that play with the representation of what has been called "nature". Repeating itself in the works are organs such as the tongue: a reference both to the spoken word, but also to its writing (in the form of drawing).

Gina Proenza
After the revolution, who's gonna pick up the garbage?, 2023

A jumping rope is mechanically activated by a windscreen wiper motor in Gina's piece. The walls on which it hangs have replaced the arms and hands that turn it. Referring to the almost ritualistic game of the playground, the artist also evokes a certain geography of affects. Originally created to be exhibited in Pristina (Kosovo), the work was designed to fit into a piece of hand luggage, and to be able to unfold and adapt to any type of space, referring to the two points of attachment needed to set up a hammock and inhabit a place.

Jorge Raka
Robert Smithson's Periphery, 2023

Jorge's work plays with and questions the absurdity of the dichotomy of center and periphery. In his installation, mosquitos become the symbol of peripheral landscapes, accompanied by hoses, canisters with stagnant water and plants used to keep the insects away. A big mosquito spiral in the canvas makes reference to Robert Smithson's iconic Land Art work *Spiral Jetty*, commenting on the peripheral practice of these artists, which today belongs to the art history canon. At the same time, the spiral makes reference to the rural towns where dengue is a health threat.

Sergio Rojas Chaves
Has anyone tried this?, 2023

In his installation, Sergio presents a series of wood carvings depicting avocado bonsais along with the cities where they are located. The images are taken from photographs uploaded to online Bonsai forums where tips and techniques are shared. While most attempts at dwarfing avocado are futile due to the plant's resilience, the artist presents the images with an aesthetic resembling souvenirs to address the desire of bringing "the exotic" and "the tropical" into domestic environments in western societies, transforming crops into house plants and consumer objects.

Paulo Wirz
Embarcação, 2023

Simple but familiar structures, reminiscent of furniture are a recurring feature in Paulo's sculptural work. His interest in these common objects lies in the symbolic power that they hold: how they permeate our imaginary, our everyday rituals and the architecture of self. In *Embarcação*, the artist displays a multitude of objects on top of a somewhat familiar structure that reminds of doors, windows and wardrobes, rendering it uncanny. Bottles, necklaces and lamps, among other elements, hint to handcrafted or ready-made objects that could be found in Syncretic, mostly Afro-Brazilian, religious practices, blurring the margins between centers and liminal spaces.

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