

PERSONA CURADA

presents

Ai Miz Yu

a group show with artists Marisabel Arias (Peru), Ingrid Pumayalla (Peru, 1989) & Sofia Salazar Rosales (Ecuador, 1999)

curated by GISSELLE GIRON
for The Others art fair.

DONDE ESTAS CORAZON

In 1995, the Colombian singer Shakira sang, “Where are you, heart?”. The translation for the song has been a matter of discussion. Whether she was singing to a lover taking the persona of “the heart” or whether she was singing to her actual bodily organ remains a mystery. Whether the former or the latter is a significant difference as it would most likely change the sense in which to translate the title. If it referred to a significant other, it would read in English: “Where are you, sweetheart?”. Whereas, if referring to the organ, it would read “Where are you my heart?”. Whilst the music video would suggest that “corazón” is a real person, I like to think she was singing to her estranged heart, as it remained missing. In the song, Shakira recounts the places where she has looked for her heart. It always seemed to me that the song worked as an attempt to find the coordinates of her heart. A shot in data buffering, if you will, for her emotional intensity and figuring out how she feels about things. Emotional intensity brings me to write this text, as I seek to explain the many conflicting emotions and reflections on economies of affection that arise in looking at the work of Marisabel Arias, Sofia Salazar and Ingrid Pumayalla. Their work left me questioning the importance of knowing where the heart lies, moving towards or away from, and how this significantly impacts the way we construct economies of feeling.

Marisabel, Sofia and Ingrid are interested in the commercial objects’ emotional and economic lives, expressing their affection towards the things they produce through letters and songs composed for them. Their works are interested in the contradictions and complexities that arise in making and working with these now displaced objects in an environment and context relatively foreign to the one they “originally” emerged from. Each object refers to object-making and object-handling processes from Latin America. It is no surprise that the three artists have explored intense periods of craft making in acrylic resin, wax, knitting and singing, highlighting the role of knowledge transmission and memory through orality and language. Ai Miz Yu presents fragments from three installations, *nike, neki, nekii, niikee, naik, naiik, naki* by Marisabel Arias; *Cantos Matrios* by Ingrid Pumayalla; and *Somos contextuales y sentimentales* by Sofia Salazar. Their work collectively functions as an emotional compass and feeling recalibration after processes of displacement. In presenting these commercial, celebratory and healing rite languages, Ai Miz Yu hopes to be a snapshot of the contradictions which result in working with objects which coexist in different economic paradigms

MISTRANSLATE MY CORAZON

Physics understands the concept of “displacement” as a quantity that offers information about an object’s overall change in position. The exercise of art-exhibition making is often familiar with the object’s contextual change. Even when

exhibited in the same place where it was produced, the *thing* constantly changes its position. Exhibition making, however, is often at odds with the very nature of art history. This discipline fights to conserve the physical integrity and memory of the object, resisting its displacement and always searching for an “original” intention. Perhaps a better lens to understand the nature of an object at the mercy of displacement would be to look at them through the tenets of trade and commercial activity. The essence behind trade relies on exchanging objects and understanding that they will travel the farthest that a producer and a consumer sometimes can. At every stop of an object’s journey lies diverse communities, contexts and affectionate relationships. The commercial *thing* embraces life in constant resignification and negotiates affection amongst the communities that coexist with them. Despite its multiple roles in diverse contexts, the commercial object is decidedly local, in the sense that they account and embody localised signifiers, sometimes in the form of imagery and others in the form of language.

“Ai Miz Yu” is the phonetic version in Spanish, writing the English phrase “I miss you”. This eponymous phrase in English-speaking media, as many other phrases, brands and famous fictional characters, have homophones counterparts in different contexts. Sometimes these homophones are considered, at best, mistranslations and, at worst, copies of their “English” original counterparts. The informal commercial activities that inform these small-scale trade businesses in Latin America have produced an array of “fake” originals and mistranslations of famous brands behind the largest multinational corporations, like Nike, Adidas, Coca-Cola, etc. They are originals because the object’s form is usually different from the array of objects of the “original” product they refer to most of the time. In any way, they live in constant tension with its counterpart and respond to an economy of tense contradictions. What happens when artists produce objects under the paradigm of popular mottled economies, and this object is presented and circulated with contemporary art audiences? Its tensions are only ever so more highlighted by existing in the neoliberal systems of contemporary art markets. And how do these contradictions become visible? The methods and languages of affection behind the emotional investment which each object reflects allow us to look into these conflicting economic paradigms.

COMMERCIAL TRANSACTIONS AND EMOTIONAL EXCHANGES

In Latin America, the market and small-scale businesses are neuralgic centres of the creation of local identities. In this sense, locality exists both as an attitude towards economy and an imagined sense of community. In *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies* (2017) [2014], Argentinian theorist Verónica Gagó has analysed how neoliberalism operates remarkably differently in Latin America. Not only propelled by large multinationals and governmental-supported corporations, but neoliberalism in Latin America also depends on small-scale, street-based and largely informal commercial activities conducted by migrant workers. In this way, neoliberalism in Latin America exists as a tense contradiction between legality and illegality, individualism and community. In this same way, unravelling in a paradox is that perspectives from diverse artists from Latin America, who now see their own sense of “locality” challenged and nourished by their current workspaces in Europe.

Veronica’s theory on neoliberalism in Latin America draws from two terms, baroque and mottled, coined and understood by Latin American thinkers Bolívar Echeverría and René Zavaleta Mercado. Baroque refers to the architecture, art, music and dance style that emerged in the Spanish and Portuguese empires

and would constitute the art of resistance in the colonies. Mottled refers to the multiple territories, logics and temporalities which are the backbone of life and political organisation in Latin America. In the contemporary arts, much thought has been given to the baroque's side of Veronica's theory as it stands a double-edged sword for both aesthetics and distribution, as well as a mode of production. Whilst Verónica focuses on studying the massive illegal market La Salada in Buenos Aires as a point of departure. She mainly speaks about migrant communities from Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru and political attitudes towards survival and community-making that arise from the questioned borders of migrant experiences. Her study overthrows the neatness of national state sovereignty in a country's concept and sheds light on promiscuous organisational modes of small-scale Latin American informal markets.

Rather than adopt clean-cut definitions which allow us to "understand" popular economies in Latin America, I would like to recognise the further complications which emerge from growing up with a very distinct informal understanding of a promiscuous commercial object in Latin America and making objects for contemporary art audiences outside Latin America. I would like to draw from the concept of "mottled" from Veronica's understanding of neoliberalism. As Gago explains, mottled economies "are structured by antagonism", which develop from moments of tension and struggle. The reproduction of these specific types of economies depends on a complete alteration on modes of domination and exploitation that have had a complete change to "the organisation of daily life, the erosion of distinctions between workplace and household, between home and the street."

THE BURDEN OF FEELING AND DESIRE SHORTAGES

nike, neki, nekii, niikee, naik, naiik, naki was made by Marisabel Arias, an artist born in Lima, Peru but currently working in Basel, Switzerland. Her project consists of installing seven objects, each of them taking the form of a birthday cake made out of acrylic resin, supported by a plastic Tupperware container and holding on top a candle that reads the phrase "Naik or Never". The candle phrase and title of the installation allude to the pirate markets in Lima, and the way language is transformed and altered through spoken word. "Naik" is the phonetic word for the corporation Nike, Inc. Marisabel's phrase "Naik or Never" emerges from the colloquial expression "now or never". She replaced the *now* for the *naik*, hence becoming a reflection on the present". A present tense that has forever been imprinted by phrases and commercial objects which surround us. Whilst the choice of a cake emerges from the development of the phrase in a candle form, explains the artists, the cake also symbolises the slang derogatory word used in Latin America and Spain to refer to lesbian women. The result is an intense contradiction in which popular informal economies move. They are vitalistic in that they manage to thrive under lack of legal support, in this case extracting the recognisable nature of the brand Nike whilst not being part of the corporation. But these are also usually communities that reproduce homophobic discourses within family-led enterprises, as they see it as a threat to its reproduction. The cakes and melted candles on top reveal the economic party's afterglow of a life lived in the dark and ultimately revealed to us. Marisabel wrote a letter which accompanies the cakes. This piece of writing shows the intensity of the longing for her cakes to be accepted in this displacement.

Ai Miz Yu presents two cakes that form part of this more complex installation, each with its respective Tupperware support and candle. Whilst it has been incredibly hard thinking that each cake could exist in its own universe, we decided to in-

clude just a pair. In this way, they at least would have some company. Throughout the process of making these cakes, Marisabel often asked me, why do we *feel*? I have to recognise that feelings are often a burden. They are an intense strength that acts as a daily compass, dictating how you will feel throughout the day and conditioning the lens you use to look at your surrounding relationships. But feeling can also be a powerful force and desire to change the way *things* are. I have long admired Marisabel's commitment to feel through her artwork, and vice-versa, her artwork feels through her as well, but they can also exist independently of each other. Her cakes are a strong testament that while some *things* get lost in translation, different emotions are gained that spur out from displacement. In her case, the fervent desire to wish for an alternate world where girls can openly like each other and recognise their passion for each other has translated to creating the conditions to reveal our wishes and desires. In a current market climate with apparent heavy shortages of desire, her work shows it is not the desire per se that lacks, if not the spaces, to reflect on our wishes. For Marisabel, creating the spaces for desire surplus means subverting the object's economic conditions of use, freezing them in the very instant in which we blow out our birthday candles and think of what we want for the year ahead..

RITUALS AND ALCHEMICAL EXPERIMENTS TO MAKE FEELINGS TANGIBLE

Somos contextuales y sentimentales by Sofía Salazar, born in Ecuador but currently working in Paris, is an installation that consists of five sculptures in wax, oakum, plaster and digital print, which lie on top of a mat made out of woven cardboard. Each sculpture represents a bag of agricultural produce local to Ecuador, such as flour, rice and sugar, draws important iconographic material reminiscent of the struggles for independence and exploitation experiences of agrarian communities in Ecuador, particularly racialised communities from the Andean region of Ecuador and the African diaspora. They live both as a discourse of freedom (take, for example, the brand "Super Independencia" or super independence in English of one of the wheat flour bags), which directly contradicts the legacy of colonialism and exploitation of the cane and wheat in current times. However, frozen in time, these bags appear, as initially, they would have been soft and malleable with touch. Sofia makes sure that they are protected and tucked with the warmth of cardboard underneath them. Her care for these objects comes through the letter she writes for the bags, which says: "I realised that my bags were asking for words of love, identity, sadness, forgetfulness. They were asked to feel."

Ai Miz Yu displays two bags sitting on top of a cardboard woven mat specially made for the occasion. I remember the first time Sofia and I talked about the exhibition. She was particularly concerned about the surface over which the bags would rest. "Tienen que estar abrigados". This genuine care and dedication to the objects' lives and conditions of the display extend Sofia's investigation of making feelings tangible. When speaking with her about what makes the concept of sentimentality so appealing to her practice, she responded that the context guides tremendously how we conceptualise feelings and emotions. In Latin America, whilst sentimentality has often been regarded as detrimental to a more rational and intelligent way of confronting life, it is the most predominant exchange currency to look at the past and think of an excess of emotions. In the region, pejorative perceptions of sentimentality are often associated with a classist view of the world, in which "sentimental" people lack taste due to their excessive display of affection. Sofia is interested in this interstice between class, history, memory

and emotions. She is on a mission to think of sentimentality as a complex guiding force, which is contradictory and needs to be demoralised to approach it more critically. She told me that her bags are indeed in a “toxic” relationship. Sometimes they appear to look at each other caringly, others in contempt. Sometimes they hold each other, other times they are apart. It is undoubtedly the case that they exist in this perennial tension; will they love or hate each other?

TRADING AND GIFT ECONOMIES

Cantos Matrios by Ingrid Pumayalla, born in Peru but currently working in London, is a multidisciplinary installation that incorporates performance, photography, video, and found objects that collectively speak about Ingrid’s migratory experience within Peru and outside Peru. The rural and urban are juxtaposed in different elements, showcased in the same grid-like fashion as a healing ritual in the northern tradition of shamanism. The installation is accompanied by 5 chants which Ingrid has composed and written for the objects present in the installation and retell the experiences of having multiple homes in vastly different geographic conditions. In each weather and geography, healing can be conducted in different ways, and displacement is seen more like a collapse of different belief systems that support each other to allow for the survival of the migrant object and/or entity. *Ai Miz Yu* originally attempted to showcase two sets of found objects, mainly two stones, which showcase the following found objects: huaco, camera lens, compass, dry broom and palo santo. The last two *things* belong to local botanic remnants used in healing rituals in the north of Peru.

The exhibition would find that the same displacement of objects is trampled by a series of bureaucratic procedures which reveal *which objects can migrate and which others cannot*. The gifted *huaco* was of particular difficulty to bring to Turin for the occasion. Carrying it through aerial borders meant taking the risk of the object being confiscated by Peruvian authorities. You see, *huacos* are pre-Columbian earthen vessels that were often found in ancient burials. Since the mid-19th century, *huacos* have been the target and object of desire behind illicit lootings at archaeological sites. Many of them end up in private, mostly foreign, collections and have hardly been studied in Peru. To battle this practice, the Peruvian Government has set strict rules for moving these precious objects, thus making it more difficult for looters to sell *huacos* abroad. However, this does not necessarily mean that objects are forever forbidden to be seen outside Peru. It just means that there is a more extensive bureaucracy and steps to export the *thing*. I often wonder whether these measures have really stopped the commercialisation of *huacos*. What happens once they are detained? Who gets to have them and see them? All of this whilst there is a massive exhibition about pre-Columbian cultural artefacts at the British Museum, the story of objects’ migrations, back and forths are never straightforward. The installation has now been reformulated to include the *huacos* as a black and white image, acting as a mesa, or shamanic table, where other elements such as palo santo, spondylus shells, wood, knitted mats and a small transformed five pence British coin. All the objects presented in *Cantos Matrios* have been acquired through bartering or gift exchange. The very history of how these objects came into being and are brought together is a result of ongoing parallel economies of affection that exist parallel to mainstream economies.

ESTOY AQUÍ

“Donde estás corazón” and “Estoy aquí” are both tracks of Shakira’s third studio album *Pies Descalzos* (1995). The latter is the first track of the album, whilst

the former is the penultimate track. I always like to think that Shakira's nineties albums have been carefully constructed to resemble the shape of an ouroboros, a snake biting its tail, the perfect shape for earworm composition. This is what makes you replay her albums infinitely, a pop queen in the making. "Estoy aquí" or *I am Here* is the response to "Where are you, heart?", and thus you hear Shakira in a never-ending dialogue towards understanding the coordinates of her feelings. In an attempt to make justice to how Marisabel, Sofia and Ingrid's artworks act as emotional compasses, *Ai Miz Yu* embraces the floor rather than the walls. I have always been conflicted by walls. To be honest, I often think of them as enforcing one type of retinal relationship between the spectator and the artwork. This is not to say that *all* the artworks hanging on walls enforce this relationship, just that working with walls makes this type of relationship challenging to turn around. However, I am conscious that embracing the floor is only a cosmetic solution and a minor answer to a larger question on how to change relationships in the arts. For me, answering this question has always dealt with both the emotional investment in following a career in the arts and the economic contexts and paradigms surrounding these decisions. Whilst I am aware that analysing international contemporary art practices in the same scope of race, class, and economic dynamics as small-scale, informal markets feels at best a stretch and at worst misconceiving. I am also aware that placing them in the same universe of knowledge-making can further complicate the lives of objects. However, we ought not to forget that the art world and all its participants work with a set of privileges and problems that arise from further alienating the context from the objects. In an attempt to contextualise objects, I have tried to learn the multiple lessons which Marisabel, Sofia and Ingrid's works have given me about contextualising emotions and economic paradigms.

Ai Miz Yu is a brief love letter to mottled economies from Latin America, in which longing, contradiction, belief systems and deep desire to exist collapse in these powerful objects.

Gisselle Girón Casas