

GUGGENHEIM UBS MAP GLOBAL ART INITIATIVE

Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today

Carlos Motta on His SOA / Democracy Cycle Works

I think my work has two main aspects to it. On the one hand, I have been producing works that are interested in being presented, exhibited, and being in dialogue with histories of exhibitions. On the other hand, I have been producing a series of projects that is not that interested in that context, and is more interested in producing social situations. That is not to say that those works are not shown in institutions, but I think those works are more conscious of wanting to break with the expectations of the exhibition space. All of the work, however, is interested in a few things. The most important one, I think, is this idea of approaching historical constructs—the construction of history, the narration of history, and the perspectives from which those histories are written.

So, for instance, this *SOA Cycle*, and what it later became, which is called the *Democracy Cycle*, is a group of seven large works that approach the question of democracy. What is democracy? How is it constructed? How is it implemented? Is it something that is to be thought of in relation to its political influence? Or is it something that plays out in terms of cultural and social, and even emotional terms, for instance?

The *SOA Cycle* manifested itself in many, many different works. So there is, for instance, a work that is called, *Brief History of U.S. Interventions*, which is a gigantic chalkboard work where I have listed interventions, beginning in 1801, throughout the world. People are offered chalk to intervene in the construction of that history or memory. It becomes a kind of democracy wall of sorts. There's also a film, which is called *Memory of a Protest*, which documents one of the protests by the SOA Watch, which is the activist organization against the School of the Americas in Chile. I really like that film because it presents the anachronistic impulse of these activists that are still trying to redeem the memory and the role of the U.S. military in that region—for ideological purposes, but also because of their involvement in the disappearance of so many people, for instance, in the Chilean context. So there is this question of justice that is attached to wanting to close this institution.

The *Democracy Cycle* of works includes *The Good Life*, which is a piece where I traveled throughout Latin America, stopping in 12 different cities, asking people on the street about their perception of democracy as a form of government, but also about the way that the U.S. was responsible for the construction of that perception. That work is an online archive of interviews—a kind of database documentary of sorts, which is edited minimally, to provide access to all of these different opinions. There are close to five hundred interviews. It takes the form of this specific kind of sculptural installation, based on the Athenian agora, the space where democracy was conceived, or invented, within the Greek context.

Then there is another work called *Six Acts: An Experiment in Narrative Justice*, wherein I'm interested in the way that a number of presidential candidates from the left in Colombia were assassinated while campaigning. So, I'm interested in sort of like highlighting the crisis of the left in Colombia, but also largely in the Latin American context. And the form of the piece is a series of performative interventions we did on the streets of Bogota during the 2010 presidential campaign, where I worked with actors to reread speeches that had been delivered by these candidates that had been assassinated.

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There are a few other works, but the last significant body of work in the *Democracy Cycle* is called *We Who Feel Differently*, which had its most comprehensive presentation at a solo exhibition at the New Museum where I was interested in investigating histories of sexual and gender activism, and thinking about how those histories have changed, from the nineteen-sixties to the place where we are now. And that is a work that exemplifies these two different aspects of the work. It presented itself as an installation in the museum, a very kind of specifically designed aesthetic project that included sculpture, prints, six films, and an all-encompassing installation. And at the same time, three months of programming, in which the space of the installation itself was turned into a kind of community space, where a lot of the issues that the work was addressing were contextualized in the context of New York.

These cycles of works brought together different approaches.