

# Taller E.P.S. Huayco

## THE DIALECTICS OF PURIFICATION WITHOUT PURITY

Cuauhtémoc Medina

In 1980 a small avant-garde group in Lima, Peru, adopted the Quechua name for floods and landslides, "Huayco", to suggest the possibility of a cultural inundation derived from the pursuit of an "Aesthetics of Social Projection".<sup>1</sup>

Along a small number of extraordinarily provocative exhibitions involving slogans, graphic works of populist inspiration, taste questionnaires and floor compositions depicting a local class of fast food made of sausages and fried potatoes. E.P.S. Huayco most important work was a unique pointillist-Popist intervention in an isolated spot among the sandy hills that surround the city of Lima.

It is in fact a large scale painting of sorts, visible from the road that frequently brings to the city the immigrants and is dedicated to the popular heterodox Saint Sarita Colonia. The outdoor horizontal painting consists in a 60 square meter mosaic of painted metal cans, that were collected from the public garbage deposits of Lima, that copies with outmost detail the popular stamps of a girl whose claim to sainthood centers in having escaped from being raped when her sex was erased, and therefore closed, by divine intervention. The saint of choice

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<sup>1</sup> In Spanish: E.P.S. "Estética de Proyección Social". Among the members of E.P.S. Huayco were Francisco Marioti, Fernando Bedoya, Mariela Zevallos, Lucy Angulo, Herbert Rodríguez, María Luy and Armando Williams.



of the millions of migrants that in a matter of two decades turned Lima city into a gigantic megalopolis, also appears on top of the sand dunes the same way their houses are erected on dunes to reproduce the new city. But beyond those common aspects that probably explain the significance of the cult, what is extraordinary is that this public artwork has after a quarter of the century became, effectively, a proper shrine, operating in the presence aesthetics of Amerindian places of devotion, or Huacas. Next to this post-Popist work anonymous devotees perform rites and leave offerings, charging the space of supernatural sacrality. Indeed, the Sarita Colonia effigy by Huayco, a cross between Lichtenstein and Land Art, has effectively created a holy place, a veritable Andean *Huaca*. For, as curator and critic Gustavo Buntinx, who has made more than anybody to diffuse the knowledge of Huayco around the world, has argued, Huayco's *Sarita Colonia* "is a ritual appropriation that devolves pop to popular culture."<sup>2</sup>

## THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE

Álvaro Díez Astete.

*Marka Magazine* # 204, Lima,  
May 1981

The image and religious strength of Sarita Colonia is a patent case of symbolic realization in which the religious element is made up by a determined level of aesthetic taste, thus serving as a container for the dramatic union of magical thought and immediate social reality. In Lima Sarita Colonia is today a saint (not yet accepted by the Vatican) who receives the devotion of the most underprivileged members of society, the world of the underground and prostitution, of certain sectors of workers, such as dock labourers, or bus drivers in the whole of Lima, who carry her image throughout the great labyrinth on a daily basis.

It is known that she was born in Huaraz in 1914 and died on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1940 in El Callao. It is precisely in El Callao where her cult started, but it is not so clear why. There are many and sometimes contradictory versions about Sarita's life and death. What is certain is that when she died she was buried in a common grave in the El Callao cemetery and that her family then exhumed her body and transferred it to a tomb. Later on the local people built her a mausoleum that over the years has become a veritable sanctuary adorned with thousands of *ex votos*, around which a constellation of travelling salespeople has grown up

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2 *E.P.S. Huayco. Documentos*, Introductory study, edition and notes by BUNTINX, G. Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, 2005. P. 104.



(even inside the cemetery itself) who sell all the paraphernalia imaginable in order to encourage and stimulate this devotion.

The spiritual prestige, her daily presence and the sweetness of her countenance form an image of the most diverse longings. Not even her still living brothers and sisters can give an exact account of her strange supernatural condition. We will here point out three elements deserving of deep anthropological attention and which perhaps promise the knowledge of a new religion of social psychology because we are in the privileged position of witnessing the birth of a myth: Sarita Colonia in Lima is a provincial saint who has arrived with the migration movements, in which the ethnic differentiation is underlined and which carries out miracles directly related to the pressing needs of the most part of the population; that means, health, protection, work and good fortune in life.

## **MANIFESTO OF THE "CONTACTA 79" TOTAL ART FESTIVAL HELD IN BARRANCO. JULY 1979 LIMA, PERU**

The traditional arts, the evolution of our popular artistic expressions.

The applied arts, the modern techniques of massification integrated as a conceptual act with the rituals of daily life can only be justified if they manage to dynamise the relationships of historical development, breaking the inertia of a tolerated and controlled creativity, seeking solutions that are opposed to the neutralisation of culture.

The experiences of groups and collective workshops are an important approach towards carrying out massive artistic expressions, based on the authentic features of Latin American cultural and material life in relation to self-determination and for the rise of struggles for liberation in favour of social progress as a counter measure to underdevelopment, repression and domination.

Finally, we declare our satisfaction because of the fact that this Encounter coincides with the triumph of the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua over the imperialist dictatorship, once again dramatically and inevitably raising debate about the function of art.