

## EXHIBITION

### **FLYING DOWN TO EARTH**

Winning project of MARCO/FRAC Lorraine awards of the Award for Young Curators

**21 May - 29 August 2010**



Marilyn Bridges. *Great Triangle, Nazca, Peru, 1979*. Collection FRAC Lorraine © D.R.

#### **DATES**

21 May - 29 August 2010

#### **PLACE**

Exhibition rooms on the first floor

#### **OPENING HOURS**

martes a sábados (festivos incluidos),  
de 11.00 a 21.00  
domingos, de 11.00 a 15.00

#### **PRODUCED BY**

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea  
de Vigo, Spain / FRAC Lorraine, Metz,  
France

#### **CURATOR**

Inti Guerrero

## ARTISTS

**Marilyn Bridges** (1948, New Jersey, USA. Lives and works in New York)

**Flávio de Carvalho** (1899, Barra Mansa-Rio de Janeiro, Brasil – 1973, Valinhos-São Paulo, Brasil)

**Taller E.P.S. Huayco** (1980-1981, Lima, Peru. Workshop formed by the artists Francisco Mariotti, María Luy, Charo Noriega, Mariella Zevallos, Herbert Rodríguez, Armando Williams and Juan Javier Salazar)

**Cristina Lucas** (1973, Jaen, Spain. Lives and works in Paris and Madrid)

**Ossama Mohammed** (1954, Lattakia, Syria. lives and works in Damascus, Syria)

**Valérie Mréjen** (1969, Paris, France. Lives and works in Paris)

**José Alejandro Restrepo** (1959, Bogota, Colombia. Lives and works in Bogota)

**Alan Schneider/Samuel Beckett** (1917, Kharkov, Russia – 1984, London, UK)

**Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor** (1968 Constanta, Romania / 1974, Geneva, Switzerland. Live and work in Bucharest, Romania)

**Alexandre Vogler** (1973, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. Lives and works in Rio de Janeiro)

## WORKS EXHIBITED

FLYING DOWN TO EARTH is the winning project of the latest awards of the Award for Young Curators, convoked jointly by the MARCO of Vigo, Spain, and the FRAC Lorraine de Metz, France, in 2009. FLYING DOWN TO EARTH unites works by artists that look at how religious processes and forms co-exist in politics, collective memory, and popular culture. This exhibition includes videos, instalations, video-instalations and photographs, and the two shortfilms *Step by Step* (1977) by sirian filmmaker Ossama Mohammed, and *Film* (1965), by Alan Schneider and Samuel Beckett.

## SYNTHESIS OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

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FLYING DOWN TO EARTH was the winning Project in the most recent holding of the Award for Young Curators, which in 2009 was jointly held by the Vigo MARCO and the FRAC Lorraine, Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain de Lorraine, France, and the aim of which is the producing of an exhibition project to be carried out in both exhibition centres.

This is not the first time that MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, and the FRAC have come together in a co-production Project promoting contemporary art beyond their territorial frontiers. On this occasion the common interest in supporting new generations of professionals has inspired the third edition of the Young Curators Prize. The winning project is by Inti Guerrero, (Bogota, Colombia, 1983), an art critic and independent curator resident in Amsterdam, Holland. After having been shown in Vigo, the exhibition will travel to FRAC Lorraine, where it can be seen from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2011.

FLYING DOWN TO EARTH brings together Works by artists who deal with processes and forms of religious belief in relation to politics, collective memory and popular culture. It sets up a dialogue among works that share an act of iconoclasm as they describe the way that religious beliefs are transposed into social hierarchies, into people's idiosyncrasies and imaginaries.

The starting point for the exhibition is the aerial photographs taken of sacred places in the world by Marilyn Bridges in the seventies. Bridges's gaze on the forms and structures made by the human being evoking a celestial archetype – such as the Nazca lines – seems to return transcendence to that sacred past, but at the same time it disturbs the axis of communication with the beyond, given that these are precisely photographs taken "from up above". This idea of operating within systems of belief but at the same time trying to deconstruct them is common to the works of these artists, all of whom place beliefs and religious activity in relation to politics, collective memory and the idiosyncrasy of their respective contexts.

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Both the exhibition project and the assembly of the works in the halls are articulated around three conceptual axes: the relationships between religion, ritual and territory; the ways in which religion acts on the individual and his social behaviour; and a third aspect that has to do with acts of iconophilia and iconoclasm.

### **Religion, Ritual and Territory**

Some of the artists point out the political and symbolic meanings of the physical territory — the Earth itself — where they perform their work, whether it might be an action, performance, video or film. For example, *Sarita*, (1980), the impressive intervention carried out by the Peruvian neo-vanguard collective E.P.S. Huayco in a desert on the outskirts of Lima, where they created a huge portrait of the half-caste Saint Sarita Colonia, patron of the lowest classes in the country and who has not yet been beatified by the Vatican. Or the performance *Vacaresti* (2006), by the duo of Romanian artists Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor, carried out in a vacant lot in Bucharest — where a XVIII century monastery used to be, demolished

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in 1985 by the Communist government — and which confronts us with a complex negotiation of identity and collective memory. In turn, the short feature *Paso a Paso* (1977), by the Syrian filmmaker Ossama Mohammed, crosses through the ideological battles that exist in the rural areas of his country, where religion, poverty and the military state create subjectivities of citizen-soldiers rooted in an Islamic tradition.

### **Acting on the Psychological**

Mohammed's work is, in turn, the bridge towards those others that deal with the forms in which religion acts on the individual's psychological state. The French artist Valérie Mréjen does this in her work *Dieu* (2004), a series of video interviews with Jewish friends, who tell us about the moment when they realised that God did not exist, telling personal tales about the situations that led them to break with the traditions of their orthodox families. The Brazilian historical avant-garde artist Flávio de Carvalho is also present with his work *Experiência no2* (1931), which is a part of his *Experiências* centred on the study of mass psychology. In this case De Carvalho decided to infiltrate a Corpus Christi procession walking in the opposite direction to the religious flow, and without taking his hat off. The exhibition presents the original book that the artist himself wrote months after his "performance", describing the attempt at his being lynched by the crowd.

### **Iconophilia and Iconoclasm**

Taking into account the symbiosis between the divine gaze — "God sees everything" — and the panoptic gaze of the institutions of power under modernity — like the former Vigo prison where MARCO now stands — the exhibition presents a group of works that deal with iconophilia (worshipping of images) and iconoclasm (abolition of images). In the case of the Spanish artist Cristina Lucas, her iconoclastic act is the video *Habla* (2008), which shows the artist herself smashing up an impressive statue of Moses with a hammer until chopping its head off. In relation to the obsession for controlling everything through the "all-seeing eye", the Brazilian artist Alexandre Vogler, in his work *Olho Grande* (2002-2010) makes a parody of the comical decision by the Rio de Janeiro government to launch a Zeppelin with armed policemen on board in order to control the most dangerous shanties in the city. But it is without doubt the work *Iconomía* (2002-2010) by the Colombian artist Jose Alejandro Restrepo, that synthesises the two categories of Iconophilia and Iconoclasm, through an extensive recompiling of news items from Colombian news broadcasts narrating violent events in relation to the guerrilla war, the paramilitary, corruption and drug trafficking, which the artist sees as acts of contemporary iconophilia or iconoclasm. In more sinister and abstract terms, the short feature *Film* (1965), by the US director Alan Schneider and written by the renowned playwright Samuel Beckett, places the camera on its sole protagonist, played by Buster Keaton, who obsessively removes all the things that he thinks are watching him from his bedroom, carrying out an analogy between the divine gaze and the panoptic gaze of power. A work that, like others in this exhibition, is from the conceptual and symbolic point of view intimately linked to the design of the very building that welcomes them.

## TEXT BY THE CURATOR

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"At the end of the seventies, American photographer Marilyn Bridges flew over the Nazca desert in order to carry out what would become a striking series of black and white photographs of the great geometrical and morphological figures created by the indigenous Nazca culture. Since then Bridges's career has centred on developing her technique of aerial photography, which she has used all over the world in order to portray other ancient sacred sites. The interesting aspect about Bridges's uncanny images is that they both instigate our curiosity on 'the beyond', and at the same time they deconstruct the supposition of its existence, as they are precisely images taken 'from up there': By implementing a dramatic composition, her downward gaze, from the celestial to the earthly, inverts the cosmological axis of communication that these sacred marks symbolized in the past. Her photographs seek the representation of the sacred, but at the same time they fade its celestial archetype.

It is not a matter of discussing the veracity with which we may see the interpretations of the religious beliefs of these ancient peoples, given that both positivism and relativism have shown to be problematic in their methodologies. I prefer to start by wondering about the present: What are photographs of the Nazca lines doing in a collection of contemporary art? The most probable reason is that they were acquired within the narrative of *Land Art*, in which the critic Lucy Lippard included Bridges's aerial photographs, but their presence is still uncanny as a double state of adoration and abolishing of the sacred. It is precisely from that *in-betweenness* that this exhibition brings together artists and film directors whose works question the form through which religiosity acts upon people's idiosyncrasies. While a significant group of works carry out rituals among themselves about territories with specific symbolic values in order to comment upon the representation of the social body that inhabits it, other works included carry out iconoclastic acts in their intention to unsettle the belief systems from their given context. Indeed, here there is neither fetishism in relation to the esoteric or the occult, nor a militant Marxist position against religion; rather it is an attempt to understand through art how our identities are marked out by the rituals of affiliation to or emancipation from the sacred, as a mutant state in our changes of paradigm.

Close to the time when Bridges was flying over the Nazca lines, the Peruvian artists' collective E.P.S. Huayco – nowadays considered by local contemporary art historiography as its neo-avant-garde – was carrying out a different type of 'sacral art' in the desert. In *Sarita* (1980), at the arid desert surrounding Lima, making use of powdered milk tins (the milk consumed by the less privileged classes), using their surfaces as a pictorial support, E.P.S. Huayco made a large-size portrait of the image of a popular saint dear to the Peruvian people: Sarita Colonia, the patron saint of the most marginalized people in civilian society. Sarita, a Creole saint who has not yet been recognised by the Vatican, was presented on the desert as a sacred image, in which the axis of religious communication is not vertical like the Nazca lines in their relationship with the cosmos, but horizontal with 'the real'. By 'real', I am not referring to that which is antagonistic to the intangible and mystical, but rather to the idiosyncrasies of the present, where religiosity becomes an identity for affirmation. In this case a peripheral identity that is projected on the hybrid image of Sarita, embodying both the indigenous popular vernacular and that of Western Christian iconography.

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Another example of a ritual action addressing the collective memory of its context through the symbolic values of the terrain, is the work *Văcărești* (2006) by the Romanian artistic duo Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor. The work is a performance documented in a vacant space in Bucharest, where the artists by means of stakes and ropes, retrace the structural foundations of an old monastery destroyed in 1985 by the authoritarian Communist government. *Văcărești* places us in a complex situation in which the ritual of drawing out an outline of cosmological connotations, seems to wish to recuperate the collective memory suppressed by Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorial regime, but at the same time, pointing out that which history has shown as being equally obscure, dominating and ideological: the church. Taking into account that the intervened desolated territory is actually the ground set out for a future shopping centre, it seems that the marking lines in *Văcărești* point out the vulnerability of a collective identity, after the accelerated changes in post-Communist societies, in which both the old regime and the new neo-liberal paradigms completely eliminate the hereditary archetypes of the society they control.

In the case of *Tridente* (2003) by Alexandre Vogler, his mark upon the territory may seem less committed to the collective in relation to E.P.S. Huayco, or less poetic than Vătămanu and Tudor, but no less critical. As a kind of 'bad joke', the simple and for some 'foolish' action of drawing a big trident in whitewash over a hillside located above one of the most evangelistic neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro. This was locally marked out as the apparently secular state, governed by ultra religious governments that mix their personal faith with their political convictions. The neighbourhood's rejection for Vogler's work set off an enormous scandal in the media of the city, which resulted in the participation of the governor and of other politicians in the collective exorcism of the hillside where the work took place.

Interest for the ideological implications of religion in its relationships with the media have had different ways of accompanying the artistic research of the Colombian artist José Alejandro Restrepo. Since the beginning of the nineties Restrepo has painstakingly recorded news clips from TV bulletins that show the complex armed conflict in Colombia. Subjects about murders, massacres, drug trafficking, guerrilla warfare, corruption and poverty have been classified by the artist into two types: *Iconophilia*, referring to the adoration of the image, and *Iconoclasm*, referring to the abolishment of images. The vernacular field of a highly visceral day-to-day, caused by the high level of violence, is presented in his work *Iconomía* (2000/2010) as socio-cultural behaviours that are strongly attached to the archetypes of ancient religious confrontations.

Another case that deals with the way in which religion acts in a bio-political manner upon the individual, is the short film *Step by Step* (1977), by the Syrian director Ossama Mohammed. Although Syria is one of the Arab nations that is at the forefront in promoting secular states, Mohammed's film intertwines the great ideological battles existing in the rural area of his country, in which religion, poverty and the military state construct subjectivities of citizen-soldiers attached to an Islamic tradition, which appears in the film through the repetition of the sequence of an old man praying in front of an overwhelming landscape. Through an avant-garde and experimental cinematography, Mohammed takes distance from objectivising those he portrays, bringing us closer to the cruellest forms with which the authoritarian power acts upon the bodies of others.

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Adapting a script by the legendary playwright Samuel Beckett, the American director Alan Schneider brings us a iconoclastic short feature, in which the actor Buster Keaton plays the only role in a film which has no conventional narrative. *Film* (1965), centres on the last scene in which Keaton enters a room where he removes any trace, object or living being that might possess characteristics or mechanisms for observation. Recorded in a period prior to CCTV, the sequence makes an analogy through the psychology of the character between the divine and the panoptic gaze of power, which trespasses the public space, operating within our most private spaces, from our domestic surroundings to our memories.

At first sight Cristina Lucas's work is perhaps that which literally is an iconoclastic act. In the video *Habla* (2006), she uses a great mace in order to shatter an impressive statue of Moses, simultaneously shouting at it for it to speak, to say what it has to say. After having hammered of its arms, she breaks the tablets with the ten commandments he was holding, and finally beheads him. Nevertheless, at the end of the video Lucas does not appear to feel satisfied by stating the only dialogue in the sequence: 'It doesn't speak, it doesn't want to say anything, there is no answer', making us accept that the religious tradition is not located as a mausoleum, but rather that it is rooted in a sophisticated manner in our social behaviours, in our perspective. The idea of eliminating tradition thus stand as a Utopia, only possible in the oneiric field that is brought by the atmosphere of the video.

Two works seem to be closer to the Nietzschean death of God as an iconoclastic act. On the one hand Flavio de Carvalho, a fundamental reference of Brazil's historical avant-garde presents his first *Experience* in the urban space in order to analyse crowd psychology. Under the title *Experiência no.2: Uma possível teoria e uma experiência*, 1931, Carvalho infiltrated a Corpus Christi procession in Sao Paulo without having taken off his cap, and walked among the celebrating crowds against the direction of the religious flow. The artist's 'simple' action immediately sparked off a collective rage from believers, who soon started persecuting him, demanding that he should be lynched: 'Lyncha! Lyncha!'. Months later Carvalho started a publication that included drawings and texts written by himself, under the influence of Sigmund Freud and James Frazer, in which he analysed the emotional crescendo of people who demanded his life. Carvalho's individual act in relation to the mass showed the lack of individuality of people at that time who reacted violently under the ideological doctrines of the church. Carvalho's experience might be seen as an immediate action that tried to break with the paradigm of a belief system of his time and context.

In turn, the death of God in the work of Valérie Mréjen, *Dieu* (2004), takes place through the personal testimonies by different orthodox Jews close to the artist, who narrate to a Handycam the moment when they realised that God does not exist. The intimate relationship with the most personal aspect of the person who is narrating its anecdote shows the way how religious belief manages to occupy the psychological and the bodily existence of the individual. It is above all one of those in which it is patently obvious how religion can manage to control our systems of personal representation and identification. 'This was me at 40. Three years ago I was like this' were the words of a old orthodox Jew when seeing through Mréjen's camera a photograph from his past. That aware moment in the possibility of imagining oneself in the world in a different manner is understood as a personal act of radical dissidence in relation to all unilateral and homogeneous representation."

**Inti Guerrero**

[Text by the curator for the exhibition catalogue]

## GENERAL INFORMATION

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### ABOUT THE CURATOR

Inti Guerrero is an art critic and curator born in Bogotá, Colombia and based in Amsterdam, where he was a fellow of De Appel's Curatorial Program. Guerrero fulfilled studies on History and Theory of Art & Architecture and General History at both Universidad de Los Andes in Colombia and Universidade de São Paulo in Brazil. Former curator-in-residence of Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin) and Capacete Entretenimentos (Rio de Janeiro), he has written for *Afterall* (London), *Ramona* (Buenos Aires) and *ArtNexus* (Bogota/Miami) and curated (selection): *A cidade do homem nu*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2010; *Duet for Cannibals*, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, 2010; the traveling survey exhibition *Light Years. Cristina Lucas*, Centro de Arte 2 de Mayo, Madrid, 2009 - Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, 2010; and *Deceiving the Enemy*, Laboratorio Interdisciplinario para las Artes, Bogotá, 2008. Guerrero has also co-curated: *And yet it moves*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, 2009 and *Yo no soy esa*, Galería Santa Fe, Bogota, 2005.

### CATALOGUE

On the occasion of this exhibition, MARCO of Vigo and FRAC Lorraine, Metz have published a quadrilingual catalogue (Galician-Spanish-French-English) which gathers a number of texts on each one of the artists, by the well known art theoretician Lucy Lippard (on Marilyn Bridges), and the curators and art critics Cuauhtémoc Medina (on Taller E.P.S. Huayco), Cosmin Costinaş (on Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor) and Rasha Salti (on Ossama Mohammed). This publication includes also texts by the artists José Alejandro Restrepo ('Iconomy'), Álvaro Díez Astete (Taller E.P.S. Huayco's 'Arte total' Manifesto), and the curious aesthetics and social thesis by the renowned playwright Samuel Beckett and the controversial avant-garde artist Flávio de Carvalho.

### INFORMATION AND VISITS

Members of the museum staff are available in the halls to provide visitors with information, in addition to the regular guided tours:

- Every day at 6 pm
- 'A la carte' tours for groups, by appointment at the tel. 986 113 900/11

## REQUESTS FOR GRAPHIC MATERIALS

EXHIBITION

**'FLYING DOWN TO EARTH'**

**GRAPHIC MATERIAL AVAILABLE TO THE PRESS:**

CD including texts and photographs of the exhibition in different formats.

**IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE DOCUMENTATION, PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND SEND IT BY E-MAIL, FAX OR MAIL POST TO:**

**MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo**

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