

The Modern Paradigm, the Exhibitionary Form and Our Epistemological Crisis

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70733/uthbw74g2lob>

Catalina Imizcoz

Abstract

Taking exhibition as a transparent construct maintains a theoretical pact through which the exhibitionary form and its modern/colonial roots are glossed over. My research proposes to critically appraise the exhibitionary form and its ideological infrastructure, starting from the concurrent birth of Western modernity and the art exhibition as a cultural device, and asking if the exhibitionary form can be used to critique modernity as a socio-cultural phenomenon. This article draws on a series of epistemological reviews of modernity—Bruno Latour’s, Bonaventura de Sousa Santos’s and Paul B. Preciado’s—to frame such a critique. I use two recent shows as examples in which the exhibitionary form emerges as a locus for epistemological otherness. In Cecilia Szalkowicz’s “Soy un disfraz de tigre” and Adrián Villar Rojas’s *The Theater of Disappearance*, human and non-human bodies enact the exhibition’s architecture. In these examples, a critique of the modern world view transpires through the exhibitionary form.

Emperor Joseph II had created such a collection in Vienna. In his cabinet of curiosities he had decided to collect everything that was particular, every manifestation of the aberration of the world, every instance of matter forgetting itself. One of his successors, Francis I, had not hesitated to stuff his black-skinned courtier, one Angelo Soliman, after his death. At which point his mummy, wearing only a grass band, was displayed for the viewing pleasure of all the monarch’s guests.

Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights* (2017)^[1]

The fashion parade began to the beat of Depeche Mode’s “Christmas Island” (1986). The tune’s first few seconds announce what sounds like a civil parade, complete with triumphant trumpets, before diving into the band’s characteristic melancholic tone. Similarly, Cecilia Szalkowicz’s exhibition “Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I” (I am a tiger costume, act I) lulled the audience into thinking they knew what would come next, only for them to realise seconds later that the standard conventions of such events would not be followed.



Cecilia Szalkowicz, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I", 2019 (film still), Casacuberta Hall, Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires © Cecilia Szalkowicz

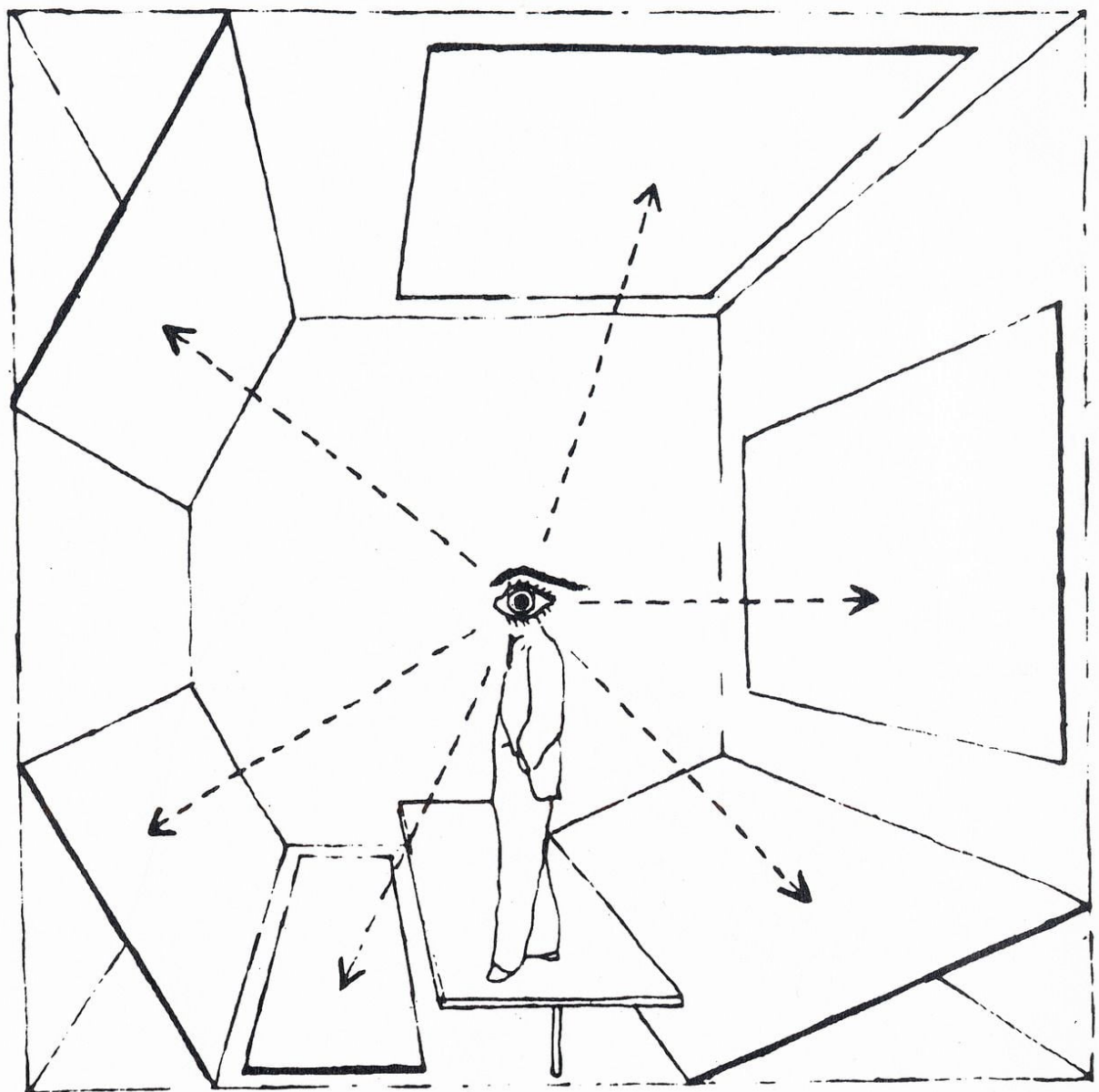
Fashion parade-cum-art-exhibition, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I" lasted eleven minutes. It took place on 1 October 2019 at the Teatro San Martín in Buenos Aires. Widely recognised as one of the city's landmark cultural spaces, the Casacuberta Hall is the wide anteroom to the eponymous theatre, boasting an over thirty-metres-long mural by modernist artist and designer Luis Seoane. The hall is accentuated by a few noticeable touches: ample staircases reinforce the sense of space, while a large leather sofa and teal carpet complement the mural's colour palette and echo the sharp lines that run throughout the room. When the music began, the first model appeared at the top of the orange lined staircase, framed by golden handrails and dressed in monochrome blue

His outfit and pose hinted at that of maintenance personnel: one might have felt that infamous live performance panic in the audience when lights go on before backstage crew have left the stage. The first model was closely followed by a woman in brown and pink office attire. In less than half a minute, the first artwork was being presented to the public, to reactions of relief and incipient confusion.



Cecilia Szalkowicz, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I", 2019, Casacuberta Hall, Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires. Photo: Sofia Ungar
© Cecilia Szalkowicz

This parade-exhibition conjured up links to modernist display structures of the twentieth century. In the models' gestures of lifting the framed pictures to different heights, it referenced experimental designs such as Herbert Bayer's extended fields of vision. His 1935 diagram depicting an eye/man at the centre of a kaleidoscopic display proposed to present the viewer with artworks in a 360-degree, hexagonal space.



Herbert Bayer's diagram of the field of vision, 1930

As subsequent models walked into Szalkowicz's parade, some members of the audience could see a framed photograph while others glanced at its back, focusing on a tilted diptych as it began its descent down the stairs.



Cecilia Szalkowicz, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I", 2019, Casacuberta Hall, Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires. Photo: Sofia Ungar © Cecilia Szalkowicz

Because the audience was seated and the mobile artworks were distributed across the space, the exhibition embodied a dispersed version of Herbert's design, articulating an extended field of vision of its own.

The choreography of a total of twenty models sped up and multiplied. By minute three, one of the models had taken a seat on the blue sofa, leaning the photograph on the armrest, its top section brushing against his arm.



Cecilia Szalkowicz, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I", 2019, Casacuberta Hall, Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires. Photo: Sofia Ungar © Cecilia Szalkowicz

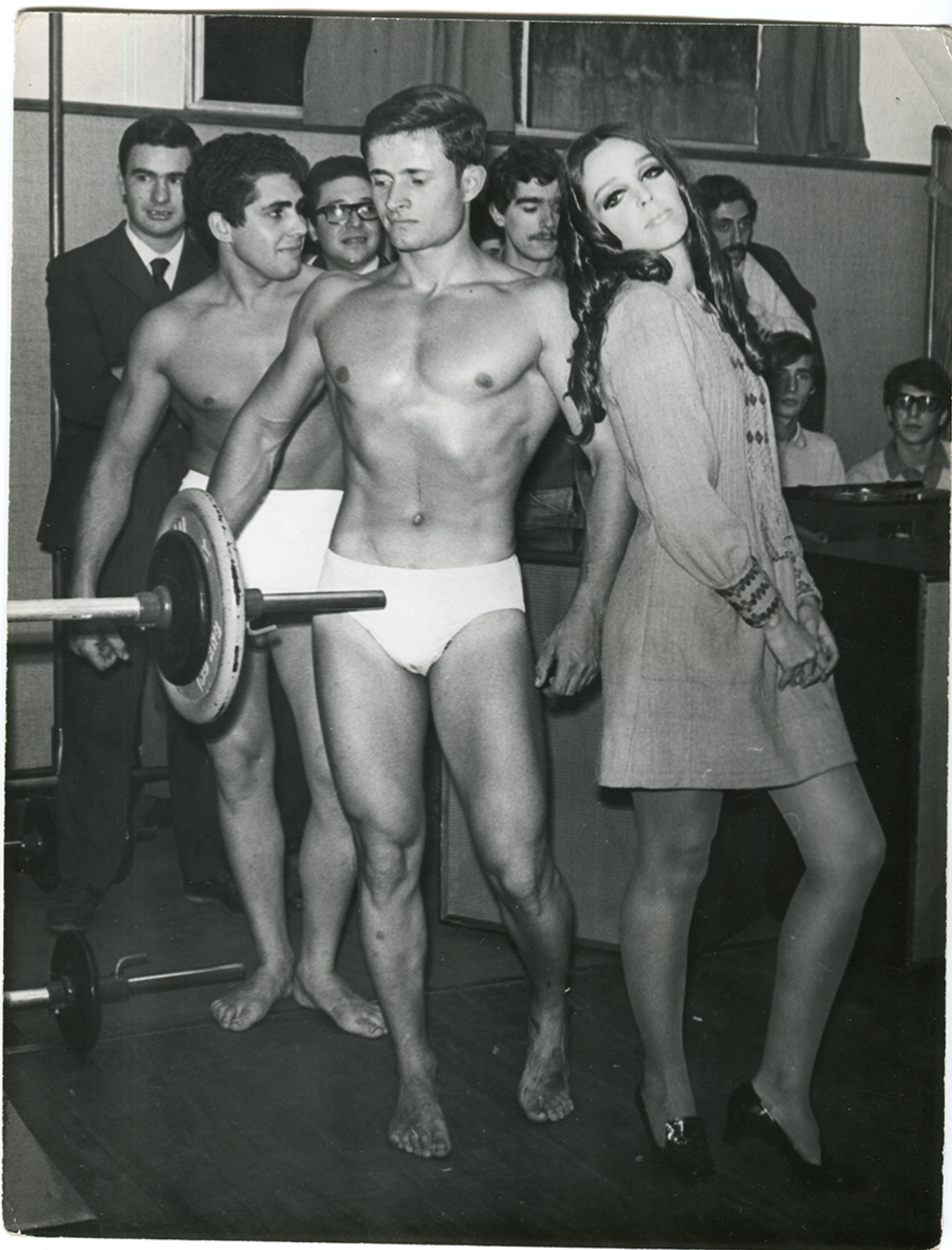
A black-and-white polyptych was being put together simultaneously, four works aligning swiftly to form a single piece.



Cecilia Szalkowicz, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I", 2019, Casacuberta Hall, Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires. Photo: Sofia Ungar © Cecilia Szalkowicz

Interactivity and tactility buzzed throughout the exhibition space, even if the audience did not actually touch any of the art. Lina Bo Bardi's 1950s glass display structures at the Museu de arte de São Paulo exude a similar quality. While touching is out of bounds, the ethereality of the supporting forms in this case, transparent glass instead of human bodies conveys a contradictory feeling of accessibility. Another landmark of exhibition design, *Abstract Cabinet* (1927) relied on a much more straightforward invitation to interactivity to draw its audience in. El Lissitzky's sliding panels were devised to reveal artworks one by one, simultaneously creating an illusion of touch and playfulness that viewers would have found difficult to resist. In these modernist experiments with the exhibitionary form, a modular quality is favoured over the static and remote conventional hangings of traditional art museums. This modularity appears to suggest tactility, even if it never quite allows it.

Museography and exhibition studies are yet to grapple with the exhibitionary form in full. The kind of genealogy mapped out above offers a tiny glimpse into the relations that can be drawn to connect exhibition design experiments across history. It could be extended further to include multidisciplinary references. Most poignantly perhaps, Szalkowicz's career-long involvement with the fashion industry suggests a strong link between "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I" and designer Mary Tapia's trailblazing fashion show at the Colmegna gymnasium in Buenos Aires in 1967, where the young female models dressed in Tapia's hybrid designs interacted with sports props and male bodybuilders.^[2]



Mary Tapia's fashion show at Colmegna gymnasium in Buenos Aires in 1967. Courtesy of Fundación IDA, Fondo Mary Tapia

Both artists use the human body as an architectural element that allows them to upset the standard conventions of these types of events within their respective fields. And yet, returning to art shows in particular, the argument here is that there is a “habit of thought that takes exhibition as a transparent construct”, that perpetuates a theoretical agreement under which the exhibitionary form is glossed

over.^[3] Recent museographic approaches have placed emphasis on exhibition design, continuing the work of expographic studies and attributing value to the culture and heritage attached to the distribution of elements across the space of the exhibition. Multi-dimensional encompassing architecture, the curatorial, graphic and lighting design museography's scope in turn tends to stop at the formal and material elements of the exhibitionary form, without questioning or problematising the ideological infrastructure of which they are a part.

Exhibition studies, on the other hand, has focused widely on replicating the canonic impulses of its umbrella discipline, art history, with only selected studies directing their efforts towards the full implications of the exhibitionary form's implicit scripts. Mary Anne Staniszewski's 1998 book, *The Power of Display*, deals specifically with the way in which exhibitions were designed, staged and installed throughout the twentieth century in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. By presenting exhibition design as an aesthetic medium and a loaded element of institutional rhetorics, the volume identifies the history of display as one that informs the way art is historicised. It grounds exhibition design as a precedent to thinking about exhibitions as elaborate semiotic networks. This chimes with Tony Bennett's foundational essay on the exhibitionary complex, which has been picked up more recently in the research project and anthology *Theatre Garden Bestiary* (2019) that provides a transdisciplinary history of the exhibition as an epistemic site. The introduction to the book groups the subsequent 22 presentations with the aim of "isolat[ing] the historical construction of a set of epistemological, aesthetic and ontological scripts, which enables us to grasp the implicit contracts encoded in the exhibition format".^[4] These material histories offer a fundamental site from which to unpack the exhibitionary form.

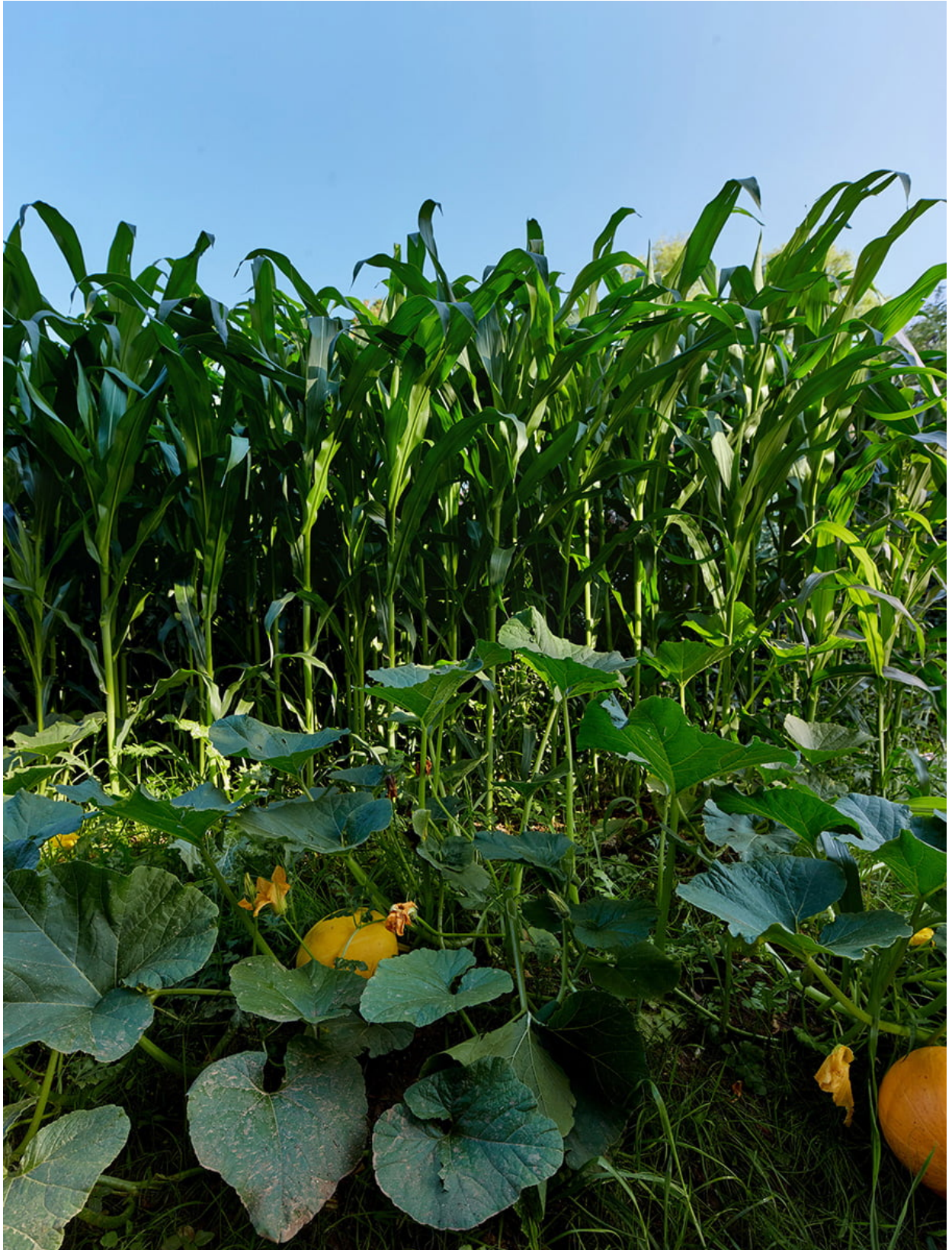
A decolonial approach to such histories methodologically anchored in modernity/coloniality takes a similar point of departure, but diverges in as far as it looks to articulate a critique of the Western-centric contacts embedded in the exhibitionary form.^[5] It aims to move beyond tracing origins, to examining possible deconstructions of the hegemonic exhibitionary form. While speculative in tone, the analysis of one-person exhibitions such as Szalkowicz's makes it possible to identify alternatives to the modern/colonial exhibition. Critiques of modernity are far from new, in fact, they abound in what amounts to our current epistemological crisis. While the literature that critiques modernity from the disciplinary perspectives of sociology, history, anthropology and science studies, or through postcolonial, decolonial, feminist or post-natural thinking has been widely adopted within artistic and curatorial practices, it has seldom been used to critique exhibition design and the ideological basis of museological and museographical apparatuses, including their spatial habits, props, idiosyncrasies and material traditions that is, to critique the exhibitionary form.^[6]

In 2010, Bruno Latour pointed out that the new red tuna's ecosystem extended to both President Sarkozy and "the sushi bars of the whole planet" as opposed to being limited to a specific chain of predators and prey.^[7] This contemporary *kakosmos* "that is, in polite Greek, a horrible and disgusting mess!" chimes with the spirit of sixteenth-century cabinets of curiosities, both literally and metaphorically.^[8] Citing Stephen Toulmin and calling Louis Althusser's bluff, Latour comments on how this early Renaissance epistemic paradigm feels closer than ever in the twenty-first century. Characteristic of such paradigms were the odd and disseminated relations that tied the micro- and macro-cosmoses, and connected animate and inanimate alike. As Latour's new red tuna observation illustrates, the present times conjure relations that resonate strongly with the dense and disordered networks of cabinets of curiosities, and they can only be explained by conferring agency to human and non-humans.

All manifestos include a call, which in Latour's case is for compositionism: "It is time to compose in all the meanings of the word, including to compose with, that is to compromise, to care, to move slowly, with caution and precaution."^[9] Compromise is a word that makes itself present in the work of another Argentinian artist, Adrián Villar Rojas. So too is composing or "comp(h)osting", as Carolyn Cristov-Bakargiev's calls it.^[10] An electrifying incarnation of Latour's call for arms, one of Villar Rojas's recent exhibitions within *The Theater of Disappearance* project, took place in Athens in 2017. First to populate the exhibition-cabinet were three very different institutions: the commissioner, NEON, a contemporary non-profit; the site, Hill of the Nymphs, an archaeological location; and the institution, the National Observatory of Athens, a cosmological research laboratory and visitor centre, itself home to several scientific institutes. When the artist proposed to include the planting of several thousand specimens in the grounds of the Observatory, that is, on the protected archaeological site of the Hill of the Nymphs, all three organisations had to work together. Compromise on a material level took the shape of a wooden crate, laid out on top of the revered soil to form a gigantic planter that provided both a fertile space and an irrigation system for the corn, wild grasses, pumpkins, watermelons and more.^[11] Photographs of its installation process as well as shots showing the land before the project began are reproduced in the exhibition's catalogue. With these as the only officially published illustrations, the catalogue feels like a kind of science-fiction PS from Villar Rojas, intended to make the audience wonder if the landscape they saw in the exhibition was a figment of their imagination.

Beyond its practical realisation, the "soil settlement" creates a theoretical framework that permeates the whole exhibition. This framework upsets the Western epistemological basis that dictates the value and obliged conservation of archaeological elements, while it respectfully lays a cloak of suspended time and tons of soil between old and emergent forms. Thrusting corn encounters the hegemonic epistemic structures of archaeology: demarcated and protected zones as well as detailed protocols to dictate the finding, classification, handling and conservation of objects and their fragments. Alive and feral, the corn and its fellow plants occupy their space, absorb their energy, extend their stalks and exude their oxygen; it is pulsing corn colonising the space of one of Western civilisation's core disciplines.

Villar Rojas presented a *kakosmos*, through which the previously landscaped gardens calmly standing for the modern concept of Nature were replaced with a maze of vegetation. Venturing through the alleys of towering plants became an invitation to be both discoverer and lost human being. The combination of corn and squash was the most visible element among the near two dozen species of plants, fruits and vegetables.



Adrián Villar Rojas, *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017, installation view at the Hill of the Nymphs, commissioned by NEON in collaboration with the National Observatory of Athens, 2017. Photo: Jörg Baumann / baumann fotografie frankfurt a.m.
Courtesy of the artist and NEON

On the American continent this union nurtured thriving civilisations, beginning with the Olmecs in central

Mexico. The joint growth of corn, squash and beans fed, balanced and protected one another as well as the soil they depended on; and the three vegetables continue to be the staple diet for local populations today. Watermelons and pumpkins are also present in Villar Rojas's previous installations, such as the 2014 show at kurimanzutto in Mexico City, where "organic and inorganic, human and machine-made matter"^[12] that was collected locally, populated another large expanse of soil, this one inside the gallery space.



Adrián Villar Rojas, Los teatros de Saturno (The Theatres of Saturn), 2014, installation view at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2014.

Photo: Michel Zabé. Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto

In the maze of the Athens exhibition, the public could choose to follow one of two main routes, either leading to the National Observatory building or to the area of the caves. Populated by eleven vitrines fitted into the rocky and sandy terrain, the caves were a hidden zone of the Hill of the Nymphs that had remained unexplored for decades. A spirit of discovery lingered in the site and permeated the vitrines' contents, which showed a variety of scenes of conquest. A replica of NASA's Curiosity rover modified with junk electrical and mechanical gadgets and surrounded by objects, ranging from satellite parts to hand-made flags of imperial Japan and the United States, among others lay close to a plaster reproduction of *Victory of Samothrace* (190 BC).



Adrián Villar Rojas, *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017, installation view at the Hill of the Nymphs, commissioned by NEON in collaboration with the National Observatory of Athens, 2017. Photo: Jörg Baumann / baumann fotografie frankfurt a.m. Courtesy of the artist and NEON

Rather than being conserved in pristine condition, the sculpture had been covered in graffiti and stickers, posters and flyers a post-apocalyptic vision.^[13] Both pieces sat on Moroccan sand and ancient stromatolites from the same region. Other nearby vitrines show a bird's nest, torn or well-kept flags

arranged into small altar-like configurations, and dense entanglements of dust and fossils, weapons and teenage souvenirs. Moving into the caves' depths, the audience encountered astronaut suits or animal skeletons stacked on translucent shelves as seen, for example, in the albatross skeleton replica towering over the copy of "Lucy". The first is a recent case of a species under threat of extinction, and the second the million-years old fossil that was used to refute the linearity of evolution: the sight of both merging through the layers of transparent glass invited the viewer to reconsider the authority of scientific narratives.



Adrián Villar Rojas, *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017, installation view at the Hill of the Nymphs, commissioned by NEON in collaboration with the National Observatory of Athens, 2017. Photo: Jörg Baumann / baumann fotografie frankfurt a.m.
Courtesy of the artist and NEON

Colonialism in its different forms loomed over the presentation: terrestrial, xenophobic, age-related, fossilised. The vitrines joined the corn in their throbbing impulse, the latter growing and invading the space around them, the former's insides telling stories of other colonisations. All of them asking if violence is a requisite of conquest or if that has simply been the way we, as a species, have come to perform it. "There is no morality in a lion devouring a deer", Villar Rojas once posited, just as there is none in the corn taking over the Hill of the Nymphs.^[14] Discovery, conquest and imperialism are common threads running through *The Theater of Disappearance*, yet without a direct critique or moral judgement towards its perpetrators. The exhibition's non-human entities its plants, caves, soil and trees add as much to its narrative as the man-made objects. In other words, it is not the act of planting that can be read as a "performance" aligned with the exhibition's narrative, but invading corn in itself, as much as the vitrine that depicts the moon landing.

Colonialism's binary logic has recently been unpacked as part of sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos *Epistemologies of the South* (2014). In defining modern Western thinking as "an abyssal thinking",

Santos conceptualises the impossibility for both “sides of the line” to be co-present.^[16] The sides this one and that one, in Santos terminology are characterised as metropolitan and colonial respectively, and he postulates that decades after most colonial administrations ended, social reality is still traversed and divided by this profound chasm. The power of “this side of the line” lies in the possibility of “exhausting the field of relevant reality”.^[16] The “other side” is void of any ontological value.

Thinking in these terms, knowledge can be divided into “acceptable knowledges” science, philosophy, theology and “non-existent” ones beliefs and opinions that cannot be confirmed by positivism, intuitions that belong in the world of magic. Similarly, there is a legal cartography that Santos delineates alongside his epistemological mapping: originally set up to work according to a political division of territory, law becomes the only possible arena in which legal and illegal categories apply, while anything outside of it is simply considered a preceding state of nature. Santos quotes John Locke “In the beginning all the world was America” to illustrate how the social contract created not only a metropolitan civil society but also a huge state of nature imposed on millions that live outside the territory of law. This lawlessness, as well as the incomprehensibility of “non-existent” knowledges are, according to Santos, products of the abyssal lines that gradually take shape in historical treaties that justify the invasion and colonisation of the Americas.

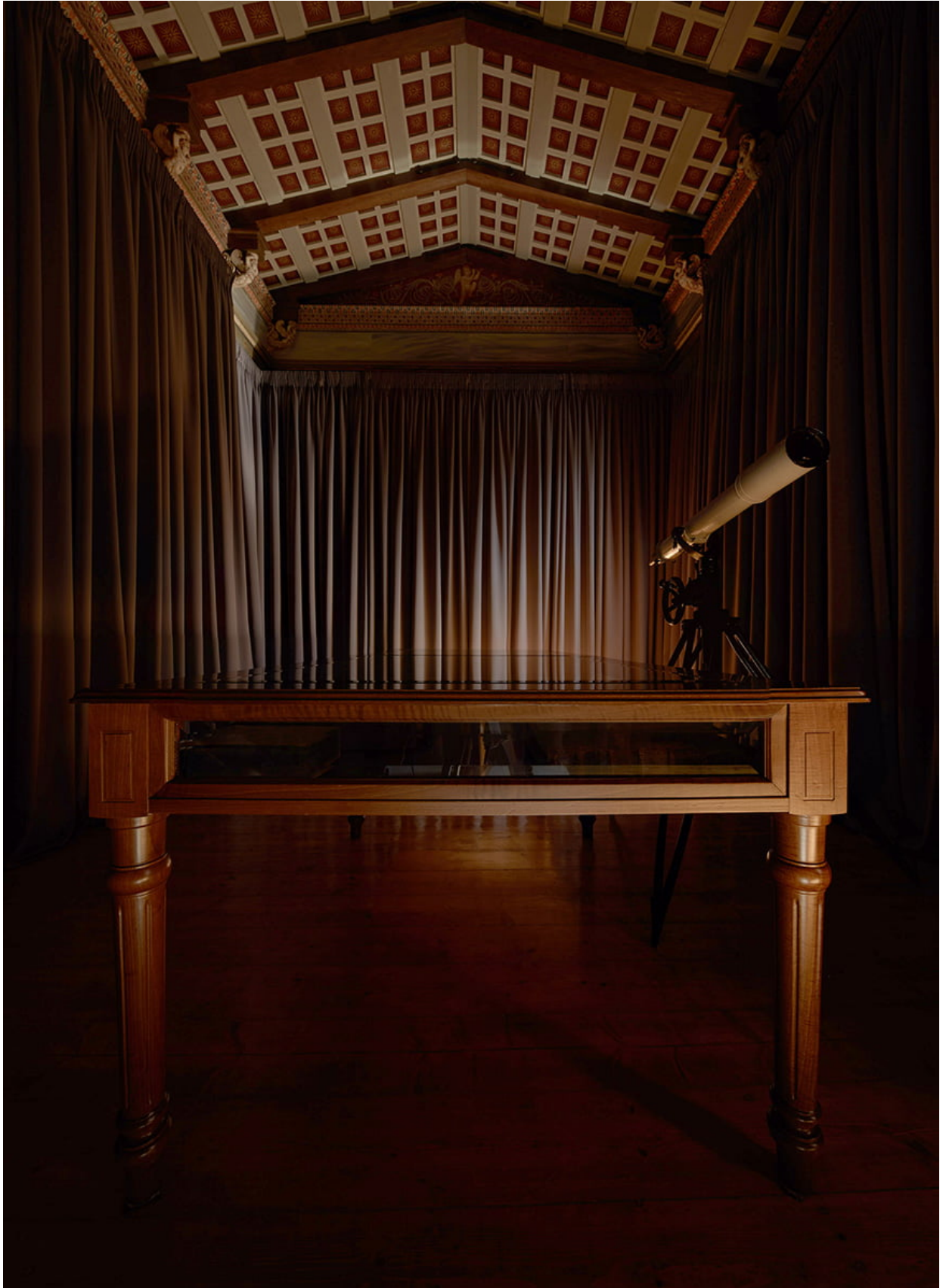
In the dissolution of the limits that normally separate good and evil, Villar Rojas’s exhibition forges an epistemic paradigm that no longer follows the abyssal lines of the modern world. Rather than playing with the categories that “this side of the line” has on offer, Villar Rojas constructs a different world in which characters have to be perceived as if for the first time and where the exhibitionary form no longer follows the rules stipulated by its modern configuration. In this world view, those experiences that according to Santos’s abyssal thinking had been “made invisible both as agencies and agents” the corn, the caves, the energy of the sun are made manifest.^[17] The exhibition exists and responds to a different epistemological basis, one in which living corn is art.

The other route that could be followed across the Hill of the Nymphs, under the deafening sound of crickets singing in the hot Mediterranean summer, led to the building of the National Observatory. This part of the exhibition spoke to the historical compromise negotiated in 1846, when Athens was barely a city and the Observatory took priority as a site that helped consolidate its status as a place of discovery of Classic civilisations and Western culture as well as a place of erasure of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. In building their first research institution, the Greeks confirmed their standing in the West, and as a proponent of progress and science. This historical compromise integrates the framework or foundational myth of Villar Rojas’s project.

The building was stripped bare of the instruments and documents that it normally houses. Instead, a white, true-to-life model of the Observatory was installed in a room lined by thick curtains, with an elegant wooden table and matching telescope placed nearby.



Adrián Villar Rojas, *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017, installation view at the Hill of the Nymphs, commissioned by NEON in collaboration with the National Observatory of Athens, 2017. Photo: Jörg Baumann / baumann fotografie frankfurt a.m.
Courtesy of the artist and NEON



Adrián Villar Rojas, *The Theater of Disappearance*, 2017, installation view at the Hill of the Nymphs, commissioned by NEON in

collaboration with the National Observatory of Athens, 2017. Photo: Jörg Baumann / baumann fotografie frankfurt a.m.
 Courtesy of the artist and NEON

The model was mysterious, firstly because it showed the building that the viewer stood in while contemplating it, but also because it went back in time, showing the newly born and barren site of the Observatory surrounded by an incipient city of Athens. The artist has used curtains in previous works notably in *Two Suns* (2015) at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York to seclude the space of the work, and as Villar Rojas himself explained in an interview, to avoid the uncomfortable situation of “being watched as you watch”, in the case of the Observatory, by the young receptionist sitting at the door.^[18] The way they meticulously cover the space, sealing off the outside world with their maroon thickness, is reminiscent of the dense curtains famously employed by Adolf Loos to secure a similar level of intimacy in his wife’s bedroom (Fig. 14).



Adolf Loos, Lina Loos's bedroom, 1903

The comparison touches on the question of control: while Villar Rojas claims to have installed the curtains to give the audience some privacy, Loos’s architecture famously allowed the owner of the property a vantage point from which to keep its visitors in check. The National Observatory was built to study the cosmos and is an institution of modern research and positivist discovery as the telescope that adorns the space testifies. And yet, in the upsetting of dynamics of conqueror and conquered that run throughout the exhibition, the curtains that frame the model of the Observatory ask whether humankind is the one mastering its object of study or if the cosmos has always been in control instead.

Beatriz Colomina disentangles the wonders of Loos’s design of control in an article cited by Paul B.

Preciado in “Architecture as a Practice of Political Disobedience” (2012). Preciado summarises:

Beatriz Colomina was one of the first architectural historians to register the impact of performative and poststructural feminist theories in architecture. “Architecture,” she argues in *Sexuality and Space*, “is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames the occupant.” Reading Colomina and Butler with Foucault, it seems urgent today to redefine architecture as being part of modern “biopolitical technologies.”^[19]

Preciado explains how spatial conventions determine what can be thought of as possible or impossible in relation to bodies’ materiality. He poignantly unpacks the effects spaces have on the bodies that occupy them, and how the history of those spaces, the ideology and the rationale that gave way to their particular configuration, is not neutral. Such biased basis has a twofold effect, on the space’s morphology and on the subject that occupies it. In his application of Foucault’s ideas to the subjectivities of the second half of the twentieth century and the current times, Preciado provides a loaded reading of contemporary spaces.^[20] Importantly, he says that what is at stake is “the possibility of architecture to transform into a social revolutionary practice”, one of “extensive connections and mobile thresholds”.^[21] The invitation can be extended to the exhibitionary form and both Szalkowicz’s and Villar Rojas’s exhibitions appear as examples of such practices. In disarticulating the standard forms of exhibition, each artist opens up a way to think about how space frames and determines what is included and excluded from its epistemological basis.

“We are going through a period of epistemological crisis. We are experiencing a paradigm shift of technologies of inscription, a mutation of collective forms of the production and archiving of knowledge and truth”, Preciado argued at the beginning of 2017, in an article written in Athens.^[22] The exhibition as epistemic site, one where the production and perpetuation of a truth regime takes place, has sustained and augmented its role in contemporary culture throughout modern times. The birth of the art exhibition as a cultural form is coetaneous with the dawn of European modernity, which explains why ideas of classification, taxonomy, conservation and archive are equally integral to both.^[23] These forms of rationality are indivisible from the abstract mechanisms that consolidate them, as well as from the spatial or concrete devices they materialised into, which is to say that the epistemological system embedded into spatial displays that endeavour to categorise, organise and diagram a subject matter namely, the exhibition can only be part of the Western, scientific, positivist system. Just like architecture produces its occupant, so too does the exhibition spatialise the knowledge system it is subsumed by. In the morphologic gesture of Szalkowicz and Villar Rojas, it is not only the spatial configuration that is being reconstructed, but, more importantly, the epistemic foundations that underpin such spaces.

De-automatising modes of exhibition is something Szalkowicz has been pursuing throughout her artistic practice.^[24] On the occasion of “Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I”, her gesture went beyond that of hybridising in the past she has played with the lighting and routes through the exhibition to embark on a complete reconstitution of the framework of display. It is not so much in the strategies of mix and match that this gesture finds its potency, but in the cascading effects that the human hanging walls have for the space of the exhibitionary form as a whole. If the in-animism of the walls can be overcome by using parading human beings, then the wider distinctions that constitute the exhibition between animate and inanimate objects, form and content, subject and object are also blurred. In manipulating these

dichotomies, which are foundational in the modern world view, Szalkowicz is not only twisting the display mechanisms of her show, but questioning the extent to which the whole of the modern exhibition can continue to house the art she wishes to create. The epistemological shift that occurs at the level of the exhibitionary form validates an art object that is not encased in representation, but exists in the everyday. In other words, in Szalkowicz's world view, art is part of the design of life ineffably present in the photograph of the leg as well as in the leg that mimics its gesture,



Cecilia Szalkowicz, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I", 2019, Casacuberta Hall, Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires. Photo: Sofia Ungar © Cecilia Szalkowicz

as much in what can be seen as that which hides from view.



Cecilia Szalkowicz, "Soy un disfraz de tigre, acto I", 2019, Casacuberta Hall, Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires. Photo: Sofia Ungar © Cecilia Szalkowicz

Non-human bodies play a similar role in Villar Rojas's show. The epistemological break occurs at one of modernity's primary binary splits: Nature and Culture are cross-contaminated. Colonialism is divested of morality and revealed across soil, rovers, pumpkins and Observatory alike, while Nature is animated and given centre stage as artwork. The entangled relations at the basis of sixteenth-century cabinets of curiosities provide *The Theater of Disappearance* with a paragon much more so than the disciplines and categories linked to modern exhibitions and it is through this lens and code that the project and its Latourian composition unfolds.

If the exhibitionary form can be used to critique modernity as a socio-cultural phenomenon, it has so far been done through the lens of individual artistic practices. Artists like Szalkowicz and Villar Rojas have been reconfiguring the space of the exhibition forever, and yet the question that endures is whether such efforts can continue to remain within the realm of artistic practices or if they can transcend to an institutional level, opening up new ritual possibilities.^[26] To probe into the exhibition's modern ideological infrastructure is a means of theorising the principles, reasons, extension and methods through which knowledge and art are validated, and to resist their automated, progressive implementation.

Footnotes

1. Tokarczuk, Olga. *Flights*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions. 2017.
2. I have Camila Charask to thank for this brilliant reference. Mary Tapia was an experimental fashion designer, who mixed traditional and aboriginal garments with modern, mainstream pieces during the 1960s. See Carrascal, María Laura. "Mary Tapia: una moda argentina en el clima internacional de la avanzada folk". *Separata: Versiones de lo nacional y lo regional*. Vol. IX. No. 14. 2009. pp. 43-59.
3. Open call for the PARSE issue On the Question of Exhibition, available at <https://parsejournal.com/opencall/on-the-question-of-exhibition/> (accessed 2021-01-23).
4. García, Tristan and Normand, Vincent (eds.). *Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions*. Berlin: Sternberg Press. 2019. p. 13.
5. Key literature on modernity/coloniality includes Quijano, Aníbal. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality". *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21. No. 2. 2007; Lugones, María. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System". *Hypatia*. Vol. 22. No. 1. 2007; Mignolo, Walter. "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference". *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Vol. 101. No. 1. 2000.
6. This is the argument of my PhD thesis, titled "The Modern Paradigm and the Exhibitionary Form". Museum Studies, University of Leicester (M4C/AHRC). 2020-24.
7. The correct name of what Latour insists on calling red tuna is bluefin tuna—as artist Asad Raza pointed out when reading this text together at "What Do Exhibitions Do?", ASFA & Hydra 21: Exhibition Histories Seminar 1, September 2019. See Latour, Bruno. "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'". *New Literary History*. No. 41. 2010. pp. 471-490.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 481.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 485.
10. "The essence of Adrián Villar Rojas's project is to build worlds by comp(h)osting. His oeuvre revolves around testing the emotional potentialities of creating a folded space-time, collecting debris, wandering like Ishmael in the desert through a sci-fi land of rubble, where the subject is a survivor, a ghost or zombie able to tell stories about the whale, and through that storytelling, reboot and restart life over and over again in cosmic perspectivism." Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. "When It Disappears, the Energy Is Left". In VV.AA. *Adrián Villar Rojas*. London: Phaidon. 2020.
11. To be precise, 46,000 different plants and 26 different species were involved.
12. VV.AA., *Adrián Villar Rojas*, p. 83, caption.
13. The artist points out in an interview that these replicas were common in schools and universities in his native Rosario and elsewhere; when the Metropolitan Museum in New York first opened it only had replicas in its Greek and Roman collection. VV.AA. *Adrian Villar Rojas, The Theater of Disappearance*. NEON Foundation. Available at <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/THE-THEATER-OF-DISAPPEARANCE.pdf> (accessed 2021-01-23). p. 14.
14. VV.AA., *Adrián Villar Rojas*, p. 11.
15. Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. London and New York, NY: Routledge. 2015.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
18. Interview Adrián Villar Rojas and Elina Kountouri. NEON Foundation. Available at <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/adrian-villar-rojas-the-theater-of-disappearance/> (accessed 2021-01-23).
19. Preciado, Beatriz. "Architecture as a practice of biopolitical disobedience". *Log*. No. 25. 2012. p. 132.

20. The subjectivity Preciado will bring in as occupant of such spaces is the pharmacopornographic subject, born in the 1940s and 1950s in the West, specifically as a consequence of the United States empire. The concept singles out the pharmaceutical and the pornographic industries as hegemonic forces in the production of contemporary subjects, via the enforcement of the heterosexual reproductive regime.
21. Preciado, "Architecture as a practice of biopolitical disobedience", p. 134.
22. Preciado, Paul B. *An Apartment on Uranus*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions. 2020. p. 221.
23. See, for example, Joao Ribas's historical recount of the birth of museums. Ribas, Joao. "Seeing, Showing, Ordering: Notes on a Natural History of Exhibiting". In *Theater, Garden, Bestiary*.
24. López Seoane, Mariano. "Soy un disfraz de tigre. Acto I". *Otra Parte*. 10 October 2019. Available at <https://www.revistaotraparte.com/arte/soy-un-disfraz-de-tigre-acto-i/> (accessed 2021-01-23).
25. On a topology of rituals see, for example, Von Hantelmann, Dorothea. "Art Institutes as Ritual Spaces: A Brief Genealogy of Gatherings". In *Theater, Garden, Bestiary*.