

AMAZONAS SHOPPING CENTER SOL CALERO

Amazonas Shopping Center is a retrospective, all immersive installation of Sol Calero's recent projects, including versions of *Casa de Cambio*, *Nuevo Estilo*, *La Escuela del Sur*, *Ciber Café*, *Agencia Viajes Paraiso*, *Desde el Jardín* and *Salsa*. The exhibition is named after a shopping mall the artist came across in South London, which hosted a hair and nail salon, a cafeteria, a driving school, a language school, a restaurant, and a tiny job center. The variety of businesses, all cohabiting a small space, were almost overlapping, one establishment spontaneously serving several purposes and offering different services. This style of commercial spaces, often found in Latin American countries, or run by immigrants in their new homes, creates a community dynamic that transcends commodity exchange. These businesses, much like people's lives, are built in a way that allows for flexibility, adaptation and improvisation. Self-construction has its parallel in entrepreneurial force that migratory endeavors bring with them, in the effort to find opportunities to construct a new life in wealthier lands. Unpredictable circumstances, precarious economics, and the need to fabricate solutions are reflected in its vernacular architecture. In this way, the restaurant becomes an impromptu salsa school; someone's relative is in town and the salon becomes a clothing shop for a few hours; the currency exchange is selling jewelry made by the owner's sister-in-law. People don't only trade goods and services, but stories, tips, and plans, and the space morphs accordingly. These forms of socialization and self-construction strategies – of opportunity, of identity, of settlement – and the aesthetics that come with it, is what Sol Calero has been exploring, and recreating, in her installations over the past few years. Calero's installations are not only sceneries, but they are activated, like the places they make reference to, through activities that provide a critical space to question the exoticization of Latin American cultures as Other, while celebrating, at the same time, an iconographic tradition that has been misrepresented and excluded from art history's canonic narratives. Calero makes use of her own take on the aesthetics of domestic Latin American culture and homogenized tropicalism to reclaim it as a source of knowledge and identity rather than a clichéd perception of this heritage.

Bienvenidos a Nuevo Estilo, 2014* *La Sauna Caliente, 2016

Two years ago the Amazonas Shopping Centre in South London was forced to close due to rising rents engendered by gentrification. Gloria's Hair Salon, which inspired Calero's project ***Bienvenidos a Nuevo Estilo*** at Laura Bartlett Gallery in 2014 and was once in the shopping center, is now on its own in a different neighborhood, but now a small empanada canteen has been installed a under the back stairs and a tiny classroom which offers both English and driving lessons. Her shop is beside a large Latino shopping center at Elephant and Castle, which will soon be evicted and demolished to build a new mall and luxury apartments. For the opening show at Hamburger Bahnhof, the hair salon will host a service of braiding by hairdresser Binta. Integrated in the show we find a rack of bathrobes and slippers, and the curtains designed as part of the exhibition ***La Sauna Caliente***, shown at Kunsthaus Bregenz as an immersive recreation of a spa-like scenario in which Calero references those typical of the regional landscape of the area as a site for sports, body-and wellness culture in the institutionalized practice of image production, an essential contemporary demand.

Casa de Cambio, 2016

On the other side of the entrance, ***Casa de Cambio*** recreates the interior guise of a Venezuelan currency exchange bureau that was originally shown at Laura Bartlett's space in Art Basel in 2016, at a key moment when Venezuela's social and political state was on the brink of breakdown, which has since then escalated into a major crisis. Calero created a site of negotiation that highlights the fragility of currency circulation, the erratic situation of Venezuela, and the conflicts and contradictions of our own value systems set against a place of waiting, longing and nostalgia where the decorative, distracting and humorous become vital elements of day to day activities. Placed in the context of an international art fair, Calero also brought attention to the volatile and frivolous nature of art's monetary value, and the ultimate socioeconomics of a global class with access to culture. As in the original version of this project, a limited edition of drawings will be circulating inside of stacks of paper sold at the exchange bureau, whose selling price fluctuates during the duration of the opening, referencing the volatile currency market in Venezuela. Within the installation, on a wall-mounted monitor, a video contribution by artist Mario Campos will be on view.

Ciber Café, 2014

Across the hall from the currency exchange bureau one finds the ***Ciber Café*** (Laura Bartlett, Frieze London, 2014), a place of access to information, typical of areas without generalized access to the internet, where people chat with their relatives in distant home countries or resolve their everyday necessities in pre-paid slots of time. For this occasion, the ***Ciber Café*** will host a selection of video works curated by Sira Pizà, showing thirteen pieces by artists and filmmakers, mostly of Latin American provenance, who approach the contemporary processes that are both a result, and stem from, dynamics of imperialism and

its colonial forms. Pre-colonial paradigms of thought, racial antagonisms, cultural appropriationism, or the effects of the Conquest in contemporary landscapes, languages and identities, are some of the subjects that the audience will be able to navigate through, viewing the pieces divided into four conceptual blocks. Featuring works by Pia Camil, Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner, Cristóbal Gracia, Núria Güell, Louis Henderson, Oscar Leone, Rogelio López Cuenca, Gabriel Mascaro, Joiri Minaya, Luís Molina-Pantin, Javier Ocampo, Fátima Rodrigo, and Olivia Vivanco.

Agencia Viajes Paraíso, 2017

Agencia Viajes Paraíso, a travel agency originally conceived for Kunstpalais Erlangen, stands on the other side, approaching the underlying relationships present in the construction and self-constitution of countries as tourist destinations. In this project, Calero points out how the tourist embodies 'experience' as the ultimate commodity in a contemporary immaterial economy, personifying the collector of experiences and sensations in yet another form of consumerism. Travelling appears as the perfect materialization of the mechanisms of desire: the trip is presented as a promise, an adventure, a dream – where the chase and the projection is more substantial than the fulfillment. This is where the travel agency, with its constructed imagery, its posters and brochures, its necessary planning and timing, scheduling and preparation, is the most evident witness of the construction of the exotic as a notion. It also implies a temporary state of the traveller, a condition differentiating the *tourist* from the *migrant* and demonstrates access to global mobility as the ultimate factor of stratification as a product of a globalized era.

La Escuela del Sur, 2015* *Salsa, 2014

La Escuela del Sur, commissioned by Studio Voltaire in London in 2015, occupies the back-left wing of the exhibition, giving passage to ***Salsa***, a project from 2014 shown at Gillmeier Rech gallery in Berlin: both revolving around transmission of knowledge, they approach and question the way cultural narratives are defined by inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. They also reflect on cultural appropriationism and the processes of importing and exporting cultural icons and practices that become clichés in the new sites of their consumption. In these places, stereotypical visions of different and distant societies are turned into notions of Otherness that become reified throughout history, language and popular culture. The school at Studio Voltaire, fully equipped with customized school furniture and changeable blackboard paintings, allowed the space to be fully realized as a social setting, hosting lectures and painting classes. While the salsa school in Berlin hosted dance lessons, it also reflected on Latin music as a true testament to racial integration, the social power of music, and as an instrumental tool in helping Spanish-speaking immigrants define their own community. Salsa music has been an ongoing interest of Calero's through her work for its charged lyrical content, ranged from heartbreak to macho posturing to sharp cultural and political commentary: while the music and dance has helped galvanize a genuine interest in Latin American culture, the fascination is often taken to be idealized, exoticized, and aestheticized, painting an image that is generally a far cry from the realities of daily life in Latin America.

Desde el Jardín, 2016

Lastly, the *Amazonas Shopping Center's* cinema will be screening ***Desde el Jardín***, written and directed in collaboration with artist Dafna Maimon and shot at David Dale Gallery in Glasgow in 2016. Imitating the structure of telenovelas, *Desde el Jardín* recreates an opulent hacienda that creates the illusion of luxury, wealth and glamour that this genre tries to represent. Working with cultural codes, Maimon and Calero underline the normalized social dynamics that are portrayed in telenovelas, such as gender roles, socioeconomic positionality and class aspiration. They use the basis of this discourse, developed in plots of greed, envy, infidelities, family drama and tragic twists, to create their own abstraction, taking extravagance to all levels of the assemblage. *Desde el Jardín* was produced by CONGLOMERATE, a collaborative project presented in the form of a television network, where it has been released episodically for free online since Spring 2016. The project is realised by a core team of five artists and filmmakers: Sol Calero, Ethan Hayes-Chute, Derek Howard, Christopher Kline and Dafna Maimon, inviting collaborations by Berlin-based and international artists to create their own segments, sets, commercials and specials for the network. The content ranges from documentary, melodrama, comedy, interview, music, and art into a unified body. www.conglomerate.tv

Project and studio assistants: Ana Alenso, Aude Levère, Sira Pizà, Rubén D'hers, Mario Campos.

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