

SOL CALERO

Agencia Viajes Paraíso

May 6th to September 24th, 2017

Kunstpalais Erlangen

With contributions from Joiri Minaya, Cristóbal Gracia and Josep Maynou.

Ever since the first pilgrimages and the crusades, the *Grand Tours* of the 17th century and the scientific explorations of the 19th, the act of travelling has taken many forms and served different purposes. One of the most recent forms is the act of travelling for leisure. This has traditionally been a practice related to privilege, but it wasn't until after the industrial revolution that it became what we know it to be today: mass tourism. Stemming from *tornos* and *tornus* in greek and latin respectively, tourism signifies a circular movement of going and returning. It implies a temporary state of the traveller: coming back to the territory of origin is, then, the first precondition differentiating the *tourist* from the *migrant*. The inherent privilege of the tourist is based on this difference: the *voluntary* traveller belongs to a new leisure class of sorts. He understands the world as attainable, at reach, and his access to mobility equals a certain amount of freedom – a sign of socio-economical status. But this figure, as some authors have argued, exists only on the basis of a growing polarization between him, and the citizen who moves out of necessity and survival. Access to global mobility has increasingly become the most elevated factor of stratification as a product of postmodern evolution.

The tourist embodies 'experience' as the ultimate commodity in a contemporary immaterial economy. He personifies the collector of experiences and sensations as yet another form of consumerism. This preeminent expression of leisure is magnified by the possibility of reporting the experience in real time through the immediate sharing of images on social media platforms, much like a contemporary public travel diary that has an audience who bestows value. The practice of travelling during one's free time involves, on one hand, the very concept of free time as an institution. It is at once the opposition and the reflection of work, as a mutually signifying structure, which classically reveals the exemption of work as an expression of luxury. On the other hand, it presents itself as a space of *self-production*. Choices of leisure *produce* personality and status; they engender individualism, value and difference. The contemporary tourist experiences travelling as a *reward* of a life of work – plans a trip as an escape from domesticity, seeking intangible pleasures and getting away from first world diseases: stress, depression, and a range of contemporary emotional disorders that travelling promises to dilute, as if repairing a broken subject. In this way, the act of tourism is to seek *difference* and *distance*. It is historically Eurocentric and Western by definition, as it only reaches meaning when it is practiced in far off places, where landscape, culture, aesthetics, language and gastronomy appear to be radically different from the familiar contexts of provenance. It is thus based on a perspective of 'Otherness' and the construction of a manufactured identity that is inherently exotic. It is also the superficial experience of authenticity, a re-creation of an original state of being (where work doesn't exist and the principle of enjoyment and relaxation, self indulgence and care become imperative). This experience must be re-enacted in a virtualization of the enjoyable, easy-to-strip-down aspects of a place: the experience of the contradictions, injustice, specificities and nuances of actual life in that same place would erase the difference between tourism and domestic life, and defeat its purpose. As much as this simplifying process is based on stereotypes, it also produces *brands*, which allow for an industry to exist. Places and their peoples, foods, traditions, natural resources and cultures are transformed into standards in order to be packed, exported and consumed.

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 self-evident witness of the construction of the exotic as a notion.

Sol Calero's *Agencia Viajes Paraíso* approaches the underlying relationships present in the construction and self-constitution of countries as tourist destinations. She 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 aesthetic heritage. For Kunstpalais Erlangen, Sol Calero has created an immersive installation that takes the audience through the different stages and implications of leisure travelling. Entering the show, the visitors find themselves in a waiting room with a TV screen, where they are presented with a series of works by artists dealing with the complexities of power relationships between historically privileged positions, and their role in the construction of stereotypes that reflect and perpetuate biased visions of race, gender and identity. In a second room, the audience finds a travel agency's office, not only reproducing objectified clichés – tiny airplanes and hammocks, clocks displaying different time zones and fake plants – but also hosting the employees of a local agency who are on-site offering their usual services during the exhibition. In the successive spaces, the visitor is surrounded by references to the fantasizing stage of projecting a trip. This is completed in the final room, where one can dive into the promised environment of disconnect and relaxation, inside a space which resembles a tropical lounge – made to meet the expectations of controlled exoticism.

Joiri Minaya
Siboney, 2014
HD video, 10:00 min

Joiri Minaya's *Siboney* approaches the gaze, which she receives as the exotic female she embodies in the work. This gaze is external, male, and western, and constructs Otherness in constant reifications that take place in language, art and representations of the body. Looking back at the camera, the artist defiantly questions standardized historical narratives of the one who is *looked at*. Minaya's video contains a performance in which she creates a dialogue between a painting by Vela Zanetti of a dancing mulatta, and the adaptation of the song *Siboney* by Connie Francis, through the exhaustive process of composing a tropical patterned-mural, and the resolute deconstruction of it through her own movement.

Cristóbal Gracia
Aquatania part I; A man should stand where God places him – jungle trails or Hollywood streets – and fight for those things in which he believes, 2016.
Full HD video.
11:04 min.

Cristóbal Gracia's *Aquatania, Part I* is based on the movie *Tarzan and the mermaids* from 1948, supposedly taking place in Africa but actually shot in Acapulco – the last one of the original series starring actor Johnny Weissmuller. The video is part of a larger project in which the artist unfolds the different layers and implications of a Hollywood-fabricated vision of a primitive, tropical land, fostering clichés promoted by predominant cultural industries. The original movie serves as a paradigm of the western idea of indigenous communities as inferior civilizations, non-western lands as exotic paradises, the superiority of the white man and the homogenizing representations of the Other. Gracia re-enacts scenes from *Tarzan* in contemporary Acapulco, a place of polarized socio-economical realities, that has suffered from exploitative tourism, a reality of violence and corruption and, much like the star of the film, continues to see the process of rising success and subsequent decadence.

Josep Maynou

Far South, 2016

HD video, 5:20 min loop

Josep Maynou's *Far South* is a small voyage, a domestic crusade of a disinterested pilgrim. The artist plays the role of a distracted rider, too tall for his donkey, a tourist with sunglasses. Reversing the terms, this openly western and unapologetically hipster explorer covers his head with a fashionable baseball cap and crosses the red hills of the Moroccan desert, refusing all heroism with the rocking back and forth of his morning stroll. In his recurrent stays in the rural area of Azilal, Josep Maynou works with the local artisans of a community, whose realities are entangled with the stories that the artist brings with him from his first world. These are chronicles of the rootless, eternally young *globetrotter*; a contemporary western individual. His tales are materialized in the cooperative production of traditionally crafted rugs. These rugs and their narratives are crafted through the slow, consensual integration of the artist into the context, and the deliberate practice of mutual permeability.

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