

Dora García

INSECT, HISTORY, MIRROR, REVOLUTION

9.9—21.10.2023

Ellen de Bruijne PROJECTS is delighted to present *Insect, History, Mirror, Revolution*, a new solo exhibition by Dora García. Dora García will debut her newest work *Insect Vocabulary* and present it alongside her most recent film *Amor Rojo*, a performance installation, and three new drawing/book works.

Dora García sculpts and arranges knowledge as a material in its own right. Using extensive documentary research, she delves into complex topics such as the history of the irrational, subconscious mind, and forges links with the great names in literature—including Walser, Artaud, and Joyce. The oeuvre of Dora García folds up into writing, film, installation, and performance, as is centred around stories which she organises and stages, conjuring situations designed to engage the visitor and trigger unique, introspective experiences. The result of this multidisciplinary atlas is a highly conceptual and metaphorical discourse that addresses issues like the artistic dimension of fiction, marginality as a form of resistance, or the symbolic logics that condition our relationship with cultural spaces and products.

AMOR ROJO (2023)

Amor Rojo (Spanish for Red Love) is the newest film by Dora García. The film connects the life and legacy of the Marxist theorist and Soviet revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952) with the current transfeminist movement in Mexico. Being a central figure among the revolutionaries of the early Soviet Union, Kollontai was the first woman to be a cabinet minister and the first woman ambassador. Among other things, she championed for women's liberation, helped organise the first International Women's Day, worked to advance women's labour, welfare, and education rights, and was an advocate for sexual emancipation, abortion rights, and civil partnerships instead of traditional marriage. After working in the Bolshevik government for a few years, she became sidelined and ostracised, and narrowly avoided her expulsion from the party by serving in several diplomatic posts outside Russia, including Norway, Mexico, and Sweden.

Following the spirit of the most recent feminist demonstrations across Latin America, *Amor Rojo* raises the issue of previous revolutions' unfulfilled promises. Violence, disappointment, and love-comradeship—one of Kollontai's main notions—become a driving force that unites women's struggles with those of queer and Indigenous peoples. Throughout the film, Dora García documents the histories, stances, and

propositions of women in Mexico while discovering the connections and knowledge on Kollontai by Mexican feminists, traced in many activist groups and associations, music bands, films, and newspapers.

In the past few years, the rise of right-wing politics and their regressive agenda has been notoriously spreading across the globe, perpetuating heteropatriarchal structures of violence and risking the advancements in queer, women, and indigenous rights. Collaterally, there has been a vigorous awakening of international transfeminist movements that intersect ecology and postcolonialism, and socialism. In early 2021 in Mexico, a country with one of the world's worst rates of gender violence, thousands of women fiercely protested the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. After long and fierce efforts, some sought-after victories occurred, such as the decriminalisation of abortion, and highly symbolic gestures took place, like the replacement of a statue of Columbus with an anti-monument created by women's groups, "Monument to the women who fight".

Just like what Kollontai used to advocate for, the current waves of feminism in Latin America fight for a struggle beyond the goal of equality between men and women, embracing transnational alliances to subvert the political and economical systems that oppress women and marginalised identities. In the words of Dora García, "I am convinced of the importance of vindicating the heritage of Kollontai's ideas; certainly, she was not unique, certainly, she was not alone, but because of a set of cultural and historical circumstances, she has managed to bridge historical periods (from those first years of the 20th to these first years of the 21st century) and geographical distances (Europe and South America). It is her name that is linked to a form of solidarity that today, in the face of the last political developments, has become a matter of life or death for many women and communities."

Amor Rojo is the third instalment of García's film trilogy, following prior films *Love with Obstacles* (2020) and *If I Could Wish for Something* (2021).

INSECT VOCABULARY (2023)

Premiering in this exhibition is *Insect Vocabulary* (2023), a set of three-dimensional cut-out signs, signs that repeatedly appear in Dora García's drawings, so often that by now they constitute a vocabulary on their own. This work series connects to the artist's recent drawings *L'insecte 1 to 30 (Mad Marginal Charts)* (2023)

and the set of panels *The Bug* (2022-2023), all of which relate to the time travel story of *The Bedbug*, a play by Vladimir Mayakovsky written between 1928 and 1929. The play tells the story of the young soviet man Ivan Prisytkin, who on his wedding day in 1929 is frozen by accident alongside a parasitic insect who becomes his companion throughout the story. Prisytkin is brought back to life fifty years later to a utopian communist world where poverty, illness, romantic love, and natural disasters exist no longer. Prisytkin, however, does not belong in this world, and he is taken and exhibited in a zoo as an example of the human corruptions of the past.

In Mayakovsky's play, the parasitic insect can be understood as an element that obstructs progress, making history repeat itself. Dora García uses this story to reflect on the cyclical nature of history, an eternal return where there is recurring fault, a bug, something that prevents the repetition from flowing without casualties. Vladimir Mayakovsky was contemporary of Alexandra Kollontai. They both shared enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution, and in time they were equally disappointed by it. A few years before Mayakovsky took his life, 1929, Kollontai began her career as a diplomat abroad (1923). Interestingly, they both wrote science fiction stories in which they speak about time travel from the 1920s to the 1970s. While Kollontai wrote about what she imagined to be a future socialist paradise in a hopeful manner, Mayakovsky portrayed a crestfallen and disenchanting scenario.

I READ IT WITH GOLDEN FINGERS, ANNOTATED BOOKS and DISMEMBERED (HAND WITH COIN) (2023)

In *INSECT, HISTORY, MIRROR, REVOLUTION*, Dora García presents three new drawing/book works from separate series. One is from the series *I Read It with Golden Fingers*, which consists in reading a book with fingers smirched in gold. The books from this series have been carefully selected and are part of the artist's private library that has informed her work along the years. From holding the book to passing the pages, all the gestures of reading leave a golden trace, tattooing the books with reading trails, sometimes to the point of illegibility. For this exhibition, the book is *The Most Foreign Country* (1955), Alejandra Pizarnik's debut collection of poems. Written when she was nineteen years old, the poems reflect on the solitude of the poetic self, the longing for artistic depth, and the tenuous nearness of death.

The second drawing/book is from the series *Annotated Books*, a project that entails making a replica of a book, generating a double with the same type of paper, number of pages, and size, yet the content is not replicated, but replaced by notes, thoughts, and drawings from the artist. The inspiration for this series comes from Roland McHugh's book *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* (1980), which compiles annotations made by five readers of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939). In McHugh's book, every page of annotations corresponds to a page of Joyce's book, levelled with the line and word each note refers to. In a similar manner, García has created several replicas of important books throughout her artistic research,

and in this exhibition she presents the replica of *Speculum of the other woman* (1974) by feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. The original book is a collection of ten essays, each concerned with an aspect of the history of Western philosophy in its relation to women, bringing to the fore the masculine ideology implicit in psychoanalytic theory and in Western discourse throughout.

Thirdly, the work *Dismembered (hand with coin)*, existing in an edition of three, presents a drawing notepad, and on its top page there is a handmade drawing of an open hand. This drawn open hand holds a real golden coin, engraved with a feminine figure, dismembered. This work refers both to García's performance "Little object <a>" (2022), in which a performer shows to and hides from the audience a gold coin she holds in her closed fist, and to the Aztec Moon goddess Coyolxauhqui, who was murdered and dismembered by her brother.

RÉVOLUTION (2022)

In *Révolution*, a performer arrives in the exhibition space and begins to unfold a poster divided in three large parts; slowly, the performer puts together and displays the three parts on the floor. Once the poster is fully spread out, the public can read: *Révolution, tiens ta promesse!* (Revolution, fulfil your promise!). This sentence was written on a placard which was carried by activist Margarita Robles de Mendoza during a women's suffrage protest outside the Mexican Chamber of Deputies in 1934. For forty-five minutes, the performer "guards" the poster, subsequently folding it back and leaving. Performed several times through several days, the poster deteriorates and breaks in some areas, progressively becoming more parts than the original three.

Dora García lives and works in Oslo. She is a professor at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Norway. She has been part of the faculty of PEI Macba Barcelona (2015-2020) and has been a guest teacher in numerous educational institutions such as ENSBA Lyon, HEAD Geneva, and Le Fresnoy, Studio national des arts contemporains, France. She has been the curator of Paul Klee Sommerakademie, Bern (2021-2022), and a guest teacher in IUAV, Studi performativi e di genere/ Laboratorio di performance, Venice (2022). Between 2012 and 2018 she was the co director (with M. Villeneuve and A. Baudelot) of Les Laboratoires, Aubervilliers, Paris. She represented Spain at the Venice Biennale in 2011 and was present again in the Venice Biennale 2013. She took part in the 56th Venice International Art Exhibition, dOCUMENTA(13) and other international events such as Münster Sculpture Projects in 2007, Sydney Biennale 2008 and Sao Paulo Biennale 2010. Her work is largely performative and deals with issues related to community and individuality in contemporary society, exploring the political potential of marginal positions, paying homage to eccentric characters and antiheroes. These eccentric characters have often been the center of her film projects, such as *The Deviant Majority* (2010) and *The Joycean Society* (2013), and *Segunda Vez* (2018). She has produced, as editor, a large number of publications, among the most recent are: *Inserts in Real Time* (M HKA and K. Verlag, 2023), *If I Could Wish for Something* (Netwerk & Fotogalleriet, 2021), *Love with Obstacles* (K.Verlag, 2020), *On Reconciliation* (K.Verlag, 2018), and *Segunda Vez* (Torpedo Books, 2018).