

PATRICIA VILLALOBOS: MESOPARASITIO <13°41'33"N 89°14'30"W>

Museo de Arte de El Salvador (MARTE) – San Salvador

By Juan José Santos



Patricia Villalobos, "Mesoparasitio <13°41'33"N 89°14'30"W>," 2011. Installation view, EPS foam on wall, four-channel audio, custom-designed furniture, dimensions variable, audio rt: 35 min. on loop. Courtesy of the artist.

"Language is a virus from outer space," said William Burroughs. Art is another kind of virus, from outer and inner space. What we see in the white and spotless room in the museum (which now resembles a hospital or a quarantine room) is a rash that seems to invade the building. A coral made of polystyrene parasites embedded in the walls of the box. In the room you hear a faint sound of helicopters and machine guns. In the midst of the space, an inviting couch. The title of the exhibition, "Mesoparasitio <13 ° 41'33" N 89 ° 14'30 "W>," includes valuable information to interpret the scene. It is a mutation (Villalobos loves to play with forms, meanings and also with words) between the Spanish words *mesoparásito*, a parasite that is partially visible, and *sitio*, which is a synonymous of the siege. The coordinates set the exact location of the Museum of San Salvador. Military language that connects with the sounds of war are reproduced in the exhibit. The initial sensations, however, are relaxing, cleansing, as one settles himself into the couch and enters into an REM phase, sleepy with crackling sounds and vision pristine surroundings. It is a dangerous "chill out." A subtle, beautiful work that hides an uncomfortable message. Something is wrong; something does not feel comfortable at all. Recognizing the sound of gunshots, you are put on alert. Recognizing the shapes of the walls: parasites, disease, pollution, contagious viruses. Suddenly the sofa on which you lie becomes a parasite that wants to devour you ... and you're not so calm in that clean room.

In the work of Patricia Villalobos the human body has always been important. Starting in a most literal way, then evolving into a more subdued profile. In both *Mesoparasitio*, and its predecessor *Salpullido* (2010), the human element remains essential, but is understood in a different way. The wall becomes the skin, which undergoes biological mutations. Her early works, reminiscent of Tony Oursler's anthropomorphic beings (with a very different intent), were more complex but less direct. Here is a very clear reference to war, in the form of a virus attacking everything, even in ways we do not realize. Villalobos already addressed this issue in a more playful work *Triquitracas* (2009), where she made a caricature with a bombardment of fireworks.

The versatile *Mesoparasitio* can move to the living room of your home. Rashes grow and move through the walls of your lounge while you look with insect eyes on war images as if they were a television show, as Baudrillard predicted. The viewer does not know whether to scratch, or continue to endure the itch. But let's keep *Mesoparasitio* in the museum, where the sarcastic reading of its biological invasion is best appreciated. Contemporary art is a virus that assaults the anachronistic 21st century museums. A latent threat from outer and inner space that becomes powerful in the Central American scene. ■

(July 22 – September 25, 2011)

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