

# ROGELIO LÓPEZ CUENCA AND ELO VEGA



## THE ISLANDS

Dates: 23.10.21 – 27.02.22

Opening: 22.10.21, 19 h

Curatorship: Imma Prieto

Exhibition hall: B

PRESS KIT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“The Islands” is an exhibition by Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega that explores, from a geopolitical perspective, the power relationships between the North-South axes.

The proposal shifts the reflection on Western colonial exploitation to the more immediate present related to leisure and the so-called tourist model, linking the colonized territories with the territories later touristified under the post-industrial consumerism logics.

This project reveals to the eye its own inability to look at itself. Through different media such as installation, video or collage, it enunciates the way in which such contemporary issues as colonialism, racism, tourism, gender, class and consumption are intertwined in the collective subconscious hiding, through market dynamics, a inequalities history. Thus, it proposes a resignification of exploited spaces, where the idea of the white man of the colonial stage today is disguised as tropical colors and joys.

“The Islands” shows, for the first time, a set of unpublished collages where different representations manufactured by the advertising industry and which land in pop culture through tourist images, typical of advertising codes, promotional posters, photo clippings or movie captures. The *hawaiian shirts*, a series of mannequins that occupy the hall, are part of the stage also next to a video installation that reflects these colonized landscapes that serve as spaces for tourist exploitation today.

The exhibition is a critical eye to the appropriation of territories, but also at the construction of an otherness that not only maintains its hegemonic position through material elements but also symbolic domination. Finally, the potential of the proposal lies in the sharp question posed by the visitor: Are we able to break down the boundaries that encode our gaze?

## BIOGRAPHIES

Elo Vega (Huelva, Spain, 1967) and Rogelio López Cuenca (Málaga, Spain, 1959) are visual artists and researchers. Doctors in Research in Art and Humanities, their artistic practice focuses on the analysis of the mass media, the construction of identities and cultural criticism; work that they develop using procedures typical of both the visual arts and literature or social sciences.

Creation and research are inextricably woven into their work, in the form of audiovisual productions, exhibitions, publications, interventions in public spaces or online work: artistic projects that are at the same time devices for criticizing culture and a political instrument.

For more than a decade they have been collaborating in critical rereading of the processes of manipulation of history and the construction of collective imaginaries. Among the most recent are *Málaga monumental* (Universidad de Málaga, Spain, 2020), *Calma urgente* (MNCARS / L'Internationale, Spain, 2020), *The prodigal son* (Museu Picasso. Barcelona, Spain, 2019), *Golden Visa* (Barcelona metro, Spain, 2018), *Málaga 2026* (La Casa Invisible / MNCARS, Málaga, Spain, 2018), *Prima petra* (Museo ICO. Madrid, Spain, 2017), *El agua y los sueños* (Fundación Cerezales / MUSAC. León, Spain, 2017), *Dark Places* (CAAC. Sevilla, Spain, 2017), *Guía monumental de Granada: Mármoles con caracteres extraños* (Centro José Guerrero / Editorial Cien Gramos. Granada, Spain, 2016), *Los bárbaros* (Sala Alcalá 31. Madrid, Spain, 2016), *Quilombo #1* (MACBA. Barcelona, Spain, 2015), *Valparaíso White Noise* (CRAC Valparaíso. Chile, 2014), *Mapa de México* (CEM. Ciudad de México, 2010), *Saharawhy* (CAAM. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, 2012) o *Historia de dos ciudades* (CCCB. Barcelona, Spain, 2010).

## 2. TEXTS

The Doctrine of Desire

**Imma Prieto**

Approaching the tourist imagination means approaching a world view based on enjoyment and pleasure. The iconography to accompany desires and aspirations blends perfectly with codes intended, almost subliminally, to shape our view. If this is the result of the sum of multiple experiences, knowing and acquaintance, we must be aware of the treacherous assumption that leads us to think that everything we desire and think comes from our own free will. It matters to ask what relation exists between the wishes and behaviour patterns resulting from the indoctrination fostered by neoliberalism.

The project “The Islands” by Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega raises a series of questions focusing not only on a criticism of the tourist industry, but on the ways in which this industry works on our subconscious. The propositions we are looking at here subvert the literality or obviousness of issues that have been raised in recent decades. Without ignoring some of the changed views on colonialism, xenophobia or patriarchy, the artists work from a dialogue of opposites: on the one hand, they perpetuate and repeat the gestures they are denouncing, while on the other they introduce new codes that very subtly dismantle the message.

They use a range of objects easily related to the states of euphoria and desire, media (billboards, stickers and posters) characterised by a certain syncretism and excess, accentuating the kitsch aesthetic used by the tourist advertising industry. At the same time they manage to neutralise all meaning by using other linguistic, visual and text forms that share the stage.

Each detail of the installation contains multiple readings that help us delve into a reflection on the heteropatriarchy. Both the mannequins’ gestures and the illustrations on the shirts they are wearing portray the tension and the violence with which the West has spread its monovision of the world. Added to that is how thinking about all this brings us to the situation through which women have been objectified since antiquity, amputating their entire reason for being, as is captured in the quote the artists chose to accompany their research:

While I was in the boat I captured a very beautiful Carib woman, whom the said Lord Admiral gave to me, and with whom, having taken her into my cabin, she being naked according to their custom, I conceived desire to take pleasure. I wanted to put my desire into execution but she did not want it and treated me with her fingernails in such a manner that I wished I had never begun. But seeing that (to tell you the end of it all), I took a rope and thrashed her well, for which she raised such unheard of screams that you would not have believed your ears. Finally we came to an agreement in such manner that I can tell you that she seemed to have been brought up in a school of harlots.

Michele de Cuneo's letter on the second voyage (28 October 1495)

The project avoids doctrine or the discovery of any new truth. As is often the case with their method of working, the proposal sows doubt and opens up cracks in the habitual mechanisms of information. The idea of the stage and performance is taken to the extreme in order to impose a certain distancing. Even when they find themselves in a familiar environment, it is hard for a person to accept that their free will is not entirely their own. In turn, the possibility is now constructed for it to be the subject who decides how far they want to go. While the coexistence of opposites generates loss and insecurity, a space is in fact created that works out of freedom, in this case of knowledge. "The Islands" deconstructs a preordained territory and offers the viewer an insularity that generates community.

The Islands

**Yaiza Hernández Velázquez**

They say the worst thing that can happen to you in a museum is to find it full of tourists. There are countless scenes in film and literature where the anticipation of an exceptional aesthetic experience is undone by a mass of philistines taking pictures at such speed that they leave no room for transcendentality. This weary cliché, the residue of a time when a love of art was cultivated as a sign of bourgeois distinction, has lost fuel as museums themselves have begun to design their itineraries to ensure that their visitors, whatever their fondness for the exhibits, visit the gift shop and the restaurant, leak data through their open Wi-Fi and post a selfie before they leave. But bemoaning this touristification of the museum, as a sign of its *decadence*, would be to overlook what remains most awkward about this close encounter of art and tourism: the unwelcome realisation that there was always very little distance between the kind of experience each of them peddled.

In the installation “The Islands” by Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, this proximity is historically unpacked. “The Islands” brings tourists to the museum not as visitors, but as exhibits. In itself, there is nothing original about this gesture. We have seen tourists on display at the museum before, but always shrouded in distancing mechanisms—tourists unaware of their vulgarity, unwittingly submitting to the classist gaze of the visitor, who is reassured that gaping at things hanging on white walls is an activity of an entirely different order than say, gaping at performing dolphins or Niagara Falls. The “middle-class porn” of Duane Hansen’s *Tourists* in the 1970s or Martin Parr’s *Small World* in the 1990s are just some of the best-known examples of this genre.<sup>1</sup>

The tourists in “The Islands” are not so easy to sidestep. Fashioned by mannequins in a variety of poses, they are able-bodied, handsome, aggressively heterosexual cis-males (something we know despite the lack of actual genitals), and whiter than white. They do not just stand in the gallery space; they take it up unrestrainedly with a gestuality familiar to anyone who has been forced to accommodate these “guests” in the role of reluctant “host”—as the trade literature euphemistically refers to tourists and those who must countenance them. Hosts do not work for you, they “welcome” you; the

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<sup>1</sup> I take the expression *middle-class porn* from Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, London: Verso, 1999, p. 251.

invisibility of their labour is necessary for the continuing allure of the tourist resort as a site of pleasure. The bed in the hotel room is always made, the bathrooms always clean, and the floors always scrubbed as if by magic, an erasure that resonates with the way all settlers ideate the land they colonise as “empty” land. It is worth noting that the same mechanisms are at play in the museum, where invisible outsourced workers ensure the white cube remains white, the artwork is dust free, and the passage of time is kept at bay.

The mannequins, naked from the waist down as if to signal their readiness for “action”, are uniformly attired in aloha shirts, an unwittingly apt global signifier of tourism. The shirts’ benign origin myths refer to Chinese immigrant shopkeepers in Hawaii using Japanese kimono fabric to produce short-sleeved tailored shirts in the aftermath of the First World War. The shirts—purportedly a symbol of the Hawaii’s multiculturalism and “familial love” (*aloha*)—would become the attire of choice for both holidaymakers and the abundant US troops deployed on the Island.<sup>2</sup> Their bright and colourful patterns served to conceal the ongoing violence of settler colonialism, what Haunani-Kay Trask would refer to as the “prostitution” of Hawaiian culture, a term that betrays the centrality of the sexual-economic function of women in producing the allure of the exotic.<sup>3</sup> The images that accompany the installation show women repeatedly offered up for consumption, at times even garnished in garlic or chorizo, as if expecting to be literally devoured. The patterns of the aloha shirts that López Cuenca and Vega have produced for the installation incorporate gruesome vignettes of the subjugation of indigenous and enslaved women by Spanish colonisers. Tourism is thus revealed as a continuation of colonialism by other means, one that demands that the colonial extraction be re-packaged as pleasurable encounters and cosmopolitan exchanges, with misery wages offered as tokens of its pacifying aims.

The World Travel and Tourism Council attributes 1 in 10 jobs around the globe to tourism, but neither these jobs nor the profits they generate are evenly distributed.<sup>4</sup> Tourism has become the new monoculture of the Global South, increasingly providing the only available strategy to achieve an elusive “development” that swallows up all other possible futures. The enormous terraforming capacity of the tourist industry not only produces infrastructures tailored only to serve its purposes, but also indulges in the predatory zoning of

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<sup>2</sup> Hope, Dale. *The Aloha Shirt: Spirit of the Islands*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Haunani-Kay Trask, “Lovely Hula Hands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture”, *Border/Lines* 23, Winter 1991–1992, pp. 22–34.

<sup>4</sup> See the “Impact reports”, <<https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>> [consulted on 23rd September 2021].

territories previously claimed by nature, used for other industries or habitation, with little regard for local needs or hopes. As Matilde Córdoba Azcárate puts it, tourism “sticks” to the people and the land as the only path towards the good life.<sup>5</sup> And yet, the “good life” always remains elsewhere—somewhere one might one day visit, perhaps, on holiday.

If something significant has changed in the tourist industry since Frantz Fanon denounced the national elites that organised “centres of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie” it is the diminishing role of these national elites, increasingly sidelined and relegated to the role of “managers” by transnational ones (as Fanon also anticipated).<sup>6</sup> This has come to reinforce the extractivist nature of the industry, as more and more of the wealth that is generated in the resorts ends up miles away from them. The recent rise of digital platforms has only served to exacerbate this trend. The environmental, social, and cultural costs of the industry are rarely accounted for, such that *in toto* tourism ends up costing local populations more than it brings in. And yet, the tourist industry grew by 3.5% in 2019, outpacing the growth of the global economy for the ninth consecutive year. It is too early to know if the grounding of international flights during the pandemic and the unevenly felt effects of the climate crisis will manage to reverse this unfolding disaster. Talk of a literal “post-tourism” era might be premature,<sup>7</sup> but as López Cuenca and Vega have done with “The Islands”, turning tourism into a relic remembered only in museums is long overdue.

Given its role in shaping the global economy, population flows, and the Eurocentric “planetary consciousness” that has served as the precondition of the global art world, it is remarkable how little attention contemporary art has paid to tourism. This apparent lack of interest is all the more remarkable somewhere like Spain, where tourism has radically refashioned the country with an insatiable appetite for its territory, its labour force, and its futurity.<sup>8</sup> The work of Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega is singular in its situated and detailed attention to the texture of life under conditions of touristification. The “historic”

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<sup>5</sup> See Matilde Córdoba Azcárate, *Stuck with Tourism: Space, Power and Labor in Contemporary Yucatán*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Fanon, Frantz. “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963, p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that “post-tourism”, a widely used term initially coined by Maxine Feifer (*Going Places*, London: MacMillan, 1985) to refer to the postmodern knowingness of tourists who ironically acknowledged the inauthentic nature of the tourist industry, has given way to a much more existentially urgent call for a world *after* tourism.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Ivan Murray Mas, *Capitalismo y Turismo en España. Del “milagro económico” a la “gran crisis”*, Barcelona: Alba Sud, 2015.

city of Málaga, increasingly unable to distance or differentiate itself from the voracious “sun and beach” resorts that surround it, has often served as a microcosm through which to dissect these conditions. Importantly, however, in their role as artists López Cuenca and Vega have not understood themselves as mere observers of the web of corruption, destruction, and exploitation that tourism has left in its wake, but have instead acknowledged their embroilment in its operations. Works like *Málaga2026* (2018) or *The Prodigal Son* (2019) leave no margin for the art world to remain on the outside; any illusion of a distance between tourists and art spectators is dissolved. Like tourism, museums offer us “pleasurable experiences which are different from those typically encountered in everyday life”, they both exist in this negatively defined continuum.<sup>9</sup>

While the works mentioned above were relatively straightforward in their denunciation of local authorities, tourist industry conglomerates, or opportunistic art institutions, “The Islands” does not pinpoint such clear targets. The easy seduction of the images on screen, the background music, and the beautiful bodies on display offer themselves to our gaze with little resistance, and we can take satisfaction in decoding the gruesomeness that lies under their glossy veneer. As viewers, we feel comforted in our ability to conquer their meaning, in lifting the curtain to peek behind. However, a slower engagement with the work deflates any smugness. What is our role here? The mannequins actively request our rejection or admiration, but it is not clear that we have the option of distancing ourselves. However much they might repel us, the mannequins are not doing anything that we don’t do, or aspire to do, ourselves. We cannot claim our innocence without being troubled by a suspicion of our own complicity. Are we hosts or guests here? “The islands” might be a warning that, in a fully touristified world, we could be condemned to always be both.

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<sup>9</sup> Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze*, London: Sage, 1990, p. 1.

## The Island is Exotic—The Archipelago is Post-Exotic<sup>10</sup>

Sayak Valencia

Text published in the catalogue for the exhibition *Rogelio López Cuenca: Keep Reading, Giving Rise*, Museo Reina Sofía, 2 April – 26 August 2019. Revised for publication in Es Baluard Museu.

### What We See

The collection of pieces created by Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* (The Islands), explores different techniques, media, and discourses: video essay, installation, textile art. This is not an inconsequential use of different means: the complexity of the composition belies the complexity of what the artist is stating.

In *Las islas*, López Cuenca and Vega take us through different layers of visibility and sensibility. The first effect the pieces have on the visitor is the visual and emotional excitement of the exuberant colors and their tropical joyfulness. This relates to the way in which the dominant order of perception structures our subconscious way of seeing and binds it to pleasure.<sup>11</sup> Our initial perception then dissolves as we approach the pieces and see that the paradisiacal landscape represented in the Western imaginary by remote, unexplored lands, where islands are conceived as “ideals of pure eroticism,”<sup>12</sup> is not what it seems to be; in the reproduction of its natural abundance is hidden a subtext, which comes from very far back and very far away. In the subtext is our submissive agreement with the *coloniality of seeing*, which can be understood as “a heterarchical power machine that has been expressed throughout the history of capitalism ... and consists in a series of superimpositions, derivations, and recombinations that interconnect, in their discontinuity, the fifteenth century with the twenty-first.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> IdeaDestroyingMuros, *Post-exótico: relaciones, archipiélagos y comunidades otras* (Valencia: Editorial Pensaré Cartoneras, 2018), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18.

<sup>12</sup> IdeaDestroyingMuros, *Post-exótico*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Barriandos, Joaquín “La colonialidad del ver. Hacia un nuevo diálogo visual inter-epistémico,” *Nómadas* (Universidad Central de Bogotá), no. 35 (October 2011): 13–29. <<http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/1051/105122653002.pdf>>

The exotic fascination for the natural environment thus shows not only the West's voracious and exploitative relationship with nature throughout its colonial past, but also the transferring of the logic of plunder and exploitation to the people who inhabit its ex-colonies. It reiterates "the stereotypical portrayals of nature Europe has been constructing since the fifteenth century via different mechanisms that constitute an epistemic exercise of violence that suppresses the human condition of non-European subjects-objects-nature."<sup>14</sup> Not only that, but the piece also specifically reveals the relationship between the "panoptical colonial gaze"<sup>15</sup> and its relationship to gender, violence, consumption, and Western self-affirmation by antithesis to the natural bodies carried into the sexual and racial fantasies of the twenty-first century.

Like a dissection in reverse slow motion (a type of *Chien andalou* cutting into the colonial eye), the video essay and Hawaiian shirts strip away all justification and unveil the historical responsibility of the colonial empires and their relation to the production of *the coloniality of seeing* that transcends the gaze and creates political fictions that are carried into material reality.

The *coloniality of seeing* is linked to the *coloniality of gender* defined by María Lugones as "the colonial association between anatomy and gender as part of the binary, hierarchical opposition necessary for the domination of anafemales introduced by the colony, by which women are defined in relation to men, the norm."<sup>16</sup> This relation is made manifest in the sexual symbology in the prints on the Hawaiian shirts, where the usual floral designs are interwoven with images from medieval engravings, advertisements, and other contemporary political and sexual imagery, all of which position racialized women as lascivious, passive bodies at the service of the "perfect male"<sup>17</sup>—the reckless, Spanish, Catholic heterosexual man constructed during the colonial period as the hero and owner of others (especially women and their bodies), and who finds his counterpart in today's figure of the tourist, particularly the sex tourist.

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<sup>14</sup> Romero Caballero, Belén. "La colonialidad de la naturaleza. Visualizaciones y contra-visualizaciones decoloniales para sostener la vida". *Extravíos. Revista Electrónica de literatura comparada* (Universitat de València), no. 8 (2015): 1. <<https://ojs.uv.es/index.php/extravio/article/view/4528>>

<sup>15</sup> Zavala, Iris. *Discursos sobre la "invención" de América* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Lugones, María. "Colonialidad y género," *Tabula Rasa* (Bogota), no. 9 (July–December 2008): 87. <<http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=39600906>>

<sup>17</sup> Molina, Fernanda. "Crónicas de la hombría. La construcción de la masculinidad en la conquista de América," *Lemir: Revista de Literatura Española Medieval y del Renacimiento*, no. 15 (2011): 192. <[http://pamaseo.uv.es/Lemir/Revista/Revista15/08\\_Molina\\_fernanda.pdf](http://pamaseo.uv.es/Lemir/Revista/Revista15/08_Molina_fernanda.pdf)>

López Cuenca and Vega link discourses on colonial porno-tropics<sup>18</sup> with the figure of the colonizer metamorphosed as the (sex) tourist, and highlight how the intermittent patterns of colonialism tend to actualize themselves, reaffirming certain forms of representation that, through design, impose a visual regime that continues to instrumentalize bodies and calls into doubt people's humanity and citizenship and thus their right to access basic rights and non-stereotyped forms of representation.

In this sense, the etching by Johannes Stradamus entitled *The Discovery of America* printed onto a blue background with palm trees on one of the shirts opens up an invitation to think of the "invention of America"<sup>19</sup> as an invention of "women" as Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí conceives it, understanding the category to be a materialized concept of subalternization used as a scapegoat for the correct functioning of the colonial state, or, in her words:

The emergence of women as an identifiable category, defined by their anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, resulted, in part, from the imposition of a patriarchal colonial state. For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination.... The creation of "women" as a category was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state.<sup>20</sup>

The consequences of women being historically positioned as inferiors in the colonies and Europe (with the destruction of community bonds and the femicide that was the witch hunt in different European countries<sup>21</sup>) are still visible today; the postulates of gender that structure power hierarchically around the body continue to pre-form patriarchal gender relationships ontologically, politically, economically, and culturally. This leads to different levels and intensities of violence against women as well as against *becoming-minoritarians*,<sup>22</sup> which, for reasons of class, race, sexual preference, bodily diversity, or migratory status,

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<sup>18</sup> According to Anne McClintock, "America and Africa had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination—a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears.... Women served as the boundary-markers of imperialism." Annie McClintock, "The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism," in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York, Routledge, 1995), 22, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (1958), trans. Terry Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).

<sup>20</sup> Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónké. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 124.

<sup>21</sup> Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Guattari, Félix; Rolnik, Suely. *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Karel Clapshow and Brian Holmes (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008).

are seen to be feminized, or, in other words, outside the colonial state's patriarchal norm.

### **What We Don't See**

López Cuenca and Vega's Hawaiian shirts also provoke reflection not only on our ways of seeing and consuming but also on our tacit compliance in the crystallization of the hierarchical imagery of racial supremacy that conceives inhabitants of extra-European space as objects with no right to migrate or travel, as perennial and static, as a part of the *atrezzo* of the islands that tourists so freely access.

The works are thus an accurate, critical, yet also cosmetic gesture, as they are not unbound, either, from the context that produces them—they are a self-reflective, European gesture that seeks patterns for locating colonial intermittencies and how these are updated by neoliberalism in its phase of global touristification.

The layers of meaning in these pieces are suggestive on many levels. One of these is how textile design is used with sharp humor to present the shirts as "uniforms of the tourist army," reactivating discussion on colonialism, but also on the gentrification and displacement taking place in many Southern European cities.

The Hawaiian shirt as an apparatus of touristification and low-cost consumerism leads us to reflect on the social gentrification of cities throughout Europe, especially those on the coast of Spain, and on the impact of this as it ruptures communities and displaces autochthonous populations, linking contemporary neoliberalism to colonial capitalism, whose primary economic drive has been to accumulate by plundering, appropriating territories, forcefully displacing inhabitants, and creating generalized poverty.

The shirts are a material and tactile representation of what is suggested in the video essay, which uses the performative resource of slow motion as a narrative metaphor. Through the nature and body of women, it tells how the ignorance or concealment of five centuries of colonialism in Latin America have not only been catastrophic in terms of political, epistemological, and material responsibility; they also provide the means for the official institutional-colonial-corporate European narrative to rewrite history and conceal its workings. Creating precarity and accumulating by plundering are thus relegated to the

status of fictionalized accounts of colonial history that appear unrelated to contemporary European inhabitants.

Yet much of the potency of this piece lies in the warning it offers: these genealogies of oppression tell the story of a continuous plundering whose sights are set on spaces whose colonial past or geopolitical location may belie the fact that, for the most predatory manifestations of neoliberalism, they are actually becoming the South in terms of their material conditions. In these spaces, the tourist becomes the contemporary version of the medieval knight who justified the occupation of territories outside Europe with a civilizing narrative, whose modern-day form would be the neoliberal corporate discourse.

*Las islas* is an account of the concatenations and renovations of the conquering colonial gaze and its setting up of alterities, which in imperial history not only fulfilled the task of conquering territories and accumulating riches but also reaffirmed the architecture of power, represented by the imposition of a hegemonic masculinity<sup>23</sup> that has rights over and access to all bodies and territories.

The pieces are dense with content and visually fascinating. Their medium precisely articulates their message. They might be seen as messages in a bottle from the faraway land that is history, inviting us to think and take responsibility for our manner of colonizing others in the new, colorful, accessible, fun space of tourism, today represented by the international middle class, which, according to Dean MacCannell, “are purveyors of modern values the world over,”<sup>24</sup> modern values being understood as relating to the renewal of the vision of modernity/coloniality.

Here, I would like to relate these pieces to the archipelago metaphor proposed by IdeaDestroyingMuros, a collective of feminist artists. Against the dominant imagery of the island as an ideal of pure eroticism, the collective seeks to “repoliticize the souvenir”<sup>25</sup> and reinstate the density of islands as “territories that continue to suffer forms of national, financial, and touristic domination.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is a concept put forward by Raewyn Connell referring to “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of the patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” Connell, R. W. [Raewyn]. “The Social Organization of Masculinity,” in *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 77.

<sup>24</sup> MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: MacMillan, 1976; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>25</sup> IdeaDestroyingMuros, *Post-exótico*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Islands must therefore be decolonized, being real and imaginary places that no longer favor their own insularity, but potentiate “post-exotic archipelagos that geographically represent our anti-capitalist life and relations.”<sup>27</sup>

Against the refeudalization of the world, the border walls that enclose, and the fueling of imagery of exploited, racialized female bodies as a driving force for desire and the possession of the exotic as located in ex-colonial territories, it may be pertinent to return to what researcher Mery Favaretto proposes: a post-exotic perspective for an anti-colonial, transfeminist world, where the post-exotic is conceived as “a series of anti-colonial, feminist methodologies able to create real, material, creative alternatives for thinking and critical practice that break out of the Western ways of thinking that constitute the exotic imaginary and antagonistic critical thinking.”<sup>28</sup>

These pieces by Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega are post-exotic in the sense Favaretto proposes. They are archipelagos of meaning that rupture the colonial gaze and its imposed forms of representation and reification.

*Las islas* materializes not only critical readings but also critical practices that invite the viewer to start up an inter-epistemic, community dialogue grounded in nonviolence, anti-capitalism, and relationships that are not based on racial, gender, or sexual exploitation and domination, where we no longer glorify national identities but reconfigure our imagery of border territories through post-exotic perspectives.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Favaretto, Mery. “Estado, economía y sexualidad en la obra de Pier Paolo Pasolini. La creación artística: desde la singularidad pasolineana hacia la dimensión comunitaria” (PhD diss. Universitat Politècnica de València, 2017), 250. <<https://riunet.upv.es/handle/10251/90490>>

### 3. WORKS OF ART

#### **Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega**

*Las islas* [The Islands]

2019

Multimedia installation. Twelve mannequins, twelve shirts, three-channel synchronous video (colour, sound, duration: 50') and digital video (colour, silent, duration: 5'30")

Produced by: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, for the exhibition "Yendo leyendo, dando lugar"

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru

*Paisaje con figuras* [Landscape with Figures]

2021

Photomontage on printed paper

Diverse measures

Courtesy of the artists

*Imagine*

2021

Sticker

9,5x20 cm

Courtesy of the artists

#### 4. CAPTIONS



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* [The Islands], 2019 (detail).  
Courtesy of the artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* [The Islands], 2019 (detail). Multimedia installation. Twelve mannequins, twelve shirts, three-channel synchronous video (colour, sound, duration: 50'), + digital video (colour, silent, duration: 5'30"). Dimensions variable. Produced by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía for the exhibition "Yendo leyendo, dando lugar". Courtesy of the artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru. Photograph: Rogelio López Cuenca



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* [The Islands], 2019 (detail).  
Courtesy of the artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru. Photograph: Mariano Ibáñez



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* [The Islands], 2019 (detail).  
Courtesy of the artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru. Photograph: Mariano Ibáñez



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* [The Islands], 2019 (detail). Courtesy of the  
artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru. Photograph: Mariano Ibáñez



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* [The Islands], 2019 (video still).  
Courtesy of the artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Las islas* [The Islands], 2019 (video still).  
Courtesy of the artists and Galería Juana de Aizpuru



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Imagine* [Imagine], 2021. Courtesy of the artists



Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, *Paisaje con figuras* [Landscape with Figures], 2021 (detail). Photomontage on printed paper, 50x40 cm. Courtesy of the artists. Photograph: Elo Vega Archives



Rogelio López Cuenca i Elo Vega, *Paisaje con figuras* [Landscape with Figures], 2021 (detail). Photomontage on printed paper, 40x50 cm. Cortesía de los artistas. 2021. Photograph: Rogelio López Cuenca Archives

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