

Press Release



11.09.2015 - 07.02.2016

Primeiro andar

Comisario: Agustín Pérez Rubio

Realización: Associação Cultural

Videobrasil e Sesc São Paulo



memórias inborrables

Akram Zaatari—Aurélio Michiles—Ayrson Heráclito & Danillo Barata—Bouchra Khalili
Carlos Motta—Coco Fusco—Dan Halter—Enio Staub—Jonathas de Andrade
León Ferrari & Ricardo Pons—Liu Wei—Luiz de Abreu—Mwangi Hutter—Rabih Mroué
Rosângela Rennó—Sebastian Diaz Morales—Vincent Carelli & Dominique Gallois—Walid Raad

Unha mirada histórica á Colección Videobrasil

Unerasable Memories

A Historic Look at the Videobrasil Collection

Akram Zaatari, Aurélio Michiles, Ayrson Heráclito & Danillo Barata, Bouchra Khalili, Carlos Motta, Coco Fusco, Dan Halter, Enio Staub, Jonathas de Andrade, León Ferrari & Ricardo Pons, Liu Wei, Luiz de Abreu, Mwangi Hutter, Rabih Mroué, Rosângela Rennó, Sebastian Diaz Morales, Vincent Carelli & Dominique Gallois, Walid Raad

September 11, 2015 – February 7, 2016

First-floor galleries

Tuesdays to Saturdays (including bank holidays): 11am to 2.30pm and 5pm to 9pm / Sundays:
11am to 2.30pm

Curated by Agustín Pérez Rubio

Produced by Associação Cultural Videobrasil and Sesc São Paulo

On the opening day, **Friday 11 September at 7pm**, a lecture by **Solange Oliveira Farkas**, the Director of Associação Cultural Videobrasil, will take place at the conference room.

Summary of the Exhibition Project

To enable audience to contact with the connections between art and human history is a goal that Sesc São Paulo and Associação Cultural Videobrasil have shared for more than twenty years of collaboration in organising exhibitions, publications, audiovisual productions and the Contemporary Art Festival Sesc_Videobrasil, held in São Paulo since 1983.

Curated by Agustín Pérez Rubio, the exhibition *Unerasable Memories – A Historic Look at the Videobrasil Collection* is the first experiment involving the Videobrasil Collection and a guest curator as part of a set of strategies designed to keep a collection created thirty years ago, active and in touch with the world.

Unerasable Memories is a landmark event: the first major exhibition based on the Videobrasil Collection, created in 1991 and currently comprising over 4,000 items (including publications, documents and roughly 1,500 video pieces from the 80's.) by artists coming from the Geopolitical South of the world, i. e. Latin America, Caribe, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South and Southeast Asia and Oceania.

From an immersion into this complex and assorted universe, Agustín Pérez Rubio has selected include 18 artworks que, which, though made in different places over a thirty-year timespan, are all concerned with retrieving from erasure uncomfortable memories of conflicts, persecution, and violence.

From the “discovery” of Brazil by the Portuguese to the military coup d’état in Chile, the September 11 attacks in the USA, the Tiananmen Square massacre in China and civil war in Lebanon... There are myriad ways one can tell – or attempt to erase – periods of history kept alive by the sensibility and the work of artists from these areas. The exhibition *Unerasable Memories – A Historic Look at the Videobrasil Collection* features artwork that helps retrieve episodes and conflicts that are usually interpreted from the perspective of official discourse, of history as told by the victors, but resist in personal narratives and are disseminated through art.

A word from the curator

Facing Mirrors. Projecting Memories against Historical Amnesia

We naturally remember what interests us and because it interests us.

John Dewey

The day will come when our memories will be our wealth.

Paul G eraldy

After reading the quotations by the American philosopher and educator, and by the French poet and playwright that head this text, it is easy to get the impression that we construct our memories selectively and therefore, that memory is a cultural construction; furthermore, that our memory is a large collection of remembrances of facts that have occurred throughout history (either individual or collective), something of an inestimable value, that is part of our emotional asset. From this point of view, to have the most wealth is not only to possess the most memories, but also to cherish them, keep them alive, or to live them infinitely, to their fullest. The same holds true when we think of a collection, a device that collects, maintains, and displays not only artifacts or objects, but also the various experiences to which they are related. In this way, the importance and interest of an art collection depends on whether it can convey to us the unique experiences the artists had; and also, whether it can make us recall or evoke other possible worlds, even though those worlds may also exist in our own world, as Paul  luard would say.

In this sense, history as well as memory and recollections are part of the experience I had while diving into the waters of the Videobrasil Collection for more than a year and a half. An experience about which I feel very fortunate, having been the first curator invited to carry out a project based on its more than three thousand pieces, including artwork, documents, records, television programs, and so on. This work implied the idea of recalling things from the past, from memory, or from a certain gap. Thus, the project presented here has largely taken into consideration that form and content go hand in hand. A collection that was shaped throughout the history of both the Festival and Associa o Cultural Videobrasil, over a thirty-year period, is in itself charged with representing the internal history of Videobrasil. I have always kept in mind the heritage that lies in the great wealth of art pieces, interviews, documentaries, and publications of the collection. I tried to be faithful to the totality of it, and certainly, to the idea of a “hidden timeline” of sorts made up of important award-winning pieces of past editions and registers of the public programs undertaken from the 1980s to the present day. As it will become clear, this gesture is imbued with the notions of history and memory, memory and rereading. Although for some it might be unnecessary to recall a few recent works, from the last editions, for they are part of real life stories, experienced in the flesh, in people’s bodies and memories.

I would like to emphasize the personal, human, and material labor by which the artists, together with Solange Farkas and her team, have constituted, over thirty years, an essential collection of the recent history of video in Brazil. In addition to expanding the knowledge and relationships of the Festival, the

collection is a means to understand the whole context of Brazilian artistic output. I would like to begin diving into this exhibition and the decision to undertake this project, which has a geopolitical nature, and addresses the social and political memory of certain countries that, in the Global Era, have become part of our coexistence. A project that goes against the historical amnesia that is sometimes imposed on us, and still roams freely in the political, social, religious, and, in some cases, even corporate and personal fields.

It is gratifying to recall that Videobrasil Collection emerges at a time when video was being used as a political tool in the fight against the very art system; video artists focused, mainly, on its relations with television and other media. Therefore, receptor and emitter partake in the same idea or, better still, container and content are clearly used from a social and political point of view, something that has always interested video artists. Video is known for its low production costs, easy handling and portability; lately, it became even more democratic, enabling artists to use it in almost amateurish ways. They have even been able to produce works in which the device itself is hidden, as in a selfcensor-ship of sorts.

Another key to understanding this project and the Collection itself is to realize that Videobrasil has transformed itself from a festival of the South, to a festival of many “Souths,” as it adopted the concept of a *geopolitical South*, as its director Solange Farkas likes to call it. Starting from South America, she has connected the Festival to other realities. It was through the *Southern Panoramas* exhibition that the Festival slowly began to develop a geopolitical vision of the South to include other “Souths,” by first referencing to the context of the Latin American political reality and then shifting it to include other parts of the world— from Africa to Australia, to the Middle East, to China and Southeast Asia, and so on. This political axis has remained active all through this process, enlarging and expanding the visions of the South that we have experienced through the Festival and its participants. What I want to emphasize here is the highly political and geographical character of the Videobrasil Collection, a character that, nevertheless, is expressed in a variety of formats, techniques, themes, and experiences. The gaze evidenced in the Festival—the greatest source of the Collection—is also present in *Unerasable Memories*.

When tracing the idea that shapes this exhibition at a structural level, I am reminded of the interplay between two facing mirrors, where the image of one is projected in the other, and the other, in its turn, projects inside the first one the general content of its image. In our case, both Videobrasil and the exhibition, or its concept and the art pieces themselves make up a structure that is entirely general. At the same time, the artworks project their historical contents, by shedding light on the realities, as well as on the fictions, of what really happened. In this sense, projecting, to me, is a way of reproducing, of bringing things out of the darkness and oblivion, and into the light; these are the meanings I would like to underscore and emphasize as I undertake this project against historical amnesia.

The concept of historical amnesia has become the engine of the whole project. For those who are not very familiar with the term, it is used in the study of history, culture, and sociology, to describe a situation in which a great number of people have forgotten major events or trends, usually negative, and only have a selective remembrance of the past. The consequences of that kind of amnesia may be seen constantly in the policies of governments, in education, in newspapers, and even in people, who may suffer from amnesia due to the lack of attachment to their own personal history. The results vary from an impaired ability to learn new information (anterograde amnesia) to an impaired ability to remember past events and data (retrograde amnesia), to the fabrication of false memories, either

completely invented or made up of real memories misplaced in time (confabulation), all the way to problems with short-term memory or partial memory loss. In other words, it is clear that we do not want to get sick with amnesia; or better still, we want art to give us back our collection of experiences, the beautiful ones as well as the cruelest and most inhumane ones, so that we may continuously learn from them.

In this sense, the *Unerasable Memories* project aims to lay bare the compromises in contemporary creation that resulted from the postcolonial studies, starting with an inquiry into the different aspects of the conquest of America, especially of the Portuguese in Brazil, and the conflicts that ensued here and in many other lands. Starting from the idea of “conquest” as the action in which the violence of mankind was self-imposed in order to govern and enslave, we have extended this metaphor into the globalized world, using different historical events of the 20th and early 21st centuries as micro histories of the conflicts that ravaged the South and of how they affected the lives of its inhabitants.

Here we find a kind of erosion between the new colonizers and a variety of aspects originating from such a colonization. These aspects range from topics related to the neglected issue of indigenous peoples; slavery and racism on the part of a society that came and imposed its canons; a whole set of geopolitical issues related to questions of borders and immigration; the eroded memory of a large sector of the population; wars and their consequences to a South that sometimes fears or feels gagged by an oppressive North. The central axis of the exhibition is composed of eleven art pieces, organized according to the historical events to which they refer. The pieces are presented in chronological order, as history can be both synchronic (taken without antecedents) and diachronic (taken through time) in its representation and as a conceptual experience. This leads us to realize that stories and experiences repeat themselves, and that, sometimes, it is not about time in a single historical sense, but in an amplified and communal sense. That is why adjoining these eleven pieces there are other works of art, records, actions, documentaries, etc. that contribute a greater echoing voice to the ideas and events at hand. Thus, there is something unique in each piece, but also a common ground, in the sense that all the artwork is interrelated by topics, chronologies, territories, or conflicts experienced by their witnesses.

The intention of these artists is to keep alive the memory of a conflicting occurrence, a past fact that has been either forgotten or interpreted by the winning narrator—he who writes the story and holds the power to make many of these events seem as if they no longer belong to us. But this is not so. Even if we are clear about the diachronic sequence of events that we have been taught, it is essential that we are aware that, at the same time, other events of equal importance have also occurred. Furthermore, it is of vital importance that we also think of how the history of these conflicts is being viewed from the present, where everything seems distant and past, but in which issues of race, gender, slavery, borders, and wars keep on occurring.

It seems almost unbelievable that we humans have evolved so much but still refuse to remember. Conflicts of this magnitude are often followed by a period of post-traumatic amnesia, partly because indeed we do want to disregard the fact, and partly because there are those for whom such oblivion is interesting. In this sense, it is through their work that these artists put their finger on such issues; they point at what seems to have been forgotten or faded, either to join in the response, the fight, or repulse for it, or to give us back the memory of it.

One cannot move forward in a world that is amnesic and sterile, where there is no remembrance or any trace of anything. This reminds me of a personal experience from my past. Recently, just forty years ago, my homeland, Spain, was under general Franco's dictatorship for over thirty-five years. Since his death and to this very day, the country has tried to forget his existence, by erasing names of streets, squares, figures, and anything that could remind us of his figure and the trauma his government entailed. But the result is that people who are under twenty do not remember who Franco was; they do not know the evil, the censorship, and the atrocities that were caused by him. The question, here, is: How should we perpetuate history? By remembering, so that we do not make the same mistakes again, and can still read its veracity, without idolizing it, but also without eradicating the memory, however much pain or discomfort it might produce in us?

The exhibit brings together many historical facts through the work of these artists. It's not by chance that it begins with the conquest of Brazil, in *Vera Cruz* (2000), by **Rosângela Rennó**. Here, the fictionalization of a document puts us on alert on two levels. How was it possible for such a document to reach us, if there was no film or photography at the time, and, yet, how can it be true to the historical data in the letter written by Pero Vaz de Caminha? On the other hand, how have we imagined or been told all this information about the "other," in the purest Derridian sense of the term? The intention of starting with this piece is to remind us that everything that is being told is fiction, cultural fiction; and that art is a subconscious and fictional view of reality, even when it tries to get as close as possible to reality.

The exhibition also includes a series of events, such as the slave trade from Africa to Brazil—and other Latin American countries—that artists **Ayrson Heráclito and Danillo Barata** approach in a very poetic, almost performative way, bringing us memories of these travels and of the seas crossed with suffering. They are joined by the sobs in the performance by Kenyan artist **Ingrid Mwangi**, a breathtaking piece she presented in Videobrasil; the agrarian struggles of the early 20th century, in this case, in Brazil, presented by **Enio Staub**; the military coup in Chile and the theft of the Bolivian sea by Chile, addressed in an ironic fiction piece called *Projeto Pacífico* (2010), by **Jonathas de Andrade**; the political struggles of the Sateré Mawé indigenous people against the French multinational oil giant Elf Aquitaine, who invaded their demarcated territory in the early 1980s, by **Aurélio Michiles**; the masterful documentaries about Brazilian indigenous peoples, who have been disrespected on many an occasion, shot in the 1990s by **Vincent Carelli and Dominique Gallois**; the memory of the Tiananmen Square massacre, of which 2014 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary, by **Liu Wei**, an artist whom the Chinese government is constantly trying to prevent from leaving his country and traveling.

Also present, of course, is one of the greatest conflicts of the 20th century, the South African apartheid; **Dan Halter** shows us, in his music video of sorts, the way the white and the African youths relate to music and to the protests that took place in South Africa prior to the liberation. The winner of the Festival in 2013, **Luiz de Abreu** approaches the contemporary view of racism in his performance *O samba do crioulo doido*, in which he deals with the iconography and the looks of the black male body in contemporary times. An important recent event, the Lebanon Civil War, is well represented by **Rabih Mroué's** video *Face A Face B* (2002), that addresses immigration, memories, and personal affections derived from these conflicts; by the recording of a lecture-performance about The Atlas Group archives, by **Walid Raad**; and by **Akram Zaatari's** piece *In This House* (2004).

The imperialist policies of the u.s. appear in **León Ferrari & Ricardo Pons'** video *Casa Blanca* [White House] (2005); the acts of humiliation in Guantanamo are referred to in *Bare Life Study #1* (2005), the recording of a performance by **Coco Fusco**. The 9/11 tragedy that assailed the u.s. is revisited through the eyes of an immigrant, **Carlos Motta**, the artist himself. Towards the end, a tragically significant event in Latin America—the “Argentinean *Corralito*”—reemerges in *Lucharemos hasta anular la ley* [We shall struggle until the law is annulled] (2004), a video by **Sebastian Diaz Morales**; last but not least, the terrible voyages and occurrences of the massive immigrations of North Africans into Europe are told in the testimonies included in *Four Selected Videos from the Mapping Journey Project* (2008-2011), an installation by **Bouchra Khalili**.

Going beyond a detailed description of each of these events and many others that make up the conflicts of our macro and micro history, the most important thing here is to reflect on how we should interpret history, save it, and evoke it, in order to learn from it, while still turning the past around in order to give privilege to the future, something that, as a typical feature of modernity, this project cannot help but to assume. In this sense, what we need is to speak about historical memory and the different ways we create it, in order not to continue reading newspapers, watching tv, and remaining impassive to events and occurrences that have also happened to us, as well as to our ancestors; in short, a manual on how to continue moving forward without erasing that which has occurred.

We must be truly self-conscious while addressing our remembrances and the reasons why we use them in the media and in our social networks; in how we confront our ways of delineating and weaving that memory. Regarding this concerns, which lie at the heart of this project, Andreas Huyssen's book *En busca del futuro perdido. Cultura y memoria en tiempos de globalización* (2002), has been of great inspiration.

Agustín Pérez Rubio

About the curator

Agustín Pérez Rubio is the MALBA - Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires Artistic Director. He has a degree in art history from the Universidad de Valencia. He has curated over ninety exhibitions at venues like the Museo Nacional Reina Sofía in Madrid, Mucsarnok in Budapest, Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo in Santiago de Compostela, SantralIstanbul in Istanbul, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, Chalottenborg Kunsthalle in Copenhagen, and Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló in Castellón; and in events like the 50th Venice Biennale, the 9th Nicaraguan Visual Arts Biennial, and Sesc Pompeia – Videobrasil in São Paulo.

In his outstanding work as curator of MUSAC, he organized monographic exhibitions of major artists like Pierre Huyghe, Julie Mehretu, Dora García, Pipilotti Rist, Sejima + Nishizawa / SANAA, Elmgreen and Dragset, Harun Farocki, Dave Muller, Ana Laura Aláez, Ugo Rondinone, Azucena Vieites, Lara Almarcegui, and others. He co-curated, along with Octavio Zaya and María Inés Rodríguez, *MODEL KITS. Pensar Latinoamérica*, a large exhibition of works from the MUSAC collection. His recent curatorial projects include solo shows by artists such as SUPERFLEX, Sophie Calle, Néstor Sanmiguel Diest, Rosangela Rennó, Carlos Garaicoa, and others.

He conceived of *RADAR*, MUSAC's newspaper on art and thought, which he co-founded and directed. He was also the director of that institution's AA (Art and Architecture) book series. He has written a number of books on art as well as exhibition catalogues; he has contributed to a great many art publications. He has directed countless seminars, workshops, and conferences, and given lectures himself at many international symposia.

Exhibition tour

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, Spain

September 11, 2015 – February 7, 2016

The exhibition premiered at Sesc Pompeia (São Paulo, Brazil), from August to November 2014. In 2015, *Unerasable memories — A historic look at the Videobrasil Collection* started touring the world, beginning in Argentina. It opened officially on June 25, at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA). In 2015 will travel to Spain and Germany. Before the end of 2016, the show will also go to Mexico.

Catalogue

Coedited by Associação Cultural Videobrasil and Edições Sesc São Paulo, the book was organized by Agustín Pérez Rubio, the curator of *Unerasable memories – a historic look at the videobrasil collection* and currently the art director of Museu de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (Malba). Rubio invited authors (art critics, anthropologists, linguists and researchers on cinema and semiotics) from nine countries to write essays about the exhibition and the artworks of 18 artists from different nationalities that address historical conflict episodes. Featuring editorial coordination from Teté Martinho and graphic design by Celso Longo + Daniel Trench, the book compiles images of the artworks on display and of the Sesc Pompeia venue, featuring contents in Portuguese in English.



FUNDACIÓN MARCO: Ayuntamiento de Vigo, Xunta de Galicia,
Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte
C/ Príncipe 54. 36202 Vigo, Pontevedra. Tel: +34 986 113900. Fax +34 986 11 39 01
info@marcovigo.com | www.marcovigo.com

Information & guided tours

The exhibition staff is available for any questions or information, as well as regular guided tours:

Daily at 6pm

'A la carte' group tours, please call +34 986 113900/11 to book

Communications & Press Office

Marta Viana

Tel. +34 986 11 39 08 / 11 39 03 / 11 39 00

marta.viana@marcovigo.com

<http://www.facebook.com/marcovigo>

twitter. @MARCOVigo3