

level. Gathering together the testimonies of neighbours and caretakers, the artist interrelates the information that documents the search for modernity through an ideal of society frustrated by the passage of time and individual, as opposed to collective interests. Esquivias questions the diversion of the common good, in its classical and indivisible sense, and of its ethical component, towards objectives that focus on the general interest dictated by individual private concerns. The cinematographic narrative, in which the spoken word and text are as important as the visual elements, is complemented by the photographic documentation Esquivias recorded on the 'service stairs' at each of the ten floors of one of the buildings. The photographs are displayed on tables and can therefore be examined individually by people, in a parallel script that actually places viewers physically on the stage.

Esquivias's works revisit themselves, adopting new interpretations in their successive formalisations. The conveyance of stories the artist takes as her starting point refers us back to oral tradition, to the recovery of the past through testimonies handed down from generation to generation, with their consequent changes and interpretations. Overlooking historiographical rigour, she transfers this recovery of the past to contemporary culture, challenging the narratives of the elites and defending the subjectivity of history, and of each individual story that shapes it.

Text: AGAR LEDO ARIAS

<sup>1</sup>*The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (Eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1983.

## List of works in the exhibition

*Folklore I*, 2006  
Video; 15'

*Folklore II*, 2008  
Video, LP, books; 13'58"

*Folklore III*, 2009-2013  
Videoinstallation; 13'07"

*Sen título*, 2013  
[Untitled]  
Ceramic mural  
By Susana González Amado, Taller Terralume, with the support of Fundación Centro Galego da Artesanía e do Deseño

1998-2012, 2012-..., *Bordados Zig Zag*, Madrid, 2013  
[1998-2012 (Zig Zag Embroideries, Madrid)]  
Diptych; 17 x 24,5 each

*Folklore IV*, 2009-2012  
Video; 20'18"  
Video; 27'49"

*The Future Was When?*, 2009  
Video; 19'51"

*Prototypes of Reproductions of Accidental Tile Designs, Thought for Madrid's Metro Museum Gift Shop*, 2013  
Mosaics; dimensions variable

111-119 *Generalísimo/Castellana*, 2013  
Video; 8'

*Ten Flights of Stairs. 115 Paseo de la Castellana*, 2013  
1.747 photographs; 10 x 15 each

# All Traditions Are Inventions

Patricia Esquivias

In the sixteenth century, Queen Joanna I of Castile, Joanna the Mad, renamed a territory conquered by Nuño de Guzmán during the colonisation campaigns that ensued the conquest of Mexico as New Galicia. During that particular campaign the explorer occupied a vast western area of today's Mexico and presumably founded, among others, the Mexican city of Compostela, as a tribute to the historical Galician province, and the city of Guadalajara, a homage to his hometown in Castile.

Starting from the encounter between two territories that are geographically remote and yet historically connected, **Folklore III** (2009-2013) reviews official narratives. Patricia Esquivias establishes a parallel between the Aztec pyramids of Mexican colonial territory and Galician dwellings, the overhanging extensions of which evoke inverted Mexican pyramids. Anthropology, memory and humour pervade a work that the artist develops through images and conceptual diagrams in which casual encounters reconstruct and dismantle great stories until their reduction to absurdity. The two territories therefore acquire a new dimension based on the questioning of history, the creation of links between communities and the role of the narrator eliciting these open stories. *Folklore III* also speaks of progress, symbolised by the 'right to fly' of Galician houses, that extend in space through each addition in height:

*'I come from the place that is the new version of this one. I came to see what the original is like. ... Here the right to fly is a section in the contract when you buy a house. It determines how much your house is allowed to grow, how much you can add to it. Always the second floor can be larger than the ground floor. It gives hope for a better*

*future. [...] I thought of how they build their houses here and if their progress continued and the laws permitted perhaps each level would be bigger than the previous and then all the houses would end up looking like inverted Aztec pyramids.'*

In the video that forms a part of the installation, the artist's voice weaves the connections between the two lands. This is the fourth version of an art work begun in 2009 and which emerged from a script that has been successively renewed. The screen, placed on a table, is accompanied by a libretto that presents the various versions of the piece, a photographic diptych—in which a tile has been moved from its place in a shop window—and a ceramic mural in which the pyramids of Galicia welcome viewers with an emphatic sentence: 'There is as much wanting in waiting as there is waiting in wanting.'

The drawing in the mural, one of the stills in the video, represents cinematographic space through a physical element, ceramics, a material that reappears constantly in Esquivias's career to re-establish that connection through time. What do Galicia and New Galicia have in common, besides the colonial relationship that united them once and for good? Specifically produced for the exhibition, thanks to the support of the Fundación Centro Galego da Artesanía e do Deseño, the ceramic piece evokes the emigrant nature of Galicia and her emotional ties to Mexico. Emigration and therefore waiting:

*'In one house in the town there were several tiles in the section coming out depicting waiting scenes by the sea, a woman, a sailor, a grandfather with grandson. Waiting to leave, or for someone to return, or for news, the typical things in emigrant*

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peoples. *There is as much wanting in waiting as waiting in wanting.*'

In the window display of a bazaar close to her home in Madrid, Patricia Esquivias recently found a tile that was exactly the same as one of those we have just described. She photographed the window display and entered the shop. The second photograph, taken in the same place as the first upon leaving the bazaar, shows the tile placed a few centimetres away from where it was originally, and both images, once printed, suggest an exercise in the perception of time and the reconstruction of absence (absence as a discourse) set between the two shots. Both this photographic diptych and the mural, new versions of *Folklore III*, exemplify the continuous growth and revision to which Esquivias subjects her oeuvre, that emerges as a result of these coincidences and speaks of opportunities, interpretations, chance and ellipsis, denying linear narrative.

The title of this exhibition of works by Patricia Esquivias (Caracas, Venezuela, 1979) stems from one of the most influential essays by Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm<sup>1</sup>, in which he describes the recent origin of many traditions that exist in society and that are, however, invented. The expression 'invented tradition' refers, on the one hand, to socially accepted practices linked to a specific past and handed down from generation to generation, and on the other, to their fabulous and fictitious origin, that creates credible yet artificial links with the historical past. The term, therefore, brings together traditions of a ritual and symbolic nature that through repetition become established practices. Their origin may be more or less traceable, yet what they all have in common is their relationship with the past and with history, their legitimating element.

In her proposal for the MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, Patricia Esquivias presents a selection of works that take history as a tool to interpret, discredit or fictionalise the past with no desire for veracity. These are works that address the transition from past to present, articulating narratives rooted in personal

experiences and in historical and cultural events, calling into question official arguments and hegemonic channels of knowledge transmission. They all start from the interconnections made by the artist, linking biographical elements and memories to inventions and archive material in a performative process. She herself appears as narrator in the videos, that are grouped together in series, and her interventions in other formats intend to revise, over and over again, the hidden or silenced aspects of the stories and the multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings they generate.

The *Folklore* series, begun in 2006, focuses on the relationship between tradition and modernity that gives rise to a given community's characteristic cultural expressions or folklore. Esquivias, born in Caracas though Madrilenian by adoption, addresses the interplay between conflict and identity reconsidering the facts, stories, clichés and characters that form a part of personal and collective memory. Issues and topics such as the economy, corruption, emigration and football interrelate, forming new connections that come up with alternative and deliberately absurd interpretations.

**Folklore I** (2006) is a visual exercise, subjective and agile, on the idea of progress and sums up Spain's development over the twentieth century in the relationships between Franco, Jesús Gil, Lladró figures and the Valencian *paella*. In **Folklore II** (2008) the narrative examines the parallels between the empires of Philip II of Spain and Julio Iglesias, taking the sun as a symbol of the prosperity of both 'reigns'. The singer 'represents a moment in which Spain was beginning to sell abroad, basing her economy on tourism. [Both Spain and Julio Iglesias] were selling a sunny, friendly image. Instead of drying the economy, the sun was re-establishing it.'

**Folklore IV** (2009-2012) takes a family anecdote as a starting point for revisiting Spanish history and modernity to construct a critical reading of the uses of architecture as a

metaphor of power and prosperity. Produced by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, the second version is shown here, accompanied by the lecture (recorded three years later) in which Esquivias revises the original piece—another example of how she creates versions of versions, superimposing them and introducing the notion of mistake as an alternative to the sole truth, thereby extending the readings of her open work.

During the Franco dictatorship, Patricia Esquivias's father emigrated to Peru, from where he would return with his family years after the dictator's death. Esquivias studied in Madrid, London and San Francisco, and has lived in Guadalajara (Mexico) and New York, among other cities. All these places can be traced in her stories and enable us to analyse her oeuvre. In **The Future Was When?** (2009), the modernisation of the underground railway system in New York is compared in its restoration to that of Madrid, highlighting the figure of artist Susan Brown who secretly restored the tiles in the New York subway by replacing damaged tiles with her own creations.

Once again, public space and private concerns clash in a story that is markedly critical, yet is formalised with the irony that characterises all her work. The future is understood as the destruction or concealment of the past, taking the example of the Madrid metro, where the authorities decided that the best way to renew appearances and offer a modern image was to hide the former tiled-covered stations behind sheets of aluminium.

Patricia Esquivias's interest in Susan Brown and in recovering mosaic tiles in New York is one of the storylines in the video, as is the relationship between the two artists: Esquivias sent Brown photographs of Madrid metro stations taken when the restored tiles could still be seen, and Brown sent Esquivias reproductions of those photographs in miniature mosaic tiles. The two

visions—the two careers—thus entwined, gingerly construct history through individual memories and anecdotes, through personal experience.

The *Future Was When?* is displayed on a monitor, and close to it are arranged the mosaic tiles produced by Esquivias after the images that documented the repairs made to the tiles in the Madrid metro, before its 'modernisation'. These mosaics, made up of small tesserae, were made following the manufacturing process employed by Brown, who, after having illegally tampered with damaged tiles in the New York subway, was officially hired by the city to restore the mosaics and went on to sell miniature reproductions of her restorations.

As always in Esquivias's works, she herself acts as narrator, making filmic time coincide with her referential and fictional narrative, organising her discourse in the form of a lecture (lessons that are invented, learnt and then related in the artist's words) and directly conveying her point of view to spectators. These are at once visual essays (experiences), ironic, subjective and free, and transpositions of conceptual maps (manual diagrams that trigger non-linear associations), in which all concepts, interrelated and distorted, reinstate the value of everyday commonplace stories.

**111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana** (2013) features a block of five buildings erected in the late fifties on Paseo de la Castellana in Madrid, in which the artist explores the fate of the ceramic murals created for each of the balconies that over the course of time and as a result of successive alterations to the apartments have gradually disappeared. Each of the murals showed a picture of a European city, to convey an idea of opening and modernity through architecture supposed to be inhabited by American officers posted to the Torrejón air base.

Patricia's video relates the history of the murals, which were intended to be seen from street