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## PERPETUAL OPENING | César Gabler

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Dead at twenty-four in 1870, Isidore Ducasse (the Comte of Lautréamont in almost every circumstance) gave us one of the most often cited remarks in art history: «*beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella*». Carolina Muñoz's paintings could correspond to this definition that was so dear to past and present surrealists. Perhaps, it would only be necessary a change in the meeting place. Lautréamont's table, with its evident allusion to necrophilia, would leave the morgue for a more luminous place, but maybe just as sinister: the art gallery. Because, as she has already shown in her latest works, this young artist has a particular interest in the artistic world and its exhibition spaces, as if there, in the midst of white in all its variations, she could find the best possible scenario for her cultured pop theatre: *the chance meeting of Jan Van Eyck and John Krickfalusi in an art gallery*.

The characters from her first works have moved into the artistic field, recognizing the territory – which they inhabit temporarily – whenever they are exhibited. To a certain extent, a *Mise en abyme* of the situation of these paintings, as if the characters had left the stage and wanted to take the place of the spectator. The breaking of the fourth wall in theatrical language. Or the emergence of theatricality that Michael Fried referred to when analysing the first minimalist works. A relevant reference if we look at the objects the artist chooses for her compositions, as if she was painting the installations that, as she confesses, she would actually want to do. Narratives of the artistic space developed in its own artificial geography.

The problem is not new. Already in the nineteenth century, and even before, there were images dedicated to their own world, where paintings and artistic pieces are enjoyed and traded. There is Watteau's *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* (1720), and Daumier's stamp collectors, almost 140 years later. At different levels, these works raise as a topic both the image of art itself - both as a cultural object and merchandise - as well as the spaces that enable its existence. Art talking about art.

The problem of the observer and the observed, emphatically stated by Velázquez in *Las Meninas* and followed by Manet's *Un bar aux Folies Bergère*, seems to persist here in a particular way. Carolina Muñoz's characters, who deserve a separate paragraph, take on a familiar place: white walls and narrow corridors with strange objects on the floor. Not at all far from what we perceive at the same moment in the gallery where we are, or any other such place on the planet. But it is clear that here there is no desire for realism, not the conventional kind at least. It is, rather, a dystopia of art or a B movie of the cultural scene. As if George Romero from *The Night of the Living Dead* had taken up the brushes instead of a film camera and had given us his impressions of all the events generated by the artistic activity: fairs, openings and performances.

The MoMA, the White Cube Gallery and Art Basel, all of them, in one way or another, are tributaries to a common ideology in which presentation techniques, belonging to architecture and theatre, are combined with a religious and capitalist mysticism. Art spreads both as faith and merchandise. Sometimes pure faith in its price, sometimes as authentic aesthetic devotion. All due to its disposition as an object of contemplation and consumption. That's where design and architecture can complete the work's circle, giving it a second life. If in the old halls paintings were placed one next to the other, in a pictorial overcrowding barely solved by the frames, modern art opted for the autonomy of the artistic work. Each work required "its own square meter."

Since then, art has had its audience. A contemporary tradition has focused on it, including photographers and painters. From the particular nature of its sociology to the oddities generated by the interaction of people and artworks. Here we can find one of the branches of Carolina Muñoz's family tree. Her characters roam the space, perhaps actors in a performance, perhaps monsters of contemporary culture, waiting for some novelty or starring in some grotesque incident. Something as uncertain as their own physical condition and their own presence, the cut and paste procedures characterizing Muñoz's works, have been exacerbated and so her characters suffer the consequences. Realistic faces are violently inserted into bodies that are sometimes made up of colours that only describe their silhouettes. Animation characters complete their attire or arise as undesirable excrescences in their bodies. The Nordic revival of which her anatomies are heirs collides against a pop universe coming from recent animation. This formula takes pop elements to an extreme while also continuing, in an anomalous way, a tradition that seemed to have been interrupted: neo-figurative art.

The attitudes of Carolina Muñoz's characters are far from natural. Their bodies acquire anomalous positions, like Egon Schiele's models or the actors in *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*, but filtered by humour from the nineties. As if the expressionist factory from which they seem to come, had been intervened by the Farrelly brothers from *Dumb and Dumber*. *The chance meeting of Jim Carrey and Egon Schiele*. However, an explanation for this is provided by the artist: everyday life is similar to art, or the other way around. Her characters behave as people do today in front of the camera. Her figures are the children of social networks. The artist goes through images on Instagram and other platforms where different communities, some of them gay, offer their privacy to the public eye. But nothing is that simple. Subjects do not give themselves innocently to the digital gaze. Far from natural, images of parties and spontaneous hangouts are dissolved by ridiculous and theatrical poses, as if the camera's eye presence made any naturalness impossible and undesirable. This deliberate affectation of the subjects seems to be ruled by the expectations of someone else's gaze. What it gets is far from being true, but rather the exaggeration of an expectation.

In its intricate game of references and quotations, these works by Carolina Muñoz assert with humour and virtuosity an artistic research that must certainly be taken very seriously.

## Carolina Muñoz | Bio

Santiago, 1985

Born in Santiago in 1985. Bachelor of Visual Arts by the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, with a diploma in Aesthetics of Photography from the same institution. She has developed her career both in photography and in painting. Carolina has collaborated with editorial projects such as *Sub30* (2014), book that compiled the works of 60 Chilean young artists, and *Ojo Andino Chile* (2015), publication by Luciano Benetton that gathered over 170 art pieces by Chilean artists.



She has participated in national and international competitions, having an outstanding performance in the MAVI/Minera Escondida Young Artists Prize in Santiago, being part of the final selection six times (2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018), and earning the Second Prize in 2018. She has been part of the final selection in the 2016 Focus-Abengoa International Painting Prize in Seville, and earned the 2nd place award at the Artespacio Joven BBVA Prize in 2017, in Santiago. Carolina has taken part at the art fairs ArtStgo (2018), Ch.ACO (2018), and FAXXI (2015, 2016, 2017), where she won the GDF Suez Art Contest in 2015; in addition to Ch.ACO (2018) in Santiago, and Art Central Hong Kong (2019) with Isabel Croxatto Galería.

In 2016, Ms Muñoz presented her first solo show, *Fugas. Imaginación no es Fantasía*, at the Centro Cultural Las Condes, in Santiago. She has taken part in group exhibits, including shows at spaces such as the Museo de Arte Moderno in Chiloé, Galería XS and Galería Madhaus in Santiago. *Blanco Universal* is her first solo show with Isabel Croxatto Galería.

Ms Muñoz currently lives and works in Santiago, Chile.

## César Gabler | Bio

Santiago, 1970

Born in Santiago, Chile, in 1970. Bachelor of Visual Arts by the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile with a Major in Painting, and holds a Master's Degree in Visual Arts from the Universidad de Chile.



As an artist, Mr Gabler has exhibited regularly in Chile and abroad since 1999. *La Catedral del Mañana [The Cathedral of Tomorrow]* (Espacio H, 2013), *La Última Ópera Rock [The Last Rock Opera]* (Sala Gasco, 2015), and *Bilis Negra [Black Bile]* (Sala de Arte UC, 2016) stand out among his latest solo shows. In 2018 Mr Gabler was awarded with the first Fundación Actual/MAVI Fellowship, as part of which the artist currently prepares an individual exhibition to be presented at the Museum of Visual Arts of Santiago in 2020.

Since 2011 he has been a columnist for art magazine *La Panera* (Santiago), writing art critique and articles about visuality. In 2015 Mr Gabler published the artist's book *La Catedral del Mañana* (Ferores Editores, Santiago), and conducted the TV programme *¿Los artistas no saben hablar? [Don't Artists Know How to Speak?]* in the art television network ARTV (Santiago).

César Gabler currently is a professor at the Universidad Finis Terrae Faculty of Arts in Santiago.

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