

Gabriela Golder was born in Buenos Aires in 1971. She was five years old when Videla launched the coup that gave rise to one of the cruelest periods in Argentine history. In one of her earlier videos¹ Golder used a split screen to show the simultaneous development of her early childhood and the beginning of the dictatorship. The question that the artist asked herself was: “How, in spite of the deaths, the people gone missing and the exiles, was it still possible to keep living a normal life”².

After the disappointment of her early studies in communication and sociology, Gabriela joined the Buenos Aires Film University; it was here that she first became acquainted with video. She obtained her Film Director degree in 1995 and continued her studies in Spain, where she took a graduate course at the Santiago de Compostela University. Later she relocated to France, where in 2000 she completed her studies in Hypermedia at the University of Paris 8. Ever since she has lived in different countries, becoming a resident artist at: Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln (2003) and Schloss Balmoral (2004) in Germany, the Wexner Centre for the Arts (2005) in USA, the UQAM in Montreal (2007/2008 in Canada), and Le 104 in Paris, France.

At present, Golder combines videographic production with teaching, holding a chair at the Tres de Febrero National University and the Maimónides University, in Argentina, and has held regular workshops at several universities and art centers abroad. She also co-directs Continente, the Electronic Art Research Center, with Andrés Denegri. Her work in video has earned her distinguished awards such as: the Tokyo Video Award in Japan, a prize from the 14th

¹ The film in question is entitled *En memoria de los pájaros* (In Memory of the Birds), produced in 2000.

² Extract from Graciela Taquini’s text in the exhibition catalogue: “Sobre una realidad ineludible arte y compromiso en Argentina” (*About an Inescapable Reality. Art and Commitment in Argentina*), 2003. Published by MEIAC and CAB de Burgos.

Videobrasil in 2003, the Media Art Award from the ZKM of the same year, the first prize from the National Hall of Visual Arts (Argentina) in 2004 and the Sigwart Blum award, from the Association of Argentine Art Critics in 2007, to name but a few.

II

The present exhibition, called *Habitada* (Inhabited), is actually part of a curatorial project which we started one year ago and are now presenting to the public for the first time. Our work is usually based on research projects contemplating different issues which later develop into expositions, conferences, workshops or publications. This method of working has already been applied on three separate occasions. We have now started a new research project which, as a whole, can be called *Care Crisis*; yet it is not of a unitary nature but rather functions as a common research topic which will materialize, or rather be shown to the public, under different appearances. The first one is *Habitada*.

In these times of economic crisis and swimming against the tide, this project is intended to attract our attention to a different kind of crisis which we are experiencing. It does not grab the attention of the media in the same way, but it is indeed, like the former, a global crisis. However, unlike the economic woes, this affects life as a whole. It is the *care crisis*.

Society used to develop through productive and reproductive (or *care*) work. This division was made possible thanks to the division of labor by gender. Productive work was carried out by men and care work was conducted by women. The backdrop for the consolidation of such a system was that of the fordist family, that is to say, the nuclear family existing within capitalism and defined by such division.

However, the fordist family has now come to its demise. Women's struggles, especially since the 70's, against all injustices and oppressions of the sex/gender system have swept away that family system. One of the factors having the most direct impact on the so-called *care crisis* is the inclusion of women into the post-

industrial labor market. There lies one of the roots, if not the cause, of the current state of affairs. As women leave their homes in search of paid work — designed by and for men — no-one is left to perform family care tasks, that is, life sustainability tasks. The result is either a deficit in the caring necessary for the development of life, or a transformation of the system that provides that caring. This transformation impacts on infinite social realities, and on two with special relevance: a necessary change in the male role within the family and most importantly the transfer of care work into the market sphere and its assignment to immigrant women. This research project is intended to study that social phenomenon and to bring together different fields of knowledge to that end.

III

This exhibition is made up of two pieces. The first, *Dolor* (Pain, 2010), began to take shape the previous year in Canada and is now being presented for the first time. This work stems from a quest into personal memory, an attempt to exteriorize the artist's own pain through the pain of others. When she talks about her work, Gabriela constantly insists on the need to listen; she ensures that it is possible to find our own feelings, our own fears and experiences, in the stories of others. As she did before in earlier pieces like *Reocupación*, *Arroró*, or even *Concierto diurno*, Gabriela utilizes a concrete working method: listening to the voices of others to tell personal experiences, stories of others which also belong to her and could in turn belong to us ... to all. Unemployed workers, immigrant housewives or women who for different reasons leave their own countries and families to take on, as often happens, the care of others in the host country.

The concept of pain is quite broad; most of us fear physical pain but this is not the worst of pains; there are others far less visible with the ability to enter our lives and stay with us for a long time. We are talking about inner pain, that which arises when someone close cannot be with us, when we are forcefully separated from those whom we love.

During her stay in Canada, Gabriela lived through a personal situation in which she suffered this kind of pain. One way to extirpate it was to invite other women to fill the spaces in her home with their own stories of pain. "I asked them to define "Pain" by choosing a text, a text that to them was Pain."

The video installation features six screens, each of them displaying a woman who shares her story with us through her chosen text. Pain materializes in the touching letter written by Camila to her sister; or in the one read by Sayeh, the Iranian girl, who tells us about the suffering of a grandfather for having his granddaughter far away and for being unable to pay for her studies; in an extract from a Laurent Gaudé book about clandestine immigration; in the fear that a son may die; in the search for identity in a hostile environment filled with oppression, repression and religious fanaticism; in the family drama lived by Nancy ... These women look at the camera as if they were staring pain in the face and remain in silence for a few seconds before they begin to read. First one, then another, little by little their voices join in and their stories of pain blend and entwine, filling the room.

Diáspora (Diaspora) is the second piece in the show: a performance recorded in a sequence shot in real time. We observe the artist herself crawling in an empty room. Barefooted, on her knees, and with great effort, she drags her body and licks the floor. The action is harsh and provokes several questions in the viewer's mind: Is this a reference to torture? Perhaps to the oppression of women? Or to the working conditions and jobs assigned to immigrant women? As occurs in other works by the artist, there is a conscious desire for the piece to remain open. The role of interpretation rests with the viewer, who must make their own connections and build on the piece. But the title gives us a hint: "Diaspora" reminds us once again of exile, the forceful abandonment of one's motherland, the pain which comes from all that is left behind, the effort required in adapting to new surroundings and indeed, the matter of identity itself. This video was first

presented at the *Desarmadero Naval de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires Marine “Chop Shop”), a space located next to the Immigrant Hotel: the place of arrival for immigrants coming from Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Now, as Gabriela says, a different kind of immigrant arrives at this point of entry: Peruvian, Bolivian... all of them leaving everything behind to become the labor force of the host country, so often related to household care, just as the video suggests.

In addition to those installations, the space includes an area for à la carte viewing of the artist’s videography. It also features other material such as interviews and literature about her work.

IV

Gabriela Golder’s artistry can be viewed from different perspectives. Undoubtedly the ideal viewpoint from which to study would be one that allows us to take an oblique look. The reason for this is that her work interconnects multiple ideas which, while not closely linked at first, do bond and empower one another in an enriching way precisely through her work. In this brief catalogue which functions as an introductory essay to Gabriela Golder’s visual production, we consulted two female writers about the Argentine artist’s videography. They have worked on two of the most recurring themes, or rather two of the most effective perspectives to approach her work: the concepts of memory and woman. Virgínia Villaplana takes on the former; the latter is covered by Victoria Simón. Now, in the little space we have left, we intend to at least take a glimpse at a third indispensable approach to watching Golder’s videos: her work on sociopolitical reality.

The first time we worked with Gabriela Golder was at the show *Sobre una realidad ineludible; Arte y compromiso en Argentina* (About an Inescapable Reality; Art and Commitment in Argentina), co-produced by MEIAC and CAB de

Burgos. Qualifying a reality as inescapable draws our attention to the moral need of Argentine art not to turn its back on the historic events taking place early in the first decade of the 21st century. The piece began to take shape in 2001; the political situation lived through by Argentines in the previous thirty years was marked by three events of the utmost significance: a devastating military dictatorship, a no less harmful economic debacle and the resulting generalized, radicalized people's protests of late 2001. The vicissitudes endured by the country throughout those years drew an uninterrupted line joining the past with the present: an indelible mark which appeared on everyday life and leaked into current artistic production.

On that occasion we included in the show two Gabriela Golder videos: *En memoria de los pájaros* (In Memory of the Birds) and *Vacas* (Cows). The former was produced in 2000. As we mentioned, this video splits the screen in two and shows us images of Videla's dictatorship and home movies shot in Super 8. An intimate archeological piece which in turn denounces what became one of the most repressive dictatorships in Latin America. The latter video, from 2002, using a filter which transforms Argentine news footage into almost pictorial work, shows a group of people from the impoverished town of Las Flores who after a livestock truck accident begin to butcher, right by the side of the road, the calves that died in the accident. When that meat runs out, they chase after the calves which are still alive to sacrifice them right then and there and take a hunk of meat home to feed their families. To transfer that kind of footage — obtained from mass media — to the sphere of art is a risky operation. But it can also be quite useful.

It was necessary to extract those images from the fleeting nature of television, where facts are consumed and promptly forgotten. The very structure of these shows prevents reflection. What Golder achieves by moving it into the realm of art is she allows us to think about it. Also, she does not simply record the footage and display it, but adds a series of new formal elements intended to erase any trace of the supposed objectivity of journalistic work, and thus creates a subjective, poetic piece and particularly a piece which unmistakably has a political point of view.

Soon after that, in 2004, she made a video installation called *Bestias* (Beasts). Again, she used effects to transform the images captured by a technological medium into a sequence of overlapping shapes and colors which brought it closer to painting. The footage came from the significant demonstrations that took place on December 20th and 21st 2001, better known abroad under the name of *cacerolazo* (pot banging protests). On those days the enraged population came out against the ruling class after the *corralito* (banking curbs). It was the last straw; a multitude took to the streets under the motto “out with all” and their force drove President De la Rúa out of the Government House in a helicopter. In *Bestias*, Golder recalls the commotion of those days; the violence lived in the streets in those moments. The installation consists of three large screens arranged in a “U” shape and enclosing a room which takes the viewer deep into that world of violence represented by the images in red.

After those years of vindicating effervescence in Argentina, and once certain democratic “normalcy” and minimum economic recovery had been achieved, the vindication issue took a break from the spotlight of Argentina’s general artistic output. Gabriela Golder’s work shows how she seizes those days of necessary reflection upon what is occurring in her country to work on the subjects that are ever present in her art: woman, memory, identity ... We find pieces such as *Trizas*, *Crashing dishes* and *Concierto diurno*, which will not be dealt with here, as they are the object of careful study in the following texts.

But as mentioned, Golder never abandons the observation of the sociopolitical reality, especially that of her own country. In Argentina, there is the birth of a new feeling of failure or at least of frustration of the hopes that were carried by the demonstrations of 2001 and 2002. It is then that some of the best pieces by the Argentine artist emerge, such as *Diáspora* (2005), which has already been discussed, or *Reocupación* (Reoccupation, 2008), a touching conceptual project which is visually massive. It is an audiovisual piece in which the artist establishes a connection with people who have been stripped of their jobs. She asks them to search their physical memories for the actions, the movements, the knowledge acquired by them in their respective employment. This is, as she explains it, an

essay on non-work and a piece of work on identity. Five vertical screens in a room display five ex-workers flawlessly reproducing the body movements they used to perform in their workplace.

The final piece we would like to review in this space, with the intention of pointing out one of the favorite viewpoints from which to approach Gabriela Golder's audiovisual production, is *La lógica de la supervivencia* (The Logic of Survival, 2008). In this piece, the artist is forced to resort to her own production as a reflection of the condition of her country. In *Vacas* we observed an entire neighborhood immersed in a horrifying situation, running after calves to sacrifice them in the middle of the road and so have something to eat. In *La lógica de la supervivencia* we observe, again as she would say, a project of failure. We see a multitude plunging into food. We see a young man being brutally repressed because of it. We see how the illusion of reconstruction vanishes in just three scenes.