



**Main
Space**

2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
416 849 2864
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6
www.xpace.info

Beyond the Tropics

Emma Edghill, Sonet Providence, Bryan Bermudez, Talia Peckel, Daniela Jordan-Villaveces, Sebastian Benitez
Curated by Sebastian Benitez
October 17 – November 8, 2014

Over two hundred years have elapsed since the first Independence was declared in the Americas, marking the first formal separation from the European colonial regime in documented Western history. Yet a decade into the 21st century, with some countries achieving their independence in the past fifty years, a certain sense of unease close to notions of self and the nation still lingers in the background. With severance from the colonial order came the mammoth task of negotiating a broken past in order to construct a new national identity. Ambiguity, constant through the works in the exhibition, comes as the result of trying to bridge and make sense of fragmented notions of identity. In relation to their own backgrounds, the artists in *Beyond the Tropics* explore these themes through textile works, installation, painting and print media.

The title of the exhibition alludes to the act of seeing what lies behind and beyond the constructed imaginary built around the Americas' tropics since colonial times, which has taken many shapes and forms in past centuries. From the land of cannibals described in the writings of German soldier Hans Staden and later in Albert Eckhout paintings; passing through the land of treasures for the grab by the Spanish conquistadors' chronicles; and jumping to the more contemporary touristic marketing of land as vacationing paradise; there is an inherent relation between the landscape and imposed power relations. Dealing with an ongoing negotiation of the remnants of colonial identity politics, the subjugation of the landscape with power dynamics and the negotiation of syncretic products within Latin America and the Caribbean, we find the works of Bryan Bermudez, Emma Edghill, Daniela Jordan-Villaveces, Talia Peckel, Sonet Providence and Sebastian Benitez.

In her series *An "Other" Place* (2014), Barbadian artist Emma Edghill explores the constructed representation of landscapes by means of painting. By focusing on overlooked and by-passed landscapes, Emma explores the duality of place in her perception of her natal Barbados. In her work, the artist combines real locations with personal memories and utopian imaginations, dealing with her perception of the landscape as home and land marketed as consumable, idyllic and touristic product.

Bryan Bermudez' *X Marks the Spot* explores the physical subjugation of the Peruvian landscape to neocolonial relationships. The series presents maps of South America where the artist marks with red "X"s locations in Peru where North American companies extract and exploit mineral resources under questionable conditions. In marking maps with "X"s, the artist also references the trope of treasures maps, comparing the current situation with the Spanish conquistadors' lavish myths of El Dorado: exotic conceptions of land with resources readily available for the grab.

In *Somewhere at the Bottom of the River Between Vega and Altair* Sonet Providence, referencing the landscape of her natal St. Vincent, explores and challenges the boundaries and definitions of distance and proximity through painting. Through her work, the artist abstracts and reconfigures the landscape by commanding it to a series of rules and systems set by the artist herself. The collapsed and transformed Caribbean landscape becomes the by-product of the artist's personal agency.

Talia Peckel's *Somewhere in Between* (2014) can be positioned as both dealing with issues of a postcolonial context and searching for local narratives. In her series, Talia explores current issues regarding identity politics in her natal Colombia. By revisiting photographs from a family trip to the Amazon when she was a child, the artist explores the complicated relations of "same" and "other" implicit in the photographs. In a play of the gaze, the artist questions her simultaneous placement in the images as both local but yet as a tourist to the region.

Daniela Jordan-Villaveces' *Fate vs. Faith* (2012) explores the syncretic nature of religious practices in South America, focusing on those in Colombia. Her installation is comprised by digitally printed and hand-dyed cotton quilts. The quilt's prints reference the ambiguities and overlaps of the roles of Catholicism and other esoteric practices

within popular culture. The artist is interested in the contradictions that are naturalized in the post-colonial context.

Finally, in his work, Sebastian Benitez explores the ubiquitous nature of catholic religious imagery within the Venezuelan public sphere. In his installation *Colección 2: Av. Urdaneta*, Sebastian references the often-religious imagery in the back of the buses in Venezuela and puts it in dialogue with the country's modern art materiality. His work also makes allusion to the negotiation and repurposing of elements of colonial inheritance within the contemporary context.

The ongoing explorations carried on by the artists in the exhibition can be seen as a sample of a larger concern around the idea of the self in relation to the nation state. The works in *Beyond the Tropics* explore the contemporary remnants of the colonial past of Latin American and the Caribbean, and the ways through which the past shapes the current relations between individuals and the physical space they inhabit.

- Sebastian Benitez