

ITZIAR BARRIO

The Hand at Work

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Opening: Sunday 17 November , 12 PM

"The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfillment in apocalypse".

- Donna Haraway - ¹



Itziar Barrio is a multimedia artist whose *rizhomatic* long-term projects focus on dissent as a way to explore the dominating narratives extracted from contemporary mythologies. By doing that she unveils the hidden mechanisms that, subtly, end up affecting our thinking, or unmasking the power structures related to the political elements that bodies are. By the act of re-creating, re-staging and altering some of the codes we find in the narratives that range from vernacular culture, cinema, or science fiction, to furniture, or more specialized references - Barrio questions the imposed narratives of power relations and reveals their hidden social and political connotations.

By involving different agents and collaborators the artist analyses social contracts and the construction of realities and identities. As the curator and museum director Johanna Burton² has mentioned, "Human beings relate to one another through a variety of modes of exchange, and via all of matter means: language, money, emotions, politics, symbols, family, community, geography, technology, and sex (to name just a few). Itziar Barrio explores these and other ways that we navigate the world and each other, and points to what unites them all-power. Barrio's interest in the nature of social negotiation manifests in live performance, video, photography, sculpture, and expanded installation techniques". By blurring the fine line between fiction and non-fiction and focusing on performativity Barrio manages to produce "an art of feeling, of bonds and symptoms that operate within a social order marked by class division and the imperative of capital"³.

We can clearly see her interest in the technology of the bodies and the modes of production, in the Marxist sense, for her sculptural pieces she uses one of the "best-selling" chairs that Ikea has produced until now, the JEFF chair. A chair is a piece of furniture for one person to sit on, to put their body to rest and therefore, it moulds our bodies. However, the meaning in English of the word "chair" is also that of a person in charge of a structure, and thus semantically, and materially, this work creates an association charged with connotations of power and the body, that element that *needs to be mould to fit*. At the same time, the combination of materials as remotely opposed as concrete (with the connotations that it might carry, such as industrialization, low-cost, the working-class, etc) and latex (a material one might think of as related to a subculture, to domination or sexual practices) Barrio chooses to make a rupture of the codes which are normally applied to them.

In a similar way, Barrio's interest in film and the iconic myths it creates clearly manifests here with "Pickpocket series" (2016-2019) by using one of the key frames in Robert Bresson's 1959 film for one of her wall- installations in which we can observe the hand ("at work") of the main character of the film. A hand that has been stripped from its original filmic context and here becomes a naked sign opening up for the viewer to grant it a brand new meaning.

With the three-channel video installation "There's Nothing to be Scared of. They Are Crazy About Each Other" (2018) Barrio goes back to her interest in performativity in order to analyze the social and power dynamics we find in society through the use of a multiplicity of narrative structures. Here we can not only see actors "at work", but we are also witnesses of the way the piece is being collectively made and how actors are being questioned about the roles they play. She uses excerpts of the 1947 script of Tennessee Williams' theatre play "A Streetcar named desire" (which three years later was turned into a film by Elia Kazan), as well as fragments of texts extracted from Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" or the 19th c. social revolts that were the Astor riots⁴ Barrio brings to light the process of production, the work of the multiple hands involved in it, and leaves us, viewers, reflecting on society's power relations. Ultimately, it is the Foucault's non-authoritative form of power that is at play here, that of the gaze, an inspecting gaze, the one each individual is exercising over and against themselves. It is there, in the small gestures, in the everyday objects and relations where Barrio wants us to take a closer look. It is by the alteration of all those systems that can easily represent themselves in the images and contents of contemporary mythologies, where a door to other meanings might be open. Please come in.

¹ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20th Century", chapt. Cyborgs: a myth of political identity , Spanish trans. Sofia Brass Harriot, ed. puenteaereo, p.95

² Johanna Burton, is the director of the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio and the former Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public in the New Museum New York. In 2018 she curated Itziar Barrio's exhibition "By All Means" at Azkuna Centroa in Bilbao.

³ Ángela Molina, "Itziar Barrio: "Quiero que la obra nunca esté terminada", Babellia, El País, 5 March 2018.

⁴ The Astor Place Riot occurred on May 10, 1849, at the now-demolished Astor Opera House in Manhattan and left between 22 and 31 rioters dead, and more than 120 people injured. It was the deadliest to that date of a number of civic disturbances in Manhattan, which generally pitted immigrants and nativists against each other, or together against the wealthy who controlled the city's police and the state militia

BIO - Itziar Barrio (Bilbao, 1976) lives and works in New York City. Her work has been presented in international venues such as the MACRO Museum (Rome), Participant INC (NYC), MACBA (Barcelona), Belgrade's Contemporary Art Museum (Serbia), Museo del Banco de la República, Bogotá (Colombia), Abrons Arts Center (NYC), Anthology Films Archives (NYC), Salzburger Kunstverein (Austria), Espacio ODEÓN, (Bogotá), Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk (Poland), tranzit (Romania), European Network for Public Art Producers (ENPAP), ARTIUM (Vitoria-Gasteiz), and at the Havana Biennial among others.

She has received awards and scholarships, including the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, NYC, New York Foundation for the Arts Individual Artist Grant, Brooklyn Art Council, Ministry of Culture of Spain, Spanish Academy in Rome, First Prize Ertibil andin 2017 the Multiverso Scholarship BBVA Foundation with which she has produced the project "Drones, Failed Stars" (2019). She has been artist in residence in several institutions, amongst them, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP), La Escuelita Nicaragua and the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art. She is an adjunct professor at the School of Visual Arts in New York and has lectured at NYU, Hunter College, Montclair University and Parsons, among others, The New School for Design. Her recent monographic exhibition, BY ALL MEANS, was curated by Johanna Burton (current Director at Wexner Center for the Arts, and the former Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education in the New Museum, New York) at Azkuna Zentroa (Bilbao, 2018).