

Artists Space
Books &
Talks

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www.artistsspace.org

UNION GAUCHA PRODUCTIONS

November 7, 2015 –
January 10, 2016

Selected Programs

Jeff Preiss and Union Gaucha Productions

Thursday, November 19, 7pm
Screenings & Conversation

An evening focusing on the work of filmmaker Jeff Preiss, and his engagements with Union Gaucha Productions. Screenings include the collaborative film, *Twins* (2002), and Preiss's 1987 film *Boytown*. Followed by a conversation between Preiss, Nicolás Guagnini and Karin Schneider.

Jonas in the Brig

Friday, December 18, 7pm
Screenings & Conversation

An evening with filmmaker Jonas Mekas, including concomitant screenings of his 1964 film *The Brig* produced with The Living Theatre, and Storm de Hirsch's *Newsreel: Jonas in the Brig* of the same year.

Gillian Walsh

Thursday, January 7
Performance

An event marking the result of an ongoing "orchestrated dialogue" between dance artist Gillian Walsh and the work of Union Gaucha Productions. Organized by Thomas Keys

Phantom Limb with music performance by Lukas Ligeti

Sunday, January 10, 3pm
Screening & Performance

A performative screening of Union Gaucha Production's *Phantom Limb*, with composer and percussionist Lukas Ligeti.

Please check www.artistsspace.org for
further program details

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"Union" signals both a convergence between different elements and, in historical terms, an association of labor against the State. "Union" is a reminder of possible associations that are created by situations not structures. Gaucha culture is prevalent in certain areas of Argentina, Uruguay, and South of Brazil with no territorial demarcation, hence a "Union Gaucha" always privileges the regional over the national, constructing various and diverse molecular alliances. The addition of the word "Productions" clarifies that the artists are in command of their means of production, exposing an inescapable condition: a form of creation that fully integrates its subjectivity with its economy

- Karin Schneider and Nicolás Guagnini

This survey of the work of Union Gaucha Productions is presented in three parts: a street level installation of film and video works; a basement cinema, where these works can be viewed on-demand; and a series of related film screenings, performance, music, and conversations.

Union Gaucha Productions (UGP) was founded in New York in 1997 by artists Karin Schneider (born 1970, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) and Nicolás Guagnini (born 1966, Buenos Aires, Argentina) and was active until 2010. Distinct from Schneider and Guagnini's individual practices, under the guise of a "film production company" they produced a diverse body of works, often collaborating with other artists, architects, musicians, performers, filmmakers and thinkers.

Both Schneider and Guagnini moved to New York in the late 1990s, and the works produced under the moniker UGP map the artists' experiences of migration from South America to the US at the cusp of the millennium. Their films and videos bear heterogeneous influences, including those of political and artistic avant-gardes from Brazil and Argentina (from Cinema Novo to Oswald de Andrade's concept of anthropophagy and the writing of the Polish émigré Witold Gombrowicz), as well as American experimental cinema (Schneider worked at Anthology Film Archives and studied with Annette Michelson, and Jonas Mekas advised the artists on the purchase of their first 16mm camera)

The works of UGP often depict individuals and objects, in many cases particular artists and artworks. But against the backdrop of the homogenizing processes of multiculturalism, which sought to re-inscribe differences as stable identities, they unfix subjects, objects and histories as they manipulate, perform, and model them. Between diary and documentary, these works privilege a mutual activation: an "infra-life" between gestures, images and forms of exchange, a territory where identities, friendships, and ideological affinities are in constant flux.

This survey is organized by Artists Space together with Jacob King.

Please visit the basement cinema to select and view the individual films

Invited projectionists: Franklin Collective (Filmmakers Mark John Smith and Matthew Whitman), artist and writer Rebecca Friedman and poet Clara Lou.

01

Phantom Limb, 1998
16mm film (silent, black and white), 22 min

Phantom Limb began with a trip to film the artworks of Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland. The resulting work assumes the guise of a fictional documentary on the distinctive development of modernism in three countries supposedly "peripheral" to the art historical canon — Poland, Brazil, and Argentina. It brings together examples of the Unism of Kobro and Strzemiński, the Neo-Concrete Art of Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica, and the Concrete Art of Raul Lozza and Enio Tomin.

We see these objects manipulated and activated for the camera, rotating and hovering, as the museum becomes a space of play. Intercut with images of bodies in trance, birds in flight, a braying elephant seal and brutalist architecture, the film uses formal analogies to narrate a perpetual state of becoming-other distinctive to de Andrade's notion of anthropophagy, an assimilation through ingestion in which modernist historiography is reorganized.

02

The End, 1999
16mm film (sound, black and white), 6 min. Scratching: Eugenijus Varkulevičius

The End is composed of footage from mid-century American documentaries, one on the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. and another on Leonardo da Vinci's mechanical inventions. These films betray a propagandistic obsession with the ordering and regulation of cultural forms, and an ideology of technological superiority symptomatic of the Cold War.

Guagnini and Schneider adopt formal strategies that emphasize the mechanics of film, running the same sequence of shots twice, once forwards and once backwards (so that "The End" is not, actually, the end), and asking the artist Eugenijus Varkulevičius to scratch away parts of the film where a portrait of George Washington appears. The aesthetic specter here is Abstract Expressionism, the apex of post-war American cultural identity and also a rupture in the discourse around scratching in experimental cinema (by, for instance, Storm de Hirsch and Stan Brakhage) as a mode of expressiveness. Pitting the "machine" of film against the "machine" of the museum, *The End* locates the apparatuses of propaganda and historical authority within an entwining feedback loop of image, material and language.

03

A Vida de Infra-Tunga, 1999
16mm film (sound, black and white), 11 min. Sound: Paulo Vivacqua

In 1999, the Brazilian artist Tunga invited Guagnini and Schneider to shoot a film he had wanted to make since 1981, titled *Heaven's Hell Hell's Heaven*. Staying with the artist for ten days in Rio de Janeiro, they shot *A Vida de Infra-Tunga* in parallel to this work; it is a "stolen" film, with images of Tunga taken in interstitial moments between performance and studio work: sitting in a hammock, playing with artworks, merging with the wildlife that surrounds his home.

The film is less a documentation of an artistic persona than an immersion in an "infra-life," the sharing of a total commitment to an artistic project. This space between documentary and diary bespeaks the influence of Marginal Cinema's "imagistic transgression" and Jonas Mekas' "camera-in-hand" film portraiture. Tunga has used the term "Cipó Cinema" (Vine Cinema) to suggest a rhizomatic approach to film; Dadaist doublings and reversals, the overlay of sound effects (a parrot squawking the voice of Antonin Artaud), and a fragmentary score by Paulo Vivacqua emphasize this state of multiplicity.

04

Nude Descending a Staircase, 2000
16mm film (silent, color), 3 min. Collaboration with Ikeba

Nude Descending a Staircase and the companion work *Portrait of a Lady* were made in collaboration with Ikeba, who Schneider and Guagnini met after placing an ad in *Backstage* magazine, seeking an actress willing to pose nude in re-enacting certain modernist paintings. In the course of producing this survey exhibition, these works have become particularly charged points of discussion among the artists and organizers, raising as they do difficult questions of subjecthood and objecthood, and race, class and gender.

In *Nude Descending*, Ikeba "re-enacts" Marcel Duchamp's 1912 painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*, walking down a staircase between two Chelsea warehouses designed by architects Leven Betts. This footage was projected in a moviola, and run forwards and backwards, at different speeds and with colored gels, so that the images are superimposed and intercut with one another. What the viewer sees is a machine filming a machine, with a body caught between them (and within the machine of architecture), in fragmented abstraction.

05

Portrait of Lady, 2000
16mm film (silent, color), 6 min. Collaboration with Ikeba

Portrait of a Lady evolved out of a dialogue between Schneider, Guagnini and Ikeba around Picasso's 1907 painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which followed the production of *Nude Descending*. Ikeba worked at the time at Pizza Hut, and her fast food uniform was incorporated into this film as she replicates the poses of the figures in Picasso's painting and improvises others, foregrounding the painting's connection to labor.

Re-exposing the film in camera for each figure in the painting — a technique of superimposition typical of early cinema (e.g. George Méliès) — a history of modernism collides here with that of modernity, built on the violent exploitation of bodies and hierarchies of class, race, and gender. This superimposition sought to turn the table on these histories, dislocating the meaning of the painting to foster new experiences of resistance and agency. As opposed to the fixity of identity grounded in disciplinary power, UGP aimed at a kind of subject-object transitivity, with the object of the painting becoming a concrete subject, and vice-versa. An important influence here is Tadeusz Kantor's excoriating manifesto "The Theatre of Death" (1975), and his insistence that "performers were essential elements halfway between living beings and objects ... where their life depended on the means by which the objects were animated."

06

IXX vs XXI, 2000
16mm film (sound, color), 3 min 40 sec. Collaboration with Leven Betts Studio

The work's adoption of a technological apparatus synonymous with advertising — put to work within the art museum — echoes elements of *The End* and *Square Times*. Multilayered editing, and interference patterns run across urban space and the reliefed geometries of modernism create an optically and psychically frenetic experience — a "time machine creating different attention spans and multiple perceptions of time."

Mosses, Blake Rayne, and Michael Smith (performing as Baby Ikt). Performances by Sarina Basta, Leigh Lederer, Juan Ledezma, Jonas Mekas, Olivier as iconic artworks are made to serve as backdrops for melodramatic and absurd (from *Home*), and a series of images and a series of images filmed inside MoMA, famous tracking shot up the West Side highway in Chantal Ackerman's *News* long tracking shot of Madison Avenue, from 23 Street into Harlem (evoking the of two strands which get spliced together in real time across the monitors: a information screens above the museum's ticketing desk. The work is composed As Long As It Lasts was originally commissioned by MoMA, and exhibited on nine Film production and editing assistance: Francisca Caporali and Lior Shvil

11

As Long As It Lasts, 2010
Digital video on six screens (silent, color), 200 min

As Long As It Lasts implies the formation of a distinct zone of exchange between Schneider Guagnini, and Kacero. body — implies the formation of a distinct zone of exchange between Schneider necessarily distance for the majority of shots, yet on occasion closing in on the still of an expanded documentation, yet the varying proximities of the camera — at a depression that began in 1998. Kacero's performance indicates a breakdown in the social contract, as a body on the streets is ignored. *Totop* assumes the logic of an expanded documentation, yet the varying proximities of the camera — at a In 2003, Argentina's economy was showing signs of recovery from a paralyzing depression that began in 1998. Kacero's performance indicates a breakdown in the social contract, as a body on the streets is ignored. *Totop* assumes the logic of an expanded documentation, yet the varying proximities of the camera — at a some briefly acknowledging the prone figure, but all choosing to carry on walking indifferently.

which had seen four presidents in as many years. Also documented are passively, mansion where Nestor Kirchner was installed that year, after a period of instability equated with civic life, including La Casa Rosada (the Pink House), the Presidential performance for an unseen camera — he chose sites for their proximity to structures dead in a number of public spaces. Kacero had enacted this unannounced performance on several occasions before in various art spaces. In this instance — filmed in Buenos Aires, *Totop* documents Argentine artist Fabio Kacero playing 16mm film (silent, color), 4 min. Collaboration with Fabio Kacero

10

Totop, 2003
16mm film (silent, color), 4 min. Collaboration with Fabio Kacero

An assemblage of Ambasz's idiosyncratic presence and diverse ideas, *Primary Green* surpasses dichotomies between architecture and nature, practice and theory, located in a conception of objects, their producers, and users in "an ensemble of inter-related processes."

Ambasz's buildings are seen in architectural models and photographs, and in footage shot by Schneider and Guagnini at his "Valley of the Moon" house in Montana. These are paired with a promotional film for Ambasz's 1972 exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, and images of the accompanying catalogue, from his celebrated period as curator of design at MoMA, while a voiceover of one of his texts accompanies images of Times Square (the same footage which appears in *Square Times*).

Primary Green begins with the lens rotating in the landscape of the South American Pampas, a region synonymous with Gaucho culture. Viewed through incessant gammas, this space of deterritorialization forms a powerful vector in an essay-film that mobilizes the ideas of the visionary architect, curator and theorist Emilio Ambasz.

60

Primary Green, 2002
Digital video (sound, color), 32 min

Evoking the physiognomy of a Rembrandt portrait, *Axom of Choice* depicts filmmaker Jonas Mekas and his son Sebastian, their heads rotating in radiant chiaroscuro against a black ground. To a certain extent, Guagnini and Schneider treat Mekas and son like the Kobro and Clark sculptures they put into orbit in *Phantom Limb*; here, as in the earlier work, the references to cinematic machinery machine is juxtaposed with the irrational axis of a trance (bringing to mind whirling dervishes), and asynchronously, the consequence (the son) appears here before the cause (his father). With Mekas at its center, the references to cinematic machinery abound in this work: from the proto-filmic zoetrope (which used a spinning cylinder to create the illusion of a moving image), to the flickering zoom of Ernie Gehr's film *Serene Velocity*, to the enormous gyrating machine at the center of Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale*.

80

Axom of Choice, 2003
16mm film (silent, color), 5 min

Schneider and Guagnini play their footage twice, pairing it first with a musical score and second with a prescient 1969 text by Emilio Ambasz ("Manhattan: Capital of the XXth Century"), as the pulsating stock tickers and advertisements become a complex reflection of the city's informatic, networked nervous system. While these scrolling lights resemble the 16mm film rolling through the projector, this collision of analog and digital is unsettling. Times Square appears here as something both archaic (an "urban attract") and futuristic, a ritual urban space where capital celebrates itself.

Square Times is a portrait of New York's Times Square at the turn of the millennium. Following nearly a decade of brutal efforts by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to remake the area for tourism and real-estate development, the neighborhood saw the largest New Years celebration in history (defined by Frank Gehry-designed headquarters, and the introduction of the Nasdaq Nest's unprecedented policing and surveillance), the grand opening of Conde Nast's 19th century vernacular (one code of representation transforming into another). Within its apparent simplicity and humor the film contains layers of modeling, of both concept and material; the utopic article of the architectural model giving over to controlled entropy. As they do throughout their oeuvre, UGP play on and deform the symbolic registers of time and history ("IXX vs XXI").

70

Square Times, 2001
16mm film (sound, color), 12 min. Sound: Paulo Vivacqua. Voice: Patrick Healy

IXX vs XXI follows the studio-based set-up of *Axom of Choice* and *Portrait of a Lady*, focusing on this occasion on an architectural model, shot in taking light. Using basic stop motion effects, prismatic fire and water play, and sound overlay, the film's succinct narrative is based on a Leven Betts Studio architectural concept: an archetypal wood-clad farmhouse reveals itself as a shell, housing inside itself a modernist steel box structure. The ensuing fire that takes hold of the farmhouse is absurdist and comic in its outsize scale, but also in the ways it fuses a postmodern parable of the "decorated shed" with an evolutionary allegory of the 19th century vernacular (one code of representation transforming into another). Within its apparent simplicity and humor the film contains layers of modeling, of both concept and material; the utopic article of the architectural model giving over to controlled entropy. As they do throughout their oeuvre, UGP play on and deform the symbolic registers of time and history ("IXX vs XXI").