

TELENOVELA

AMERICAS
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EXHIBITIONS

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FOREWORD

Americas Society is pleased to present *Telenovela*, an exhibition that explores the cultural significance of telenovelas across the Western Hemisphere through the lens of visual art. Featuring over fifty artworks produced between the 1970s and the present day, the exhibition demonstrates that telenovelas are an enduring Pan-American phenomenon that transcends geography, social stratification, and cultural categories. Telenovelas are the perfect subject for the next chapter in the series of research exhibitions that we have been developing at Americas Society for the last five years, each exploring culture from a hemispheric perspective. Starting with *This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York, 1965–1975* (2021–22) and continuing with *El Dorado: Myths of Gold* (2023–24), *The Appearance: Art of the Asian Diaspora in Latin America & the Caribbean*

(2024), and *Amazonia Açu* (2025–26), these exhibitions explore cultural connections across the continent. They understand the Americas as plural and interlinked, woven from distinct yet related histories.

This project began with a convening organized by Aimé Iglesias Lukin, director and chief curator of art at Americas Society, and Mariano López Seoane, director of the graduate program at CCS Bard. López Seoane's research on melodrama as a mode of sentimental formation across Latin American media was foundational to this endeavor. Bringing together scholars and devoted viewers from across the Americas, a series of closed sessions created a rare space—within and beyond academia—to collectively reflect on the histories, forms, and affective power of the telenovela. From these conversations, the need for a publication emerged. The resulting book *Telenovela: A Reader*, coedited by Iglesias Lukin and López Seoane, approaches the genre through its dual nature, unfolding across two interconnected sections that engage both texts

and images. The first assembles essays by twelve contributors—spanning scholarship, journalism, and creative practice—offering varied perspectives on the telenovela’s development and contemporary relevance. The second turns to the telenovela’s visual dimension, presenting archival material from landmark productions that have shaped the genre across time and geography. In addition to the reader, the exhibition is accompanied by an active schedule of public programming. A panel will explore artist Pablo Helguera’s commissioned work for the show, which extends his longstanding engagement with the genre through the ongoing project *Instituto de la telenovela* (Institute of the telenovela) (2002–present). Other programs include two newly commissioned performances: a karaoke night featuring melodramatic songs and a symposium with more than twenty participants from around the world that will animate the exhibition before its closing in late March 2027.

I am grateful to all the exhibition artists and lenders who worked with our team to bring

this show to our galleries. I also express my thanks to the Art at Americas Society curatorial team: to Director and Chief Curator Aimé Iglesias Lukin for her leadership; to Associate Curator Tatiana Marcel, the associate editor of this series; and to Associate Curators Sarah Lopez, Carla Lucini, and Camilo Otero Herrera, who all worked together on this project. I would also like to thank Karen Marta for her editorial support of Americas Society's publications, Todd Bradway for his project management, and Garrick Gott for designing this series.

Telenovela has been made possible by generous support from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Henry Luce Foundation, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, Cowles Charitable Trust, and Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros. Significant in-kind support has been provided by Globo.

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SUSAN SEGAL
PRESIDENT AND CEO
AMERICAS SOCIETY/COUNCIL OF THE AMERICAS

TELENOVELA: PASIÓN PANAMERICANA

Aimé Iglesias Lukin

Growing up in Buenos Aires in the 1990s, my mother would not let me watch telenovelas. They were considered tacky and vulgar, offering no educational value that would justify access to television in my strict household. But telenovelas had a mystique that was hard to escape, so I found ways to break the rules by negotiating over chores with my grandmother in exchange for permission to watch them together. Only later did I learn that there was no need to negotiate: she watched them religiously, for her own pleasure. When I moved to New York in 2011, I found, in communities of Latinx people and fellow migrants from all over the Americas, the same story: a childhood shaped by the narratives and visual codes of telenovelas and a secret love for the genre confessed in small talk so as not to raise suspicions. From any prohibition, a desire is born.

Almost everyone in the Americas—and beyond—grew up watching these serial dramas, regardless of their origin or social background. Stories such as *María la del barrio* (1995), a

modern-day Cinderella story, offered both an escape from reality and a perfect rendering of our hopes and dreams. The romances provided a shared space for desire and love that transcended social and ethnic boundaries, while the characters' class mobility suggested forms of justice rarely seen in real life. The plots of telenovelas depicted complicated models of womanhood, but also offered narratives of liberation and acted as educational vessels for social change. Queer elements in telenovela aesthetics created a fictional space through which audiences could experience otherwise forbidden forms of identification.

In short, telenovelas are the quintessential Pan-American cultural product. Pioneered by Cuban, Brazilian, and Mexican television but produced throughout the Americas over the years, particularly by Colombian, Venezuelan, and Argentine broadcasters, they have been adored and argued over, even paralyzing entire cities during provocative finales. *Lo telenovelesco* is an adjective in its own right, expanded from

television references to describe an emotionally excessive attitude commonly associated with Latino culture. One could debate how much of this cultural stereotype—often used in derogatory ways—can be blamed on the effect of telenovelas themselves, or if it simply represents already existing misconceptions about Latinidad. But the reality is that telenovelas, as any person who grew up watching them knows, are much more than that. They have also provided spaces for critical discussions about class and gender issues that were not openly questioned in the largely conservative societies of the Americas. Their enormous success since the 1980s has expanded their reach to all social classes, well beyond their geographies of origin, making them a true international phenomenon. They have become perhaps the largest vessel for inter-American cultural dialogue, comparable in effect and influence only to music and soccer.

Originating in Latin America during the mid-twentieth century, telenovelas evolved

from radio dramas and *fotonovelas* that were already popular throughout the Americas, as Tatiana Marcel observes in her essay in this volume (pp. 35–41). They became the symbol of the expansion of Latin American developing countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s and, later, a quiet yet powerful space for resistance and progressive social change during the 1970s and 1980s, peaking in international popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s. Fotonovelas belong to a past era of cultural consumption and today are experienced as historical artifacts. Telenovelas, by contrast, have not yet been historicized, and in the present moment, the genre faces the possibility of profound transformation: rapid changes in image production, storytelling, and media consumption, brought about by the internet and streaming platforms over the last ten years, have placed the telenovela at a critical juncture. By presenting this exhibition now and including the works of contemporary artists, we can experience the enduring affective power of the telenovela

genre firsthand, even as it participates in writing its own history.

Drawing on the history of telenovelas, this exhibition explores their impact on Latin American artistic production, focusing on contemporary works in diverse media by creators from across the Americas and Europe. The accompanying reader, published on the occasion of this exhibition, contains scholarly essays that historicize and analyze telenovelas, as well as an archival section of some of their most notable examples.¹ The exhibition's selection demonstrates the expansive reach of telenovelas in postwar art and culture—including the so-called “fine arts”—throughout the continent and beyond, simultaneously questioning the conventional reading of telenovelas as “lowbrow.”

These works also challenge understandings of contemporary art as a self-referential field, demonstrating that artists, like many others, consume and digest popular culture to reflect on and critique reality. Indeed, art and telenovelas share an important trait. Both can

offer an escape from everyday life, providing a fantasy that sheds more light on our world than documentarian practices, precisely because they emphasize, through metaphor and fiction, the contradictions of life that we tend to naturalize.

Telenovelas are no longer only a Latin American phenomenon; they have also become an international one. Even before the rise of today's highly successful Turkish, Korean, and other global television dramas, the classic Latin American telenovela had already gained widespread popularity. The period most commonly associated with the genre extends from the emergence of broadcast television in the 1950s to the rise of streaming platforms in the mid-2010s. Throughout these decades, telenovelas proved remarkably successful across a variety of cultural and national contexts.

Pablo Helguera's ongoing project, *Instituto de la telenovela* (Institute of the telenovela),² emerged from this phenomenon. While visiting Serbia in 2001, Helguera was surprised to see his uncle, the Mexican actor Enrique Lizalde, on television

in a dubbed version of *Esmeralda* (1997). The encounter inspired him to create a relational artwork in which audiences gathered in an art space in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to comment on the latest episode of their favorite telenovela. The piece evolved and was adapted over the years in places that are far apart yet equally connected to the genre, such as Zagreb, Havana, London, and Mexico City. For this exhibition, Helguera presents a new version of the *Instituto*, subtitled *Entre la gloria y el olvido* (Between glory and oblivion), a telenovela script about a “will they, won’t they” love story in the art world. He filmed it in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, demonstrating the distinctions and commonalities of each country’s entertainment industry.

Helguera’s project raises an important question: What defines a telenovela? Is it the script, rooted in melodrama and narratives of social ascent? Is it the serialized form through which it reaches audiences? Is it a particular style of acting performance? Or is it the kitsch aesthetic that characterizes so many of its classic

productions? While these questions are extensively debated in the reader and have no easy resolution, many of the artists in the exhibition playfully tackle one or more aspects of the genre's identity in their work, deconstructing its form and content.

Many of the works in the show evoke telenovela plots and the ways in which they render social phenomena, with several breaking the fourth wall of the TV screen, as Sarah Lopez explores in her essay on the tension between reality and fiction in the photographs of Yvonne Venegas, Stefan Ruiz, and Luis Molina-Pantin, among others. Marco Rountree's work, which replicates the swing appearing in the opening scene of the 1987 telenovela *Quinceañera* as a public sculpture in the Jardín Botánico Culiacán, Mexico, is now used by young girls to pose for their birthday photoshoots, turning fiction into reality. Conversely, Silvan Kälin's documentary record of conversations with inhabitants of the small rural town of Lagoa do Ouro, Brazil, transforms into a telenovela the

gossip and social dynamics among neighbors. Yoshua Okón's work *New Decor* enacts a similar operation, inviting furniture store clients to improvise telenovela scenes, demonstrating that their tropes are universally understood. Further still, Miguel Calderón's art book *Eden Is a Magic World* imposes reality over fiction by documenting the nightlife escapades of child actor Flor Eduarda Gurrola and contrasting them with stills of her naïve telenovela character, while Wanda Pimentel's paintings—which were used as props in the hyper-successful telenovela *Vale tudo* (1988), presented as the creation of one of the main characters—turn art into a tool for fiction.

Telenovela plots are rooted in the nineteenth-century literary genre of melodrama, as illustrated by Daniela Lovera and Juan Nascimento's scenes from a 1976 Venezuelan television adaptation of Emily Brontë's classic *Wuthering Heights* and in Rachelle Mozman Solano's critical reassessment of the racial dynamics in the film adaptation of the 1933 novel

Imitation of Life. Many artists in the exhibition transpose telenovela plot devices onto new mediums, like Miriam Inez da Silva's small paintings synthesizing the plot of telenovelas she saw, or Erika Verzutti, whose bronze sculpture references the storyline of the telenovela *Saramandaia*, with miniature, fantastical figures emerging from the cast. Likewise, Alex Červený's series of incised black oil paintings synthesizes a telenovela's plot into a single page, including additional small drawings that reference historical events that took place around the time it aired. Déborah Castillo and Antonio Manuel, too, reference the fotonovela format to present parodic depictions of mystery plots. The two narrative devices typical of telenovelas—the missed connection and the heartbreak—are perfectly crystallized in the feeling of romantic hopelessness that permeates Martine Gutierrez's early video *Missing*. Julio Galán's 1986 neo-Surrealist painting *Te mentí (Sofía)* (I lied to you [Sofía]) recalls telenovelas through saturated kitsch aesthetics

and an emphasis on amorous disappointment. Reynaldo Rivera's photograph of a television airing a telenovela episode in an empty bus terminal in Sonora, Mexico, recalls the melancholic solitude that is the counterpart of love. There is, however, a classic happy ending to most telenovelas: a wedding scene like the one in Maripaz Jaramillo's painting *Café con aroma de mujer* (Coffee with the scent of a woman), which marks the true end of the telenovela and brings closure. Similarly, Leda Catunda's textile piece *Os amantes* (The lovers) includes heart-shaped silkscreened portraits alluding to the Brazilian tradition of gifting pillows with a photo of newlyweds. This narrative machinery works precisely because the accomplishment has been deferred until the last moment and marks the end of the telenovela: happiness lives in the pursuit, not truly only in the end result.

Other artists accentuate how the genre is defined by facial and bodily movements that codify the telenovela acting style. Arnulfo Luna's fotonovelas are stripped of dialogue,

allowing the viewer to focus on the meaning behind the actors' facial expressions, much like Luciana Pinchiero's collages, in which actors kiss or slap classic sculptures. Lolo y Lauti's performance, commissioned by Americas Society and musically accompanied by a baritone singer, proposes a full visual alphabet of melodramatic facial expressions by telenovela heroines. Similarly, Christian Jankowski remakes an episode of a Mexican telenovela by replacing all dialogue with crying to emphasize the key role of melodramatic facial expressions. Felix Gonzalez-Torres also referred to crying and the dissemination of melodrama in television in his 1987 untitled framed photostat that includes the phrase "water-proof mascara" among a selection of sentences cited from television. Made in reflective material, the work invites us to personalize, in an intimate reflection, the information we receive from mass media.

Other works highlight the absurdity of some telenovela scripts and acting styles by manipulating speech or overacting to denaturalize the

conventions of the genre. Hélio Oiticica invokes the dramatic tropes of opera in his camp remake of Handel's *Agrippina é a Roma-Manhattan*, in which drag icon Mario Montez plays the mother of Nero in a Super 8 reinterpretation set on Wall Street, echoing the decadent Roman Empire. Lucas Michael's video *Home Alone (Since 2003)* Vol. 1 repeats script lines ad absurdum until the acting becomes so artificial that drama becomes comedy. Bernardo Oyarzún's 2007 series *Mal de ojo* (Evil eye) uses professional and amateur actors in an exaggerated performance set in a popular neighborhood of Santiago, Chile. Andrés Duque's film *Vu par télévision* (Seen on television) compiles romantic scenes from intellectual movies, and Bruce and Norman Yonemoto's *Based on Romance* creates a drama from trivial conversations between a Los Angeles art couple, drawing on soap opera acting tropes. Sol Calero and Dafna Maimon's video installation *Desde el jardín* (From the garden) satirizes the visual and performative archetypes of telenovelas, producing a truly excessive parody of the genre.

An alphabet of aesthetic references helps define telenovelas, from the use of various camera lenses and lighting techniques to soundtracks, set construction, and makeup and costume design. By presenting an audio piece through a telephone placed on an Ionic column, Fátima Rodrigo synthesizes the equal hope and despair we can feel when expecting a call from a loved one. This telenovela device also appears in Leandro Katz's collages, which turn fotonovelas into geometric abstractions. Wilson Díaz's installation combines appropriated telenovela LP records with paintings made by the artist in the same format, creating an interchangeable code of faces and cultural references that are easily recognizable, even if their specific sources are unknown. The symbol of the superstar and the role of fame in the mystique of telenovelas are signified visually in Francesco Vezzoli's star-shaped portrait of actress Sônia Braga as her character in *Dancin' Days* (1978). This same fascination with fame also appears in Yvonne Venegas's series, which

documents the tour of musical youth from the telenovela *Rebelde* (2004) in a scrapbook-like photographic collage showing behind-the-scenes moments and the audience's fanatical adoration. Luis Molina-Pantin's *Inmobilia* series explores the power dynamics and social systems inherent in set pieces, such as a living room, a prison, or a hospital wing, capturing the artificial spaces sitting empty after their fictional use. Finally, Camilo Godoy's remaking of his childhood drawings of outfits from episodes of *María la del barrio* highlights the visual vocabulary and class indicators behind each character's costume.

Like Godoy, many of the featured artists deconstruct telenovela content to expose the contradictions and fantasies of rags-to-riches stories, as well as the subliminal messages that promote social change. Throughout the genre's history—including the educational entertainment method of screenwriter Miguel Sabido—telenovela dialogues and plots have taken political angles, discussing topics such as racial inequality, divorce, and gender violence

within conservative societies. Enrique Flores illustrates Janete Clair's Chilean remake of *Semidiós* (Demigod), a successful telenovela that offered many a respite during the country's democratic transition. Alexander Apóstol invited telenovela writers to reinterpret the foundational volume of Venezuela's political history, *Del buen salvaje al buen revolucionario* (From noble savage to noble revolutionary), foreshadowing the country's political melodrama to come. Katalina Iturralde refers to melodrama as a regional signifier in her street sign reading "Drama Tropical," created in 2011 for the first Gran Bienal de Arte Tropical de Puerto Rico. *Narconovelas*, a subgenre of telenovelas, are also represented in the exhibition with Juan David Laserna's paintings of Colombia's war against narcotraffickers and the death of Pablo Escobar. These works realistically reproduce scenes from the telenovela *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal* (2012), through which most people in the country learned about these events, conflating fiction and history.

Gender issues and women's rights are topics that telenovelas address with perhaps the greatest ambiguity. While perpetuating submissive models of female obedience—as illustrated by Abigail Reyes's video compilation of hundreds of clips of women saying “yes, sir” in televised fictions, or by Teresa Serrano's crude depictions of women being sexually harassed—some telenovelas have offered stories of female resistance. In her video *Los machos de mi vida* (The machos in my life), Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz comically casts herself as a submissive Latina being seduced by different types of heartthrobs, including the handyman and the cowboy, both played by herself, only with shorter hair. Female sexuality is typically hidden or judged in telenovelas, as ironized by Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante's photo performance *Paquita y Chata*, published in *Atlántica* magazine. Similarly ludic and ironic, Jessica Mitrani's *Rita va al supermercado* (Rita goes to the supermarket) depicts telenovela star Rita Bendeck grocery shopping and performing other ordinary tasks. Márcia X and Aimberê César

appeal to cleaning routines and domesticity in an installation built of soap bars, alluding to soap operas and the origins of the genre. A different note appears in Dalton Gata's *Protagonista de telenovela* (Telenovela protagonist), which portrays the nineteenth-century Ecuadorian revolutionary heroine Manuela Sáenz as an alternative, stronger model of femininity. Lastly, Amelia Bande's musical performance takes up the trope of the "maldita lisiada," an iconic telenovela scene from *María la del barrio*, popularized by memes, that stereotypically depicts a fight between a deranged villain and a passive, victimized character in a wheelchair. Bande's performance instead features a protagonist who fights back, subverting the plot to discuss disability rights.

Precisely because they hide larger social conflicts behind love stories, telenovelas often reveal the strong classism present in the societies they portray. Characters like the maid and the butler, representatives of the lower class, are often influential operatives in telenovela plot

structures. Phil Collins invited service workers from the Roaring Fork Valley's tourism industry to participate in his work when commissioned by the Aspen Art Museum to conceive the piece *soy mi madre*. Rubén Ortiz-Torres, Stephen Callis, Leslie Ernst, and Sandra Ramírez jointly created the 1993 fotonovela *La gran limpieza* / *The Big Sweep*, which instructs cleaning and maintenance workers in Los Angeles on their labor rights. Female sanitation workers are also the protagonists in *Maria TV* by Rodrigo Valenzuela, a video musical in which they narrate their life stories in the first person. Daniela Rossell's photograph *Untitled (Ricas y famosas)* "*Inge with Maid*"—from the polemic series *Ricas y famosas*, in which rich socialites from Mexico pose in their lavish houses—is particularly impactful, considering the protagonist's choice to include her employee in the frame. Throughout, these works emphasize the key role of service workers in economic and social systems, including as class signifiers, and the gross inelegance of the social inequality behind telenovela representation.

As José Leonilson states in his drawing on view, “The maid in the soap opera is classier than the lady of the house.”

At the height of his artistic career, Vik Muniz accepted an invitation from TV Globo to create the opening credits for the telenovela *Passione* (2010). This decision drew significant criticism from his peers and other art world professionals, who accused him of “selling out to the system.” While Muniz’s project was formally in line with the works that he was doing for galleries and museums, his involvement with the telenovela enterprise was met with prejudice and resistance from the art sector, further illustrating the intrinsically classist tension between high and low culture. As this exhibition emphasizes, although artists often engage critically with the genre, their reinterpretations or explorations of such a popular product are often met with distrust, simply because of their proximity to mass media.

While many of the works on view deconstruct the telenovela’s form and social function,

this engagement with the genre by contemporary artists should not be understood solely as critique. On the contrary, and perhaps more interestingly, what most of these artists demonstrate is a genuine affection for the genre—an appreciation that can only come from being active consumers and admirers of telenovelas. Whether as a guilty pleasure or for simple enjoyment, telenovelas matter enough to these artists to be studied, revisited, and ultimately incorporated into their artistic practices in one or more works. And in doing so, they expand their references and audiences by embracing an indelible part of the pluralistic culture of the Americas.

NOTES

- 1 See *Telenovela: A Reader* (Americas Society, 2026). More generally, see a description of the projects associated with this exhibition in the foreword of this publication.
- 2 For images, additional information, and a text analyzing each of the works in the exhibition, see the “Works” section in this book, and find the artists listed alphabetically by last name, pp. 51–181.

VISUALIZING MELODRAMA: HOW FOTONOVELAS DEFINED THE TELENUELA AESTHETIC

Tatiana Marcel

The exhibition curated by Aimé Iglesias Lukin at Americas Society may be titled *Telenovela*, but it cannot be discussed without mentioning *fotonovelas*. Both storytelling formats evolved from the same point of origin: the nineteenth-century *feuilleton*, a cultural supplement in French newspapers that later spread throughout Europe and Latin America. What began as a commentary on art, literature, and fashion, intended to expand the papers' readership, ultimately gained traction with the introduction of serialized short fiction. Stories unfolded in installments, each ending in a cliffhanger to heighten suspense and encourage readers to buy the next issue. From this lineage comes the modern novela's most important inheritance: serialized melodrama.¹ The intertwined histories of fotonovelas and telenovelas briefly converged in the mid-twentieth century before telenovelas eclipsed their printed counterparts with the advent of household television sets. However, even as telenovelas took center stage and became the more mainstream form of entertainment, they would come

to be associated with the signature aesthetic of excess that was first established by fotonovelas.

The larger history of global media technology directly shaped the evolution of mass media consumption in Latin America. The twentieth-century transformation of the media landscape, once dominated by the printing press, into one of audio and visual broadcasting, resulted in the widespread cultural adoption of radio and cinema. Consequently, the narrative model once popularized by feuilletons in newspapers was adapted for radio as *radionovelas*, which are credited as the immediate predecessors of telenovelas. As Professor Carolina Acosta-Alzuru observes, telenovelas were conceived in Cuba as *radionovelas*, which were then adapted for the small screen.² One notable early example of a Cuban show that made the transition from radio to television is *El derecho de nacer*. Created by Félix B. Caignet in 1948 and adapted for Cuban television in 1958, it is widely considered the blueprint for modern telenovelas.³ In parallel, the cinema gave rise

to fotonovelas, originally called *cinenovelas*, which emerged as pictorial adaptations of famous films, using stills of actors overlaid with dialogue bubbles—essentially comic books with photographs instead of drawings. The genre arose in 1946, with the launch of the Italian magazine *Grand Hotel*.⁴ Shortly thereafter, the format proliferated across Europe and quickly reached Latin America, initially taking off in Argentina and Mexico.

In true melodramatic fashion, fotonovelas and telenovelas were separated at birth but destined to meet in the 1950s with the creation of the first early-format telenovela, *Sua vida me pertence*, broadcast in 1951 on the Brazilian network TV Tupi.⁵ From then on, the two formats overlapped until the 1980s, when fotonovelas' popularity waned. Although their trajectories diverged during the first half of the twentieth century, these two iterations of melodrama were intrinsically linked from the outset by what professor of Hispanic studies Amy E. Wright calls the genre's "genetic code": the

code of seriality.” Wright posits that seriality gives this mode of storytelling the malleability to evolve alongside changing media environments while preserving its codified rhythms: “suspense that builds, repetition that binds, and an emotional excess that demands catharsis.” Treating seriality as a genealogy, she argues, reframes the telenovela as “an evolving family line rather than a static formula.”⁶

In the relationship between fotonovelas and telenovelas, the visual language defined in the pages of fotonovelas’ weekly or monthly issues was ubiquitous, providing cues for how to depict the storylines of radionovelas adapted into telenovelas on-screen. As a printed medium, fotonovelas used speech bubbles for dialogue and characters’ expressions within frames to affect the story’s pacing and highlight emotional beats, the latter a form of cinematic pantomime that can be traced to early silent film. The fotonovelas and representations of fotonovelas on view in the *Telenovela* exhibition, including those by Alexander Apóstol; Miguel

Calderón; Stephen Callis, Leslie Ernst, Rubén Ortiz-Torres, and Sandra Ramírez; Déborah Castillo; Leda Catunda; Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante; Leandro Katz; Arnulfo Luna; Antonio Manuel; and Teresa Serrano illustrate the format's lasting impact. Fotonovelas imprinted a universally legible aesthetic of melodrama on the popular imagination, one conjured at the very mention of telenovelas.

NOTES

- 1 Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Mariano López Seoane, "Telenovelas: The Past, Present, and Future of Pan-American Melodrama," in *Telenovela: A Reader*, ed. Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Mariano López Seoane (New York: Americas Society, 2026), 15.
- 2 Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, "From Latin America to the World: Telenovelas as a Global Export," in *Telenovela: A Reader*, ed. Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Mariano López Seoane (New York: Americas Society, 2026), 58.
- 3 "El derecho de nacer," in *Telenovela: A Reader*, ed. Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Mariano López Seoane (New York: Americas Society, 2026), 216.
- 4 Samuel Titan, "Doce cuadros para George Friedman," in *George Friedman. Fotonovela*, ed. Leandro Chiappa, Facundo de Zuviria, and Samuel Titan (Buenos Aires: MALBA, 2025), 112.
- 5 "The First Latin American 'Telenovela,'" BBC, last modified December 16, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04kqf7v>.
- 6 Amy E. Wright, "The DNA of the Telenovela: Seriality as Genealogy," in *Telenovela: A Reader*, ed. Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Mariano López Seoane (New York: Americas Society, 2026), 41.

REALITY VS. FICTION: BEHIND THE SCENES

Sarah Lopez

Photography has traditionally been associated with truth and documentation, more so than newer media such as radio, film, and television, placing it in a unique position to expose constructed narratives. This association becomes particularly significant in the case of telenovelas, a genre known for blurring the line between reality and fantasy, often weaving current social issues and everyday experiences into dramatized storylines. Several artists in the exhibition push this tension even further: the photographs of Luis Molina-Pantin, Stefan Ruiz, and Yvonne Venegas capture behind-the-scenes elements of telenovela sets and their actors, complicating the boundary between the fictional world on screen and the real world off camera.

To create his 1997 series *Inmobilia*, Luis Molina-Pantin photographed empty sets of popular telenovelas, purposefully framing the images to reveal the set's boundaries and capture the lights above and the sound stage beyond. The chosen sets represent wealthy and poor homes, as well as public hospitals and

waiting rooms. Because these environments are completely uninhabited, the images have an unnatural atmosphere, and the viewer's attention is drawn to the constructed sets and artificial lighting rather than to the narrative. The photographs reveal where the real world begins. As artist and author Coco Fusco puts it, "Luis Molina-Pantin unhinges photography's promise to present us with a view of the real disentangled from what we imagine."¹

Stefan Ruiz took a different approach in 2003, when he was granted access to the Televisa studios in Mexico City. There, he photographed telenovela stars and students from the studios' acting school, Centro de Educación Artística (CEA), on the empty sets between filming. The resulting series, *The Factory of Dreams*, consists primarily of portraits of actors whom Ruiz invited to pose for the camera in whatever position they desired. Many of the actors were already in costume and chose to embody their characters. As a result, the subjects are suspended between actor and character. The contrast between the

carefully crafted sets, which engage the viewer's imagination, and the actors, who pose for traditional portraits rather than inhabiting the environment, highlights the tension between the fictional characters, the real people who portray them, and the artifice of the set. The series title reflects Ruiz's understanding of the industry as both a fabrication itself and a fabricator of the dreams and aspirations projected onto its audience.

Also invited by Fundación Televisa, Yvonne Venegas photographed the filming of the final episodes of *Rebelde* (2004), a popular Mexican telenovela about a group of boarding school students who form a band. The project resulted in her photobook *Inédito* (2013). Some photographs document the periods between takes, when the costumed cast and crew wait on set, paused within a scene before the cameras roll. Many other photographs in the series, including the collage featured in *Telenovela*, capture the cast during ordinary moments: sitting on the floor, listening to music, or sleeping while

waiting for rehearsals, wardrobe changes, or other parts of filming. In these photographs, the sets and costumes fade into the background—if they appear at all—and the young actors, casual and unposed, remain the focal point. By focusing on the cast rather than the production, Venegas reveals the mundane moments behind the scenes, ultimately creating a disconnect between the glamour of the pop-star narrative and the reality of working actors.

By photographing telenovelas behind the scenes, these artists reveal and reframe the hidden reality beneath the exaggerated storylines, emphasizing the genre's constant negotiation between authenticity and artifice. Their photographs separate the sets, staged environments, and actors from the ongoing narrative essential to the genre. Without a plot to sustain the illusion, viewers are no longer transported into the fantasy of the story but instead shift their attention to the constructed nature of the scenes: the sets, the performances, and the production elements that create the “magic” of

the telenovela. The resulting tension between the reality captured by the photographs and the fabrication of the show becomes impossible to overlook.

NOTES

- 1 Coco Fusco, "Modernity Deferred: The Work of Luis Molina-Pantin," in *Confort, 1996–2000* (Caracas: Museo Alejandro Otero, 2000); quoted from a manuscript provided by the artist.

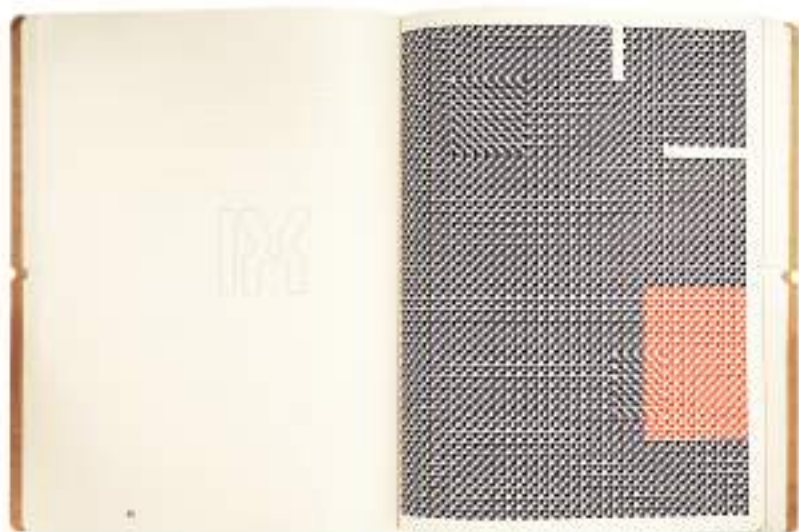
WORKS

ALEXANDER APÓSTOL

Alexander Apóstol (b. 1969, Barquisimeto, Venezuela; lives and works in Madrid, Spain) is a multimedia artist who critically examines the history and iconography of his native Venezuela. For *La salvaje revolucionaria en horario estelar* (The revolutionary savage in prime time) (2009–23), Apóstol invited intellectuals and telenovela writers to collaborate on an adaptation of the book *Del buen salvaje al buen revolucionario: Mitos y realidades en América Latina* (From noble savage to noble revolutionary: Myths and realities in Latin America), written by Venezuelan journalist Carlos Rangel in 1976, into a telenovela script. The original text argues that Latin American development is stunted because of its ideological reliance on myths, primarily the colonial European idea of “the noble savage” and the Marxist utopian revolution. In Apóstol’s work, art professionals read the resulting script on video, allowing the artist to draw comparisons between the melodramatic aspects of Latin American politics and the politics of the art world through the telenovela form. Originally conceived in 2009, the piece foreshadows the political conflict that has since developed in Venezuela. The original version of *La salvaje revolucionaria en horario estelar* was presented as an artist’s book at the Third Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan, Puerto Rico. Subsequent iterations manifested as a wall installation referencing the logo of PDVSA, Venezuela’s state-owned oil company, and included televisions screening the art professionals’ performances. The duality of the printed material and the recorded footage in this work parallels the relationship between fotonovelas and telenovelas.



La salvaje revolucionaria en horario estelar (The revolutionary savage in prime time), 2009–23. Installation with artist's book and video. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist





AMELIA BANDE

The works of Amelia Bande (b. 1977, Santiago, Chile; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and Los Angeles, California) have been described as one-person musicals that draw inspiration from her life while resonating with wider audiences, much like telenovelas with their signature mass appeal. Commissioned for *Telenovela, Ensayo abismal* (Abysmal rehearsal) (2026) is an incomplete play about language, regimes of oppression, and bodies that fail. In it, the Chilean dictatorship has closed all the country's theaters, leaving television as the only working industry and forcing a group of theater actors to work in telenovela production. The play takes place on a television set, where the actors rehearse a telenovela scene after hours. A government-imposed curfew looms outside, so the actors must stay all night. Bande is one of them. She has broken bones, pneumonia, depression—or so she says. It is unclear whether her ailments are real or part of a performance. While they rehearse, the other actors move her around, acting as both scene partners and clumsy makeshift nurses. The scene constantly adjusts to Bande's ever-changing needs. Here, the telenovela archetype of *la lisiada* (the disabled woman) is not on the margins but at the center, arguably the most powerful presence onstage. Bande overturns stereotypes about people with disabilities by emphasizing their complexity and validating emotions that society often dismisses. The rehearsal is enmeshed with a choreography of care and empathy that overcomes physical and personal differences through the process.



Ensayo abismal (Abysmal rehearsal), 2026. Performance.
Commissioned by Americas Society. Courtesy of the artist

MIGUEL CALDERÓN



A central theme in the multidisciplinary art practice of Miguel Calderón (b. 1971, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico) is power, both within interpersonal and family relationships and across disparate social groups. He often tackles these profound social and personal issues with an air of dark humor, yet remains grounded in sincerity. Calderón also plays with theatricality, oscillating between the realms of reality and fiction across his practice. His work *Eden Is a Magic World* (2011) is a publication about the former child actor Flor Eduarda Gurrola, who began her career on the hit Mexican telenovela *Carrusel* at a very young age. *Carrusel*'s massive success in Mexico and abroad made Gurrola a global star. She began receiving fan mail from an admirer, Choi Chun Moon an eighteen-year-old student from Seoul, South Korea. The two eventually developed a close friendship, which Calderón captures through intimate photographs and correspondence interspersed with scenes from *Carrusel*. Calderón's anthology of Gurrola's career and private life follows the narrative of a telenovela in and of itself, complete with melodrama and personal vignettes. Through his visual collage, Calderón himself becomes Gurrola's superfan. *Eden Is a Magic World* thus comments on the power of telenovelas to captivate audiences and blur into reality.



Eden Is a Magic World, 2011. Chromogenic print photobook. Closed: 9¾ × 7 inches (24.8 × 17.8 cm), open: 9¾ × 14½ inches (24.8 × 36.8 cm). Published by Little Big Man Books. Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York

SOL CALERO AND DAFNA MAIMON

Sol Calero (b. 1982, Caracas, Venezuela; lives and works in Berlin, Germany) constructs colorful, site-specific installations that blend the architecture, aesthetics, identities, and struggles of Latin America and its diaspora. Dafna Maimon (b. 1982, Porvoo, Finland; lives and works in Berlin, Germany) composes narratives that explore humanistic themes of recollection and belonging through performance, video, drawing, and installation artwork. Calero and Maimon collaborated on the joint work *Desde el jardín* (From the garden) (2016), which exists as both a telenovela episode and an installation mimicking a television set. Imitating the structure of telenovelas, *Desde el jardín* conjures an opulent hacienda evoking the luxury, wealth, and glamour the genre often represents. The film it stages focuses on Amazonas, the protagonist, who struggles with an identity crisis between her idealized self (the wealthy matriarch of the hacienda) and her real self (a poor gardener). By working with cultural codes, Calero and Maimon underscore the normalized social dynamics portrayed in telenovelas, including gender roles, socioeconomic status, and class aspirations. They use this discourse—developed through plots of greed, envy, infidelities, family drama, and tragic twists—as a basis for creating their own abstraction, taking extravagance to every level of the assemblage. The duality of brutal reality and wishful fantasy is addressed in the telenovela video and throughout the entire piece. As Amazonas grapples with her divided identity, so too does *Desde el jardín*, alternating between pristine television production and precarious artifice.



Desde el jardín (From the garden), 2016. HD video, 28:25 min.
Courtesy of the artists





STEPHEN CALLIS, LESLIE ERNST, RUBÉN ORTIZ-TORRES, AND SANDRA RAMÍREZ

Rubén Ortiz-Torres (b. 1964, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Los Angeles, California) is a well-known innovator of Mexican postmodernist art who works across photography, printmaking, painting, and sculpture. His practice merges prevalent and avant-garde aesthetics, resulting in intellectually rigorous and even comical projects that underscore the paradoxes of the art world and society at large. For the publication *La gran limpieza / The Big Sweep* (1993), Ortiz-Torres collaborated with photographers Stephen Callis (b. 1961, Cincinnati, Ohio; lives and works in Los Angeles, California), Leslie Ernst (b. 1958, Houston, Texas; lives and works in Austin, Texas), and Sandra Ramírez (b. 1954, Chihuahua, Mexico; lives and works in San Diego, California) to create a fotonovela focusing on service, cleaning, and maintenance workers in Los Angeles. Its story is told from the perspective of a Mexican journalist searching for her missing colleague, an outspoken union activist and diligent janitor named Ramón. The fotonovela draws attention to the working conditions, immigration bureaucracy, and class conflict that threaten the quality of life of service workers every day. It blends genres, including the melancholia of film noir photography, the boldness of printed comic books, and the melodrama of telenovelas. Service workers are common characters in telenovelas, where maid and janitor stereotypes are often perpetuated. Ortiz-Torres, Callis, Ernst, and Ramírez subvert this tendency in *La gran limpieza / The Big Sweep* to support these workers rather than homogenize them as telenovelas tend to do. Furthermore, the use of the fotonovela form to disseminate *La gran limpieza / The Big Sweep* deeply resonated with its subjects, many of whom are immigrants to the United States from Latin America, where novelas are a quintessential part of the cultural zeitgeist.



La gran limpieza / The Big Sweep, 1993. Softcover book. 11 × 8 × ½ inches (27.9 × 20.3 × 1.3 cm). Courtesy of Stephen Callis

¿DÓNDE DE ESTÁN EN LA CIUDAD
DE MÉXICO?...
NO LO - THE JUST WANTED FROM
MEXICO CITY AND...

LA CIUDAD PERO NO HAY TRABAJO.
ABRIL, BUT THEY'RE NOT KIDING.

NO, NO HAY BUSCANDO TRABAJO. ESTOY EMPLEADO
DE UNO CON UN ARRIBADO FORTUNADO. NO
TARDE QUE TRABAJAR AQUÍ.

NO - I'M NOT LEAVING THE WORK, I'M TRYING
TO FIND AROUND SANDER FOR OTHER - I DON'T
WANT TO WORK HERE.

ESTO ES EL SEÑOR PUL. PORQUE TRABAJO EL
ALFABETO DE LA GUERRILLA.
¿QUÉ PUEDE SER? ¿NO SON TAN FÁCIL
ENCUENTRO EN EL TRABAJO?

EL LLEVAREMOS ALGUNOS DE LOS QUE SE
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THE GUY WHO WAS INTERVIEWED BY THE
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JOHNSON (11) AFTER BRINGING
 SOMEONE HOME

JOHNSON (11) AFTER BRINGING
 SOMEONE HOME

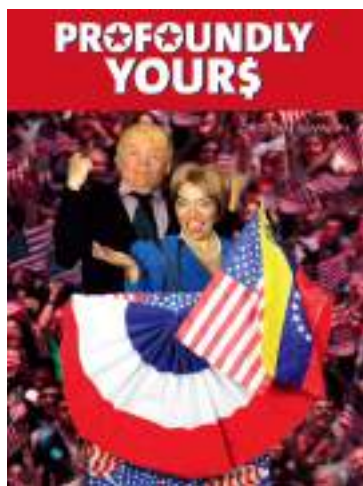


11
 11.5

En un turno nocturno típico de trabajo en una torre de oficinas, un janitor limpia el
 equivalente a 100 residencias tan pronto.
 In a typical night shift in an office tower, a janitor will clean the equivalent of 100 average
 family homes.

DÉBORAH CASTILLO

Through her conceptual work across multimedia formats, Déborah Castillo (b. 1971, Caracas, Venezuela; lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico) investigates the exchanges between institutions and societies and activates critical discourse about political power structures in contemporary Latin America, especially in her native Venezuela. Castillo has created several fotonovelas and telenovela-style works that offer subversive interpretations of modern social constructs through the everyday visual language of Latin America. In *Telenovela*, Castillo presents four fotonovelas from the past twenty years: *El extraño caso de la sin título* (The strange case of the untitled) (2005–6), *El secuestro de la ministra de cultura* (The kidnapping of the minister of culture) (2013), *La dama profunda / Deeply Your\$* (The profound lady) (2016), and *Bordes profundos* (Deep borders) (2019–20). The last three have additional video iterations that act as trailers for telenovela adaptations. Across these works, Castillo stages a complex critique of political, social, and art-world systems through action-packed storyboards and camp aesthetics. She intertwines entertainment for the masses with a harsher reality in which innocent people are kidnapped and political circumstances intensify, particularly for vulnerable populations under authoritarian regimes. A key component of Castillo's fotonovelas is that the artist aims to distribute them as they were originally disseminated: to the public rather than in a museum, despite their production as artworks. In doing so, she turns the alluring appeal of fotonovelas and telenovelas into a tool for social critique.



El extraño caso de la sin título (The strange case of the untitled), 2005–6; *El secuestro de la ministra de la cultura* (The kidnapping of the minister of culture), 2013; *La dama profunda* / *Profoundly Your\$* (The profound lady), 2016; *Bordes profundos* (Deep borders), 2019–20. Publications and videos. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

LEDA CATUNDA

Leda Catunda (b. 1961, São Paulo, Brazil; lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil) combines painting, sculpture, and textiles to create signature works with intricate textures and vibrant colors. Her amalgamations draw on a wide iconographic vocabulary, including references to popular culture and her personal memories. In the 1980s and into the 1990s, Catunda began appropriating images and symbols from bedding, clothing, and other domestic textile products. Her work *Os amantes* (The lovers) (1990) grew out of this exploration, as well as the trend at the time of newlyweds purchasing heart-shaped pillows for their bedrooms to commemorate their marriage. For *Os amantes*, Catunda bought eight of these pillows and attached them to a fabric surface. She then took slides of amorous scenes from fotonovelas and painted their images in black and white onto the pillows. Each heart-shaped vignette depicts desperate kisses, melodramatic embraces, and intense romantic passion. *Os amantes* reflects the artist's interest in the role of fotonovelas and telenovelas in the collective imagination. Though originally produced in Italy, fotonovelas became highly regarded in Brazil and throughout Latin America, telling stories of lovers and rivals. They were often sold at newsstands, hair salons, and other public spaces. Catunda remembers idolizing images of mature women swept away by handsome lovers in the fotonovelas she read during her adolescence. These images played a significant role in shaping the public imagination. Catunda memorializes their mass resonance among romantics by mounting them on heart-shaped pillow artifacts.



Os amantes (The lovers), 1990. Acrylic on lace on canvas. $48\frac{1}{2} \times 82\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ inches ($123.4 \times 210 \times 7$ cm). Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in honor of Paulo Herkenhoff, 2019.81

ALEX ČERVENÝ

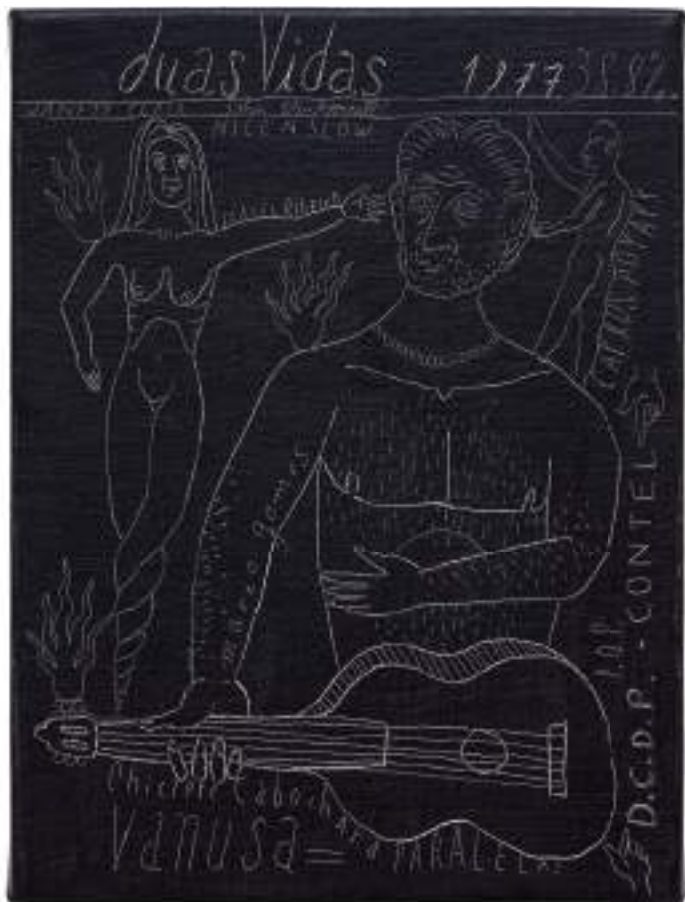
Alex Červený (b. 1963, São Paulo, Brazil; lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil) is a painter, draftsman, and printmaker. He has also worked professionally as an illustrator, collaborating with the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* for several years and contributing to multiple illustrated books. Through his artistic practice, Červený explores the poetics of narrative made possible by image making. His artworks frequently incorporate text and language to build layered representations of everyday culture, literature, and even his own biography. His *Telenovela* series (2019) is composed of illustrations, each depicting a hit Brazilian telenovela, accompanied by descriptive text listing the central actors, year of production, and other details referencing historical events that occurred around the time they aired, such as the devastating fire at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro in 1978. Some of the telenovelas featured in the series and included in the exhibition *Telenovela* are *Duas vidas* (Two lives), *O cafona* (The tacky one), *Véu de noiva* (Bridal veil), and *Anastácia, a mulher sem destino* (Anastácia, the woman without a destiny). The seriality of this body of work memorializes the importance of telenovelas in the Brazilian cultural canon. Telenovelas are epicenters for cultural engagement and entertainment across Latin America, particularly in Brazil, where many famous shows have been produced throughout the decades. In the *Telenovela* series, Červený translates the iconography of each show into his own visual language while retaining its identity, rendering each one as a vignette in an imaginative, illustrated realm.



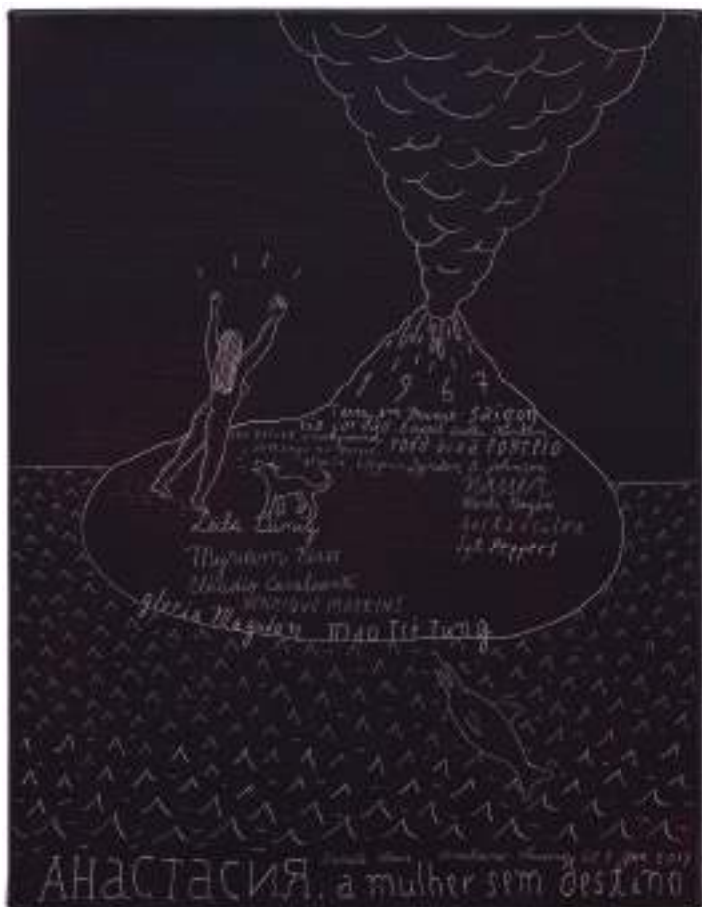
Véu de noiva (Bridal veil), 2019. Oil on canvas. 14 × 10½ inches (35 × 27 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Almeida & Dale



O cafona (The tacky one), 2019. Oil on canvas. 7 × 9½ inches (18 × 24 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Almeida & Dale



Duas vidas (Two lives), 2019. Oil on canvas. 7 × 9½ inches (18 × 24 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Almeida & Dale



Anastácia, a mulher sem destino (Anastácia, the woman without a destiny), 2019. Oil on canvas. 14 × 10½ inches (35 × 27 cm).
 Courtesy of the artist and Almeida & Dale

PHIL COLLINS

Phil Collins (b. 1970, Runcorn, United Kingdom; lives and works in Berlin and Cologne, Germany) engages in the act of image making through a multimedia practice of installation, photography, and filmmaking. His work investigates how society participates in and understands culture, often revealing the intricacies of everyday relationships. A core part of his artistic process is a close engagement with the places and populations he works with. Loosely based on Jean Genet's 1947 play *The Maids*, Collins's film *soy mi madre* (2008) is a telenovela-style adaptation that follows conflicts within a wealthy woman's mansion as she confronts her resentful servants and a dark family secret. The project was produced during Collins's residency at the Aspen Art Museum in Colorado, when he immersed himself in the Roaring Fork Valley community and spent significant time with the working population. He invited local service and maintenance workers to collaborate and portray the socioeconomic realities and wealth divide of the area. The final product was shot in Mexico City with an additional cast of renowned telenovela stars who alternate in the role of the spoiled mistress of the household. Though it was primarily screened at the Aspen Art Museum, the film was also broadcast on Aspen's public-access television channel, both widening its reach and reinforcing its connection to the telenovela form. By employing the melodramatic genre in *soy mi madre*, Collins foregrounds the issues of class difference and labor that persist throughout the Americas.



soy mi madre, 2008. 16 mm film transferred to HD digital video, 27 min. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

MIRIAM INEZ DA SILVA

During her lifetime, Miriam Inez da Silva (b. 1937, Trindade, Brazil; d. 1996, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) developed a unique and personal visual language rooted in her upbringing in Trindade, as well as in Pop and geometric art styles. Her artistic process incorporated woodwork and intricate paintings that allude to artisanal production in her native Brazil. Her works depict scenes from everyday life and cultural imagery from her birthplace, revealing the fantastical elements of small-town life. Several of her works directly reference the literature of Brazilian author Jorge Amado, whose writings are known for their picturesque depictions of Brazil and their political and environmental commentary. Many of his novels were later adapted into telenovelas. Da Silva's painting *Tereza Batista vai a guerra...* (Tereza Batista goes to war...) (1986) draws inspiration from Amado's 1972 novel *Tereza Batista: Home from the Wars*. The book follows the trials and tribulations of its titular protagonist, an orphan, in a social environment influenced by oral traditions and Afro-diasporic culture in Brazil. Da Silva's interpretation was created fourteen years after the novel's publication. In 1992, *Tereza Batista* was adapted into a miniseries produced by the Brazilian network TV Globo, bringing the story to a wider audience. Da Silva's painting illustrates the evolution of Amado's original work—from a literary text to a work of visual art, and finally to mass-televvised media.



Tereza Batista vai a guerra... (Tereza Batista goes to war...), 1986.
Oil on wood. 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (24.4 × 35 cm). Courtesy of
Almeida & Dale

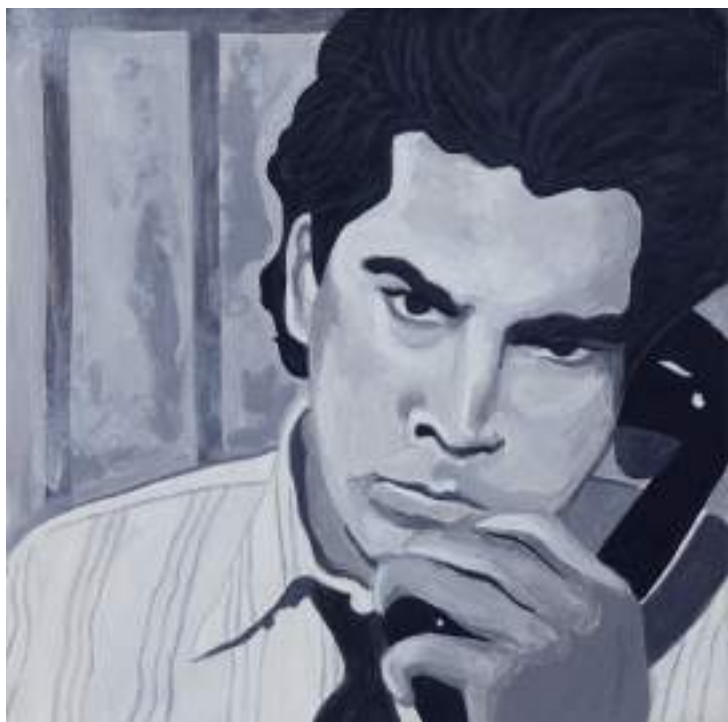
WILSON DÍAZ

Wilson Díaz (b. 1963, Pitalito, Colombia; lives and works in Cali, Colombia) is an artist who constructs large-scale amalgamations of physical media that call into question their dissemination across pop culture and politics. Profoundly rooted in Colombian history and current events, Díaz's work spans music, painting, performance, photography, and video. *TV Guía o El amor nunca deja de ser* (TV Guide or Love never stops being) (2026) is a mixed-media installation featuring twenty-four LP soundtracks from famous telenovelas produced in Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela arranged in a record store display. Some of the soundtracks appear as vinyl records sourced from vintage secondhand stores. Others are works Díaz painted in the same size and format as the LPs, based on his memories of watching certain telenovelas with his mother, along with other images drawn from the Latin American visual culture of his childhood. The installation stems from his passion for these objects and the stories they can tell. Though their primary medium is broadcast television, telenovelas also often feature iconic music. The production, circulation, and recognition of their soundtracks are evidence of their cultural influence across Latin America. As *TV Guía o El amor nunca deja de ser* demonstrates, the musical elements of telenovelas tell stories in and of themselves. A key component of Díaz's installation is its tactile nature, which enables viewers to physically handle and examine the vinyl soundtracks up close, experience their stories, and contribute their own.



TV Guía o El amor nunca deja de ser (TV Guide or Love never stops being), 2026. Vinyl records and paintings. 12 × 12 inches (30.5 × 30.5 cm) each. Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, New York





ANDRÉS DUQUE

Andrés Duque (b. 1972, Caracas, Venezuela; lives and works in Barcelona, Spain) is a renowned filmmaker. Since his debut film *Iván Z*, which centers on the cult filmmaker Iván Zulueta, he has composed both autobiographical narratives and biographical works about revered figures. He is also a scholar of the cinematic avant-garde and has taught its history for over twenty years at several international universities. Duque's video work *Vu par télévision* (Seen on television) (2008) compiles romantic scenes from a variety of cinematographic sources, primarily experimental cinema and telenovelas. These two forms, among several others, coalesce in a montage of moving images. By combining disparate sources of romantic melodrama, ranging from minimal subtlety to maximal cliché, Duque underscores the differences and similarities between genres. Telenovelas, often considered a mainstream form of mass media, appear alongside less commercial avant-garde films within *Vu par télévision* itself. Duque identifies the recurring elements that unexpectedly appear in both forms; telenovelas and experimental films coexist on his screen. Their commonalities are not limited to their shared medium of the moving image: the two employ complementary theatrics and visual cues, and their romantic subject matter unites them. Despite their divergent standing in the cultural canon and among viewers, Duque's montage suggests that the two forms have shaped each other more than one might assume.



Vu par télévision (Seen on television), 2008. 1080p video, 5 min.
Courtesy of the artist

ENRIQUE FLORES

Enrique Flores (b. 1982, Santiago, Chile; lives and works in Santiago, Chile) is an artist who explores the popular imagination in his practice, primarily through the medium of television. In August 2024, Flores began watching the entire 130-episode rerun of the 1988 telenovela *Semidiós*. Enamored with the show, he painted watercolors of select climactic moments and important characters, culminating in *Semidiós* (Demigod) (2024–25), which takes its title from the show. The project illuminates the artist's fascination with the escapism of telenovelas, which offer viewers glimpses into another world that is separate from yet not unlike our own. Originally written by the renowned Brazilian scriptwriter Janete Clair in 1973, *Semidiós* was adapted by the Chilean screenwriter Jorge Díaz Saenger in 1988, when Chile was in the final crucial moments of the Pinochet dictatorship and preparing for a vote to return to democracy. The rerun, which began in 2024, likewise occurred during a period of global political turmoil. In both 1988 and 2024, the telenovela offered its fans a reprieve from the perils of reality. The storyboard that Flores meditatively accumulated for *Semidiós* also comments on the serial nature of telenovelas, which are often aired daily and track the plotlines of their characters. This makes telenovelas feel closer to real life, as they depict everyday scenes. Flores's project highlights the temporal resonance of telenovelas, both from episode to episode and across generations.



Semidiós (Demigod), 2024–25. Watercolor on paper. $5\frac{7}{8} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$ inches (15 × 20 cm) each, Installation: $36\frac{1}{2} \times 28\frac{1}{2}$ inches (92.5 × 72.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist





COCO FUSCO AND NAO BUSTAMANTE

Coco Fusco (b. 1960, New York, New York; lives and works in New York, New York) and Nao Bustamante (b. 1969, San Joaquin Valley, California; lives and works in Los Angeles, California) are multimedia artists who work across performance, photography, video, installation, and more. Both independently and collaboratively, the artists confront the complexities of representation and sociopolitical constructs in their work. In *Paquita y Chata* (Paquita and Chata) (1996), Fusco and Bustamante explore the hypersexualization of Latin American women. In this fotonovela, the artists pose in a series of photographs dressed as Mexican Lupita dolls—popular, economical papier-mâché figurines offered as an alternative to porcelain dolls. According to Fusco, the artists were interested in these particular dolls because wives who suspected their husbands of infidelity would often write the names of their husbands' mistresses on them, a sign of their awareness of the adultery. Facing the viewer, Fusco and Bustamante engage in various activities as Paquita and Chata: they love each other, eat, and have fun. Their innocent actions, while endearing, play into the expectation that women should be idle and cater to the male gaze. Originally created for *Atlántica* magazine as a fotonovela, the work was later presented as printed photographs at the height of the Lupita doll's popularity. Fusco and Bustamante merged the print medium with ornate telenovela aesthetics in a melodramatic satire of the feminine ideal.



Paquita y Chata (Paquita and Chata), 1996. Photonovel published in *Atlántica* magazine. 12 × 9½ inches (30 × 24 cm). Courtesy of the artists





JULIO GALÁN

Julio Galán (b. 1958, Coahuila, Mexico; d. 2006, Zacatecas, Mexico) was a painter and collage artist known for his fantastical imagery. After graduating from architecture school in Monterrey, Mexico, Galán moved to New York City in 1984, where he found a creative home among artists such as Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Francesco Clemente. His work is characterized by its visual richness and symbolism and is often left open to interpretation. His painting *Te mentí (Sofía)* (I lied to you [Sofía]) (1986) features a pair of brown eyes as its centerpiece, encircled by smaller vignettes, including a light pink rose and a man in a rowboat. The painting conveys a sense of romantic disappointment, especially given its title and the inscription in the top-right corner that confesses dishonesty. The assembled image evokes memories of a shared past with a loved one. Galán's scene draws on a melodramatic mode common across cultural expression in the Americas, with visual cues associated with the telenovela genre and its themes of romance, strife, and melancholy. Galán's painting resembles a fictional telenovela, suggesting that a romantic drama has unfolded and left its symbols behind.



Te mentí (Sofía) (I lied to you [Sofía]), 1986. Oil on canvas. 27 × 36 inches (68.6 × 91.4 cm). Private Collection

DALTON GATA

Dalton Gata (b. 1977, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba; lives and works in San Juan, Puerto Rico) is an artist whose practice incorporates pop culture, Surrealist visual language, and a critical approach to the ways we consume Caribbean culture. His painting *Protagonista de telenovela* (Telenovela protagonist) (2026) emerged from his research on Cuban telenovela icon Beatriz Valdés and her leading roles in television and film. After watching the 2000 historical drama *Manuela Sáenz*, Gata became fascinated with the titular Ecuadorian revolutionary and women's rights heroine portrayed by Valdés. Sáenz played a pivotal role in the South American independence wars of the nineteenth century, yet she is primarily remembered as Simón Bolívar's lover. Through his portrait, Gata attempts to reclaim the image of Manuela Sáenz in her own right. She is pictured wearing a contemporary suit, alluding to the male military attire she wore into battle and to historical portraits depicting her as a man. She is also portrayed engulfed in flames, as fire plays a significant role in her story. Through this painting, Gata draws attention to the ambiguity of how women are memorialized in history and in the media. Like many historical women, Sáenz is more associated with her male counterpart than with her own story, a misogynistic stereotype that has trickled down into pop culture and even telenovelas. By presenting Sáenz as a telenovela heroine in the title, Gata suggests that political history can be as melodramatic as a telenovela.



Protagonista de telenovela (Telenovela protagonist), 2026. Acrylic on linen. 52 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 2 inches (132.4 × 101.9 × 5.1 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and OMR Gallery

CAMILO GODOY

Camilo Godoy (b. 1989, Bogotá, Colombia; lives and works in New York, New York) is an artist who works across disciplines, including sculpture, video, performance, drawing, photography, and zines. His interdisciplinary projects evoke themes of history, memory, and politics through queer and Latinx perspectives. For *Telenovela*, Godoy produced *Dibujos (Drawings)* (2026), a series of eight colored-pencil drawings accompanied by a video. *Dibujos* is inspired by Godoy's childhood, when he watched daily episodes of the Mexican telenovela *María la del barrio* (1995) at his mother's bridal boutique and sketched the characters' outfits. Although the original drawings from his youth are lost, Godoy spent a full year rewatching the show to recreate them. His new works depict archetypes found within the show through their outfits. Godoy traces the relationship between class and appearance in telenovelas, where both are represented—and to some degree stereotyped—through clothing. The drawings are accompanied by a video of his process, with the telenovela's soundtrack playing in the background, recalling the environment of his childhood. Godoy's drawings comment on how media like telenovelas are retained in the imaginative memory. The work reveals the performative wardrobes and postures that *María la del barrio* and telenovelas in general impose on viewers, establishing a campy visual code that transcends geographies and generations.



From the *Dibujos (Drawings)* series, 2026. Colored pencil on paper and video. Each drawing: 8½ × 12 inches (21.6 × 30.5 cm); Video: 5:48 min. Courtesy of the artist and PROXYCO Gallery, New York

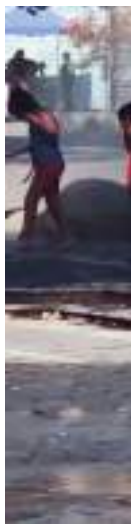
FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

Felix Gonzalez-Torres (b. 1957, Guáimaro, Cuba; d. 1996, Miami, Florida) helped redefine conceptual sculpture and queer art in the 1980s and 1990s. The thoughtfulness and ethereality of his work—evident in his use of everyday materials, layering of complex meanings, and deliberate spatial interventions—continue to resonate today. Throughout his career, Gonzalez-Torres displayed a fascination with strategies of melodrama, particularly fotonovelas and telenovelas, and the ways they draw upon performance to make visible the social scripts of class, race, gender, desire, and power. This preoccupation surfaces in a letter Gonzalez-Torres wrote on March 3, 1983 to John Stringer, then director of visual arts at Americas Society. In this correspondence, the artist proposes the possibility of presenting “a video installation . . . based in the particular discourse of Latin American soap operas in relation to popular music.” Although the installation was never realized, Gonzalez-Torres later reflected his interest in melodrama and media consumption more broadly in his subsequent artworks, such as “Untitled” (1987). “Untitled” is a framed photostat that lists several nouns, phrases, and places, each followed by a year. The phrase “Water-proof mascara” evokes a melodramatic scene in which a female telenovela character cries, her makeup running down her face. Through references to telenovela aesthetics, Gonzalez-Torres incorporated melodramatic sensibilities from mass media and Latin American culture into his body of work.



“Untitled”, 1987. Framed photostat. 8¼ × 10¼ inches (21 × 26 cm). Edition of 1, 1 AP with 2 additional APs. Private Collection, Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

MARTINE GUTIERREZ



Martine Gutierrez (b. 1989, Berkeley, California; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York) examines the malleability of identity and selfhood through an interdisciplinary practice across performance, photography, video, sculpture, and music. *Missing* (2009) is an early work in which she documents the romantic activities of real couples on Valentine's Day in Santiago, Chile. Filmed in the style of a video diary, the piece is set to a cover of Eric Carmen's hit "All by Myself," sung and produced by Gutierrez herself. Throughout *Missing*, Gutierrez professes her yearning for her first true love, proclaiming that 2009 will be the year that she either finally falls in love or "disappears." Her prophecy references the fairy tale "The Little Mermaid," in which the protagonist turns into sea foam when her prince gives his love to another. By casting a melodramatic gaze onto the streets of Latin America, Gutierrez alludes to the most common theme of telenovelas: romance. Like many telenovelas, the work builds toward a climactic romantic union. *Missing* also blurs the line between reality and fiction, as telenovelas often do. Her interventionist filming style captures spontaneous events in real time, lending an element of voyeurism and making otherwise private moments public. This video installation bridges the two realms by inviting viewers to sing along to her romantic lament through two attached microphones.



Missing, 2009. Video, 12:50 min. © Martine Gutierrez; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York

PABLO HELGUERA

One of the anchors of the *Telenovela* exhibition is a newly commissioned artwork by artist and educator Pablo Helguera (b. 1971, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in New York, New York), *Instituto de la telenovela: Entre la gloria y el olvido* (Institute of the telenovela: Between glory and oblivion) (2026). Throughout his artistic practice, Helguera has focused on a variety of topics ranging from history, pedagogy, sociolinguistics, and ethnography to memory and the absurd. Through the use of formats including lectures, museum display strategies, musical performances, and written fiction, his work as an educator intersects with his artistic interests. *Instituto de la telenovela* is part of a series of relational artworks that began in 2002 in Ljubljana, Slovenia at Galerija P74. It was also presented in 2003 at the Eighth Havana Biennial in Cuba, and in 2004 at the HDLU Contemporary Art Center in Zagreb, Croatia, and at the Royal College of Art in London, United Kingdom. The series continued in 2017 at Museo Jumex in Mexico City, Mexico. The project engages several aspects of the artist's practice, including his ongoing research on Latin American telenovelas and their widespread resonance. Through an audiovisual installation comprising multiple screens amid elements of a telenovela set, the work examines the cultural impact of telenovelas from a Pan-American perspective. Each monitor displays a video of a melodramatic scene written and directed by Helguera, filmed with local actors in different Latin American cities—including Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Rio de Janeiro—each representing a parallel reality shaped by its unique context. By composing a telenovela scene in each location, Helguera demonstrates both the universality and the nuances of the television genre across geographies. The videos are staged in a large-scale artifice that feels like a set during filming. Upon entering the exhibition through Helguera's construction, viewers cross the boundary between television production and the broadcast episode, between reality and fiction.



Instituto de la telenovela: Entre la gloria y el olvido (Institute of the telenovela: Between glory and oblivion), 2026. Video and installation. Dimensions variable. Commissioned by Americas Society. Courtesy of the artist, and made possible by TV Globo, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, Pablo Echeverri, Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo, Saigón+ and Soleado Films, Universidad de los Andes, and Carolina Pincirolí

KATALINA ITURRALDE

Katalina Iturralde (b. 1983, Chicago, Illinois; lives and works in New York, New York) is a mixed-media artist who works across painting, ceramics, and photography. Her artistic practice contemplates the rituals and ephemeral moments of daily life, revealing the dormant beauty within objects and environments. *Banner Series I* (2011) debuted at the First Gran Bienal Tropical in Loíza, Puerto Rico, and has been restaged for *Telenovela* as part of Art at Americas Society's Flag Series. Reading "Drama Tropical" (Tropical drama), the work addresses the quintessential challenges of living on a tropical island like Puerto Rico. For Iturralde, the phrase refers to the intense heat and climate events common to tropical regions, as well as the density of the island community. Iturralde likens tropicality to the interactions within a tight-knit community. Just as the heat is inescapable, so too is the closeness of a place where degrees of separation are minimal, making everything feel immediately personal. Island drama thus becomes its own real-life telenovela. The banner is designed to blend into Loíza's beach environment, a further reminder of the heat and surroundings. The font resembles the graffiti and murals often found in major urban landscapes. This visual cue, together with the work's banner format, makes the work accessible to the public, giving it a reach comparable to that of telenovelas.



Banner Series I, 2011. Digitally printed vinyl banner.
Courtesy of the artist

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI

In his multimedia practice, Christian Jankowski (b. 1968, Göttingen, Germany; lives and works in Berlin, Germany) stages performative interactions between himself, the contemporary art world, and the “world outside of art,” often recording his interventions using video, photography, and other forms of mass media. In *Crying for the March of Humanity* (2012), Jankowski was granted permission by the major Latin American broadcasting company Televisa to remake an entire episode of the Mexican telenovela *La que no podía amar* (2011) with a significant change: all the dialogue would be replaced with crying. The episode retains all the other original components, including its script, which was fed to the actors through small earpieces so that the new episode was timed precisely to the original. Crying is a staple of telenovelas, and by focusing on it, Jankowski heightens the melodrama of the genre. The work’s title alludes to David Alfaro Siqueiros’s mural *La marcha de la humanidad en la tierra y hacia el cosmos* (The march of humanity on earth and toward the cosmos) (1965–71). *Crying for the March of Humanity* consequently compares two powerful media through their effect on human emotion and empathy.



Crying for the March of Humanity, 2012. Video (1 × HD Cam, 1 × Blu-ray). 26 min., NTSC, 16:9, color, sound. Edition 2 of 5. Courtesy of the artist and Contemporary Fine Arts

MARIPAZ JARAMILLO

Maripaz Jaramillo (b. 1948, Manizales, Colombia; lives and works in Pereira, Colombia) is known for her Pop-influenced portraits. Throughout her career, sensuality and desire have been abiding subjects, which she explores through a series of paintings featuring couples. Her painting *Café con aroma de mujer* (Coffee with the scent of a woman) (1995) is one such work. It depicts the grand finale of the titular telenovela, in which the humble coffee harvester Gaviota (played by Margarita Rosa de Francisco) finally marries the coffee-empire heir Sebastián Vallejo (played by Guy Ecker) after a series of hurdles that obstructed their love throughout the show. *Café con aroma de mujer* commemorates an acclaimed telenovela and the genre's broader appeal across Latin American culture. Many telenovelas conclude with the wedding of the two protagonists, portrayed as a happily-ever-after ending. Jaramillo's painting captures this moment, preserving the cliché of triumphant love that is often repetitive, even expected, in telenovelas yet always appreciated. Installed last in the galleries, *Café con aroma de mujer* serves as a bookend to *Telenovela*, asserting the genre's resonance with one last grand gesture as the visitor leaves the exhibition.



Café con aroma de mujer (Coffee with the scent of a woman), 1995.
Acrylic on canvas. 63 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 63 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (161 × 161 cm). Collection of
Museo de Arte Moderno de Barranquilla. Loan made possible with
in-kind support of Galería Fernández Mosseri

SILVAN KÄLIN

Silvan Kälin (b. 1981, Lucerne, Switzerland; lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland) is a visual artist whose practice spans drawing, sculpture, and audiovisual media. Building on the immense popularity of telenovelas in Brazil, Kälin adapted the genre to create the documentary *Lagoa do Ouro Novela* (2008). For nine months, he lived in an artists' community in Lagoa do Ouro, a small, remote town in the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco, as one of the few foreigners, if not the only one. During his time there, he grew close to the townspeople and documented their everyday lives. Lagoa do Ouro is often dismissed as an insular and inaccessible part of Brazil because of its remote location in a poor region, yet Kälin's film portrays the community as anything but. He presents their stories as a telenovela-style drama. He also inverts the usual effect of a telenovela: rather than offering a sweeping representation of a country and its people's melodrama, as many telenovelas do, Kälin shows the idiosyncrasies of one distinct group and their real lives. *Lagoa do Ouro Novela* itself pays homage to the dissemination of telenovelas in the domestic sphere by mirroring a household television console stand, complete with sentimental trinkets.



Lagoa do Ouro Novela, 2008. Three-channel video installation.
Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist





LEANDRO KATZ

Leandro Katz (b. 1938, Buenos Aires, Argentina; lives and works in Buenos Aires, Argentina) is known for his photographic installations and avant-garde films, which explore subjects rooted in Latin American history through an interdisciplinary approach. His *Estructura libidinal* (Libidinal structure) series of collages on paper takes images from print magazines and arranges them in an asymmetrical geometric composition divided by bold lines and blocks of color. Katz then covers the collages with a translucent layer that diffuses the images and emphasizes the abstract shapes. The title of the series and the irregular shapes in the works refer to the organization and distribution of desire in the human psyche, a concept rooted in psychoanalysis that Katz's allusion connects to print-media culture. *Estructura libidinal 1, 2, 4 y 5* (Libidinal structure 1, 2, 4, and 5) (2015) incorporates clippings from fotonovelas depicting couples and other figures in emotionally charged exchanges. Romantic and interpersonal drama is often a major plot point in fotonovelas and telenovelas. Katz foregrounds this dynamic, then fragments it with rigid geometric sections that he uses to divide the storyboard. This intervention in a linear narrative calls into question the connection between novela dramatizations and the real-life events they are based on. Novelas tell their own stories drawn from everyday life, and Katz presents his own version in the *Estructura libidinal* series.



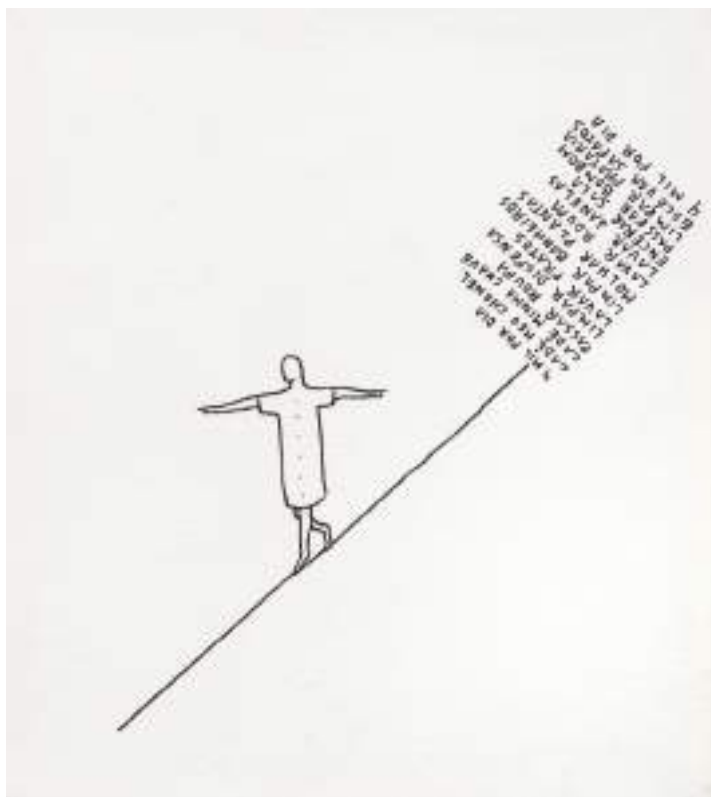
Estructura libidinal (Libidinal structure) 1, 2, 4, and 5 from the *Estructura libidinal* series, 2015. Pencil, watercolor, and ink on paper and Mylar. 13¾ × 9⅞ inches (35 × 25 cm) each. Courtesy of the artist

JUAN DAVID LASERNA

Juan David Laserna (b. 1980, Bogotá, Colombia; lives and works in Bogotá, Colombia) is an interdisciplinary artist who works across media and the visual arts. His painting *SET - PHOTO/From the scene depicting the death of Pablo Escobar on a roof in Medellín in 1993 by the joint forces of Colombian police and DEA agents. Based on the still photo by Héctor Álvarez. Courtesy of Caracol TV* (2017–25) derives from *SET* (2017), an installation of seventeen paintings and a single-channel video presented in a salon-style hang. The photorealistic paintings present scenes from the Colombian telenovela *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*, the 2012 Caracol TV production that became a landmark of the narconovela genre and preceded Netflix's 2015 series *Narcos*. *SET - PHOTO*, together with other images from the series, mirrors the original telenovela's depictions of violence and drug trafficking. Though fictionalized, *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal* is essentially an unofficial history of Colombia, and many of its scenes are based on media coverage of the cartel wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Given its national significance, the show was carefully produced, modeled on the widely circulated imagery of war in the press. *SET - PHOTO*, for instance, shows the faces of the telenovela's actors, yet it closely resembles a journalistic photograph of a real-life event. Laserna comments on this staged likeness, in which the series closely resembles the events it fictionalizes, by transcribing images from the show into compositions that recall classical paintings. The title of the series, *SET*, evokes the artificiality of television production sets, despite their roots in reality.

JOSÉ LEONILSON

During his lifetime, José Leonilson (b. 1957, Fortaleza, Brazil; d. 1993, São Paulo, Brazil) produced an abundance of drawings, paintings, embroideries, installations, and sculptures, developing his own distinct visual vocabulary. His drawing practice in particular enlisted poetics to express his personal experiences, often using blank space to emphasize intimacy and the inexpressible. *Empregada de novela é mais chique que madame* (The maid in the soap opera is classier than the lady of the house) (1991) is a drawing that depicts a figure dressed in domestic attire precariously crossing a diagonal tightrope. Behind her, inscriptions in Portuguese ask for designer fashion ("Where's my Chanel?") and a key ("Where's my key?"), and list household chores (ironing, cleaning the pantry, cleaning bathrooms, watering plants, washing clothes, washing windows, waxing the living-room floor, going for a walk, eating chocolate, cleaning silverware, brushing shoes), all framed by the phrase "four thousand a day." Leonilson turns the telenovela stereotype of the working-class maid on its head by portraying the character as the protagonist of his drawing. He pairs illustrations with text to dismantle the idealization of service workers that permeates telenovelas, stripping away the melodrama to reveal the labor and humanity beneath these fictional depictions.



Empregada de novela é mais chique que madame (The maid in the soap opera is classier than the lady of the house), 1991. Permanent ink on paper. 7 × 6½ inches (17.8 × 15.7 cm). Courtesy of the Leonilson Project Collection

LOLO Y LAUTI

The artist duo Lolo y Lauti (b. 1980 and 1986, Buenos Aires, Argentina; live and work in Buenos Aires, Argentina) create performances, videos, sculptures, installations, and photographs addressing topics such as sexuality, death, and art. Commissioned for *Telenovela*, they will perform a new piece, *La pasión de Andrea del Boca. Ópera para un barítono y dos televisores* (Andrea del Boca's passion: Opera for a baritone and two televisions) (2027), titled after both the 1928 avant-garde film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and the biggest star of the golden era of Argentine telenovelas. *La pasión de Andrea del Boca* is based on telenovela soundtracks and melodramatic acting that were prominent in Latin American popular culture from 1975 to 2005. The performance features two televisions playing scenes of telenovela heroines and villains alongside a live performer who is both a dancer and a baritone singer. It reflects the influence of the telenovela's sonic and choreographic language on queer audiences. The performer, a gay man, interacts with the melodrama in the moving images in a fluid dialogue between flesh and screen, sharing the same memory. *La pasión de Andrea del Boca* uses telenovelas as an emotional archive that operates on two timelines: that of the young queer child who turns to melodrama as a secret language to find themselves, and that of the adult who rediscovers telenovelas and recognizes their formative role. Lolo y Lauti assert that, for many queer people, telenovelas were the first mirror that did not lie.



La pasión de Andrea del Boca. Ópera para un barítono y dos televisores
(Andrea del Boca's passion: Opera for a baritone and two
televisions), 2027. Performance. Commissioned by Americas
Society. Courtesy of the artists

DANIELA LOVERA AND JUAN NASCIMENTO

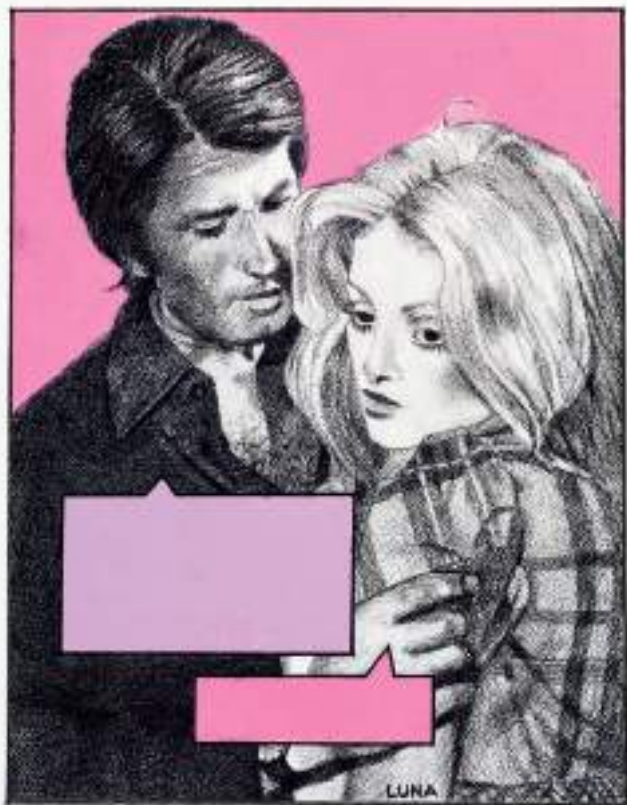
Daniela Lovera (b. 1968, Caracas, Venezuela; lives and works in Caracas, Venezuela) and Juan Nascimento (b. 1969, Caracas, Venezuela; lives and works in Caracas, Venezuela), also known as the artist duo Nascimento/Lovera, jointly create provocative performance and moving-image art that challenges narrative construction. Their film *Wuthering Heights* (2001) is a reedit of *Cumbres borrascosas*, the telenovela produced by the national Venezuelan broadcaster Venevisión in 1976, an adaptation of the Victorian-era novel by Emily Brontë. Nascimento/Lovera's retelling stages the telenovela in a black-and-white video on a loop, arranged in a four-square grid. The story unfolds in an unsynchronized cacophony across the four screens. Some moments remain legible, while others register as mere gesticulations of an unidentifiable drama. *Wuthering Heights*, both literally and figuratively, deconstructs a product of what is often referred to as the golden age of Venezuelan television, a period when production companies sought to bring classical literature and culture to a wider audience through mass media. To that end, novels like Brontë's were translated into melodrama for the local screen. Though these adaptations were presented as good-faith efforts by producers to democratize culture, they also perpetuated cultural hierarchies under the guise of enlightenment. Nascimento/Lovera present *Wuthering Heights* with a fragmented narrative to break through this facade and disrupt the transformation of one source into another. By dividing the telenovela into four distinct frames, Nascimento/Lovera cast doubt on the effectiveness of converting a work of classical literature into entertainment.



Wuthering Heights, 2001. Standard-definition video (black and white, sound), 3:32 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Gabriela Rangel

ARNULFO LUNA

Arnulfo Luna (b. 1946, Cartagena, Colombia; d. 2026, Miami, Florida) is an artist who worked primarily in painting and drawing. He received his artistic training both at the Universidad de Bellas Artes in Cartagena, Colombia, and in Paris, France. His series of drawings *Fotonovela Corín Tellado* (*Photonovel by Corín Tellado*) (1974) emerged from a period in the 1970s in Colombia—and, more broadly, Latin America—when many artists turned to realist art-making to reflect the world around them. For the series, Luna closely replicated fotonovelas by the Spanish writer Corín Tellado. This widely circulated form of romantic, dramatic storytelling, published in newspapers and magazines, captivated audiences across Latin America and the Caribbean. Given their widespread appeal and subject matter, fotonovelas are often dismissed as “lowbrow” art. However, by rendering them as classical drawings with blocks of bright, Pop-art color, Luna elevates fotonovelas to the level of high culture. He closely copied the text bubbles from the original fotonovelas in some places and left others blank, inviting viewers to insert their own words to further underscore the genre’s mass appeal. Through his drawings, Luna makes a case for reconsidering the cultural value of fotonovelas, a phenomenon he suggests should be regarded as art.



De la serie *Fotonovela* Corín Tellado (From the *Photonovel* by Corín Tellado series), 1974. Drawings in pencil, acrylic, pastel, and ink on paper. 22½ × 15½ inches (57 × 38.5 cm) each. Courtesy of Espacio El Dorado Gallery

ANTONIO MANUEL

Antonio Manuel (b. 1947, Avelãs de Caminho, Portugal; lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) is a pioneering figure in Brazilian contemporary art. He is best known for his role in the avant-garde movement that emerged in Rio de Janeiro during the authoritarian dictatorship of the 1960s and 1970s. His experimental practice synthesized the aesthetic tendencies of Neoconcretism, Pop, and Conceptual art to create provocative works that often became the subject of political debate and scrutiny. *A arma fálica* (The phallic weapon) (1970) is a twenty-four-frame fotonovela made by Manuel in collaboration with several of his artist peers. It was cowritten with Lygia Pape and photographed by Kiko, the nephew of the artist Lygia Clark. The protagonist, Guru, is played by Hélio Oiticica, whose work *Agrippina é a Roma-Manhattan* is also on display in *Telenovela*. *A arma fálica* centers on Guru's discovery of his wife Nenén's infidelity and the eventual murder of her lover, Paulo, with a phallic weapon. The work simultaneously uses and satirizes the fotonovela form, conventionally used to tell romantic stories aimed at female audiences. Through the hyperbole and sensationalism characteristic of novelas, Manuel presents suggestive subject matter with wide appeal. Manuel's work shows how fotonovelas and telenovelas can depict subversive aspects of life, especially in opposition to social and political structures.

LUCAS MICHAEL

Lucas Michael (b. 1965, Buenos Aires, Argentina; lives and works in New York, New York) is a performer, painter, sculptor, and photographer. He is known for producing a wide variety of artwork, from abstract paintings that explore the superego to sculptural renderings of damaged award trophies. He also shoots editorial Polaroids of celebrities backstage at award shows. *Home Alone (Since 2003) Vol. 1* (2004) is a video in which Michael acts out and repeats lines from existing scripts, stitched together from several clips. He records himself at home, using his personal space as a prop and set. Michael delivers each line in different tones, often alternating between English and Spanish, so that the video approximates an actor's audition or rehearsal. *Home Alone (Since 2003) Vol. 1* presents the bare essence of telenovelas, depicting their melodramatic acting stripped of any production embellishment. The video's intimate staging reflects the genre's most common setting, the domestic sphere, where telenovelas are usually watched. The work evokes the feeling of watching a telenovela and then channeling its theatricality into the mundanity of one's own unfilmed life. It is also a commentary on selfhood. Michael embodies psychological dualities, including a mother and a son, and a victim and an aggressor. As he moves through these personas, he reflects on the adaptability of dramatic characters.



Home Alone (Since 2003) Vol. 1, 2004. Single-channel video, 7:47 min. Courtesy of the artist

JESSICA MITRANI

Jessica Mitrani (b. 1968, Barranquilla, Colombia; lives and works in New York, New York) is an artist who uses video and performance to explore constructs of identity and their social, political, aesthetic, and psychological implications. She begins with the concept of gender and expands into spiritual and imaginative terrain. *Rita va al supermercado* (Rita goes to the supermarket) (2000) stars telenovela and film actor Rita Bendeck as she goes grocery shopping. Shot on 35 mm film, the work presents a pristine pastel setting in which the protagonist encounters neon detergent, dripping packaged meat, Frida Kahlo cameos, and other oddities interspersed with musical numbers. Mitrani invokes the mundanity of the supermarket to satirize expectations of femininity and desire. The visually and sonically charged portrayal of the everyday in *Rita va al supermercado* builds on the recurring telenovela trope of the female figure who occupies the domestic sphere, spending her days cooking, cleaning, and shopping. Bendeck's performance exposes the sterility and theatricality of the role that patriarchal society calls on women to play. Mitrani embraces irony in the face of gendered presuppositions, deploying the unapologetically kitsch aesthetic of the telenovela form.



Rita va al supermercado (Rita goes to the supermarket), 2000. Color film, 15 min. Courtesy of the artist

LUIS MOLINA-PANTIN

Luis Molina-Pantin (b. 1969, Geneva, Switzerland; lives and works in Caracas, Venezuela) considers himself “essentially an urban archaeologist” and uses photography to collect perceptual details of his surroundings. His *Inmobilia* series captures images of empty television sets, cropped to reveal the production scaffolding, with no cast or crew present. Television companies design these sets to mirror life in Latin America, from the domesticity of ranch houses, as in *Scenery VI (Country house)* (1997), to lavish bedrooms, as in *Scenery IV (Bachelor's bedroom)* (1997). Molina-Pantin frames each image with a border of overhead stage lights and production studio flooring, enclosing the artifice of telenovela sets. This duality underscores how telenovelas toggle between reality and fiction within a single image. While taking inspiration from modern life and its recurring themes, telenovelas also dramatize the quotidian and create a sense of escapism for their audiences. This dynamic is on display in the constructed settings pictured in works like *Scenery II (Living room)* (1997) and further emphasized by the absence of the characters who usually bring the scene to life. The title of the photo series references real estate agencies and points to Molina-Pantin's stylization of telenovela production sets almost as if they were properties for sale: empty, decorated, and posed. This comparison likens telenovela sets staged for mass viewership to commercial real estate marketing, both of which present idealized versions of aspirational worlds.



From the *Inmobilia* series, 1997. Color photographs. 16 × 20 inches (40.6 × 50.8 cm) each. Exhibition copies. Courtesy of the artist and Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

RACHELLE MOZMAN SOLANO

Rachelle Mozman Solano (b. 1972, New York, New York; lives and works between Brooklyn, New York, and Panama City and Portobelo, Panama) creates photography, moving-image, and collage work that traverses the intersections of ideology, mythology, and the human psyche. Her artistic practice is deeply informed by her Panamanian family heritage and her professional background as a clinical psychoanalyst. Her works are rich in narrative and confront the impact of perception on storytelling. *La imitación si es vida* (Imitation, if it is life) (2014) reimagines both the 1934 and 1959 US film adaptations of Fannie Hurst's 1933 novel *Imitation of Life*. The story follows the relationship between two single mothers of different racial backgrounds and the disparate and shared societal challenges they face. Mozman Solano's version reflects on several elements intertwined with telenovelas, particularly the melodramatic essence of the genre and the adaptation of international stories for telenovelas. By adapting a US story to a Latino cultural landscape, Mozman Solano reflects on the frequent export of culture from abroad to Latin America and the assimilation of social values that often follows. *Imitation of Life* is an example of this phenomenon. As the story made its way to Latin America, so too did its binary view of race. Mozman Solano's iteration of *Imitation of Life* comments on how cultural dissemination has historically packaged US ideology for Latin American mass media.



La imitación si es vida (Imitation, if it is life), 2014. Single-channel color video, HD, 6:20 min. Courtesy of the artist

Vik Muniz (b. 1961, São Paulo, Brazil; lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and New York, New York) is known for creating figurative images in photography and video from an intricate array of everyday found objects. He assembles materials such as chocolate, furniture, tires, and other junk to reproduce historical images and create new ones. By repurposing items that would otherwise be discarded, Muniz transforms trash into treasure. In 2010, the Brazilian broadcaster TV Globo commissioned him to create the opening credits sequence for the telenovela *Passione* (Passion). Muniz used 4.5 metric tons of trash to produce the work, a dynamic rendering of the show's characters. The video is shot from an aerial perspective, with zoom shots that reveal the unlikely objects making up the work. The artist recounts that when he first accepted TV Globo's proposal, he faced substantial scrutiny from some of his peers in the art world, who dismissed the commission as lowbrow because it was for a telenovela rather than a work of fine art. Muniz took on the commission nonetheless, and now cites it as his most widely seen project, since millions of Brazilians who watched the telenovela encountered his work. Rather than accept the notion that telenovelas cannot be art, Muniz claims a place for his work in conversation with the genre.



Passione (Passion), 2010. Video, 1:10 min. Courtesy of TV Globo

HÉLIO OITICICA

Hélio Oiticica (b. 1937, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; d. 1980, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) is widely regarded as one of Brazil's most innovative contemporary artists. His bold artistic practice resisted categorization and spanned mediums, including experimental film, immersive sculpture, interactive installation and performance, and abstract painting. Oiticica is also known for coining the term "Tropicália," the name of a creative and political movement that emerged in Brazil in the late 1960s and 1970s. The term comes from his participatory installation of the same name, which he first exhibited in 1967 in Rio de Janeiro. *Agrippina é a Roma-Manhattan* (1972) is an avant-garde film loosely based on Handel's opera *Agrippina*, about a mother's scheme to overthrow the ancient Roman emperor Claudius and install her son in his place. Oiticica shot his version on the streets of New York City's Financial District in the style of a telenovela, presenting its heroine as a melodramatic diva. He parallels the modernity of Wall Street with the regality of ancient Rome to critique capitalist chaos. The result is a camp reinterpretation of a classical work. *Agrippina é a Roma-Manhattan* is part of the artist's "quasi-cinema" series, multimedia installations that use and interrogate the visual language of the moving image.



Agrippina é a Roma-Manhattan, 1972. Super 8 film, 15 min. César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro

YOSHUA OKÓN

Multimedia artist Yoshua Okón (b. 1970, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico) uses his camera to set up experimental scenarios that interrogate human constructs such as identity and truth. *New Decor* (2001) expands on Okón's ongoing interest in the media and their social implications. Growing up in Mexico City, Okón watched broadcasts from Televisa, Mexico's largest network and telenovela producer, and witnessed the company's public impact firsthand. For *New Decor*, Okón used a furniture store in Los Angeles to stage his own improvised telenovela. Three cameras captured the entire process behind the impromptu production. The "actors" were recruited from customers visiting the store during the four-hour shoot. They were instructed to improvise telenovela tropes such as "the love scene," "the jealous girlfriend scene," and "the painful breakup scene." The result is a disjointed video displayed across three monitors, showing different angles of a single action, while the unsynchronized audio tracks echo each other. Participants vary in their performances, with some struggling to enact their assigned scenes and others committing with passion. Okón's intervention demonstrates how readily the telenovela genre transfers into the reality it dramatizes. *New Decor* merges the real and telenovela worlds, revealing how the two are intertwined.



New Decor, 2001. Three-channel video, 17:40 min., loop. Courtesy of La Colección Jumex, Mexico

BERNARDO OYARZÚN

Bernardo Oyarzún (b. 1963, Los Muermos, Chile; lives and works in Santiago, Chile) constructs installations and creates videos that are deeply intertwined with Chilean history and presented through a critical lens. His work is heavily influenced by his Mapuche heritage, often incorporating documentation and photography from his personal history to spotlight the Indigenous populations native to the region. *Mal de ojo, las apariencias engañan* (Evil eye, appearances can be deceiving) (2007) is a video work in the form of a telenovela series, filmed on location in a neighborhood of Santiago with a cast of professional actors, theater students, artists, and local nonactors. The series builds an imaginary realm, nevertheless rooted in the realities of the neighborhood where it is set. *Mal de ojo* mimics the nonverbal language characteristic of telenovelas: grandiose gestures, heightened emotions, and complex psychologies that emphasize the drama at play. The title of the work, which refers to the “evil eye” superstition, evokes the melodrama often fictionalized but also found in the traditions of everyday reality. *Mal de ojo* uses the telenovela genre as an aesthetic form, and it was even broadcast on the Chilean television channel Señal 3 de la Población La Victoria. Through this work, Oyarzún examines how telenovelas reflect urban life and how mass media can anesthetize audiences by diverting their attention from lived reality to fictional representation.



Mal de ojo, las apariencias engañan (Evil eye, appearances can be deceiving), 2007. Video, 20 min. Courtesy of the artist

WANDA PIMENTEL

Wanda Pimentel (b. 1943, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; d. 2019, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) was a renowned painter who rejected the patriarchal sensibilities of modernism and pioneered a distinctive feminist practice. Her work is characterized by precise geometric lines and smooth panels that blend abstraction and figuration. *Pedra da Gávea* (1986) is a painting from her *Montanhas do Rio* (*Mountains of Rio*) series, which she began in the 1980s after moving into an apartment overlooking the mountainous region of Guanabara Bay, Brazil. Some works from the series were featured in episode 61 of the celebrated Brazilian telenovela *Vale tudo* (1988), which is about a gold digger who steals and escapes from her family but is then pursued by her honest mother. In the episode, the character Heleninha Roitman, an alcoholic heiress turned painter, has an exhibition opening. Pimentel's *Montanhas do Rio* works, including *Pedra da Gávea*, appear as Roitman's in the episode. Pimentel herself also makes a brief appearance. The character is often said to be based on Pimentel; by placing Pimentel's actual paintings and the artist herself on screen, the show makes the bridge between telenovela fantasy and real life explicit.



Pedra da Gávea da série *Montanhas do Rio* (from the *Mountains of Rio* series), 1986. Acrylic on canvas. 51¼ × 43¼ inches (120 × 110 cm). Collection of Heloisa Becker Genish. Courtesy of the Wanda Pimentel Estate and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro

LUCIANA PINCHIERO

Luciana Pinchiero (b. Rosario, Argentina; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York) is an artist working across collage, sculpture, and ready-mades with the aim of dismantling historical constructs and patterns. Her artistic practice operates as an act of resistance, revealing overlaps across time periods and challenging the heteronormative male gaze. Pinchiero's *Telenovelas* series (2025) builds upon four earlier collage series: *Brides and Statues* (from vintage bridal-gown catalogs), *Movies and Statues* (from movie-star catalogs), *Romance and Statues* (from pulp-fiction covers), and *Life and Statues* (from vintage *Life* magazines). In both those series and in *Telenovelas*, Pinchiero combines archival clippings with images of public statues to reflect on history, power, and gender. For *Telenovelas*, she pairs television stars with historical monuments, challenging the hierarchy between "high" art (classical sculpture) and "low" art (popular telenovelas). Telenovelas exist almost exclusively in the private, domestic sphere, which Pinchiero emphasizes by placing her collages in picture frames reminiscent of home decor. Sculptures, by contrast, exist in museums and public parks. Yet both art forms coexist in the collective imagination and share aesthetic traits, including a characteristic melodrama and a basis in real life. The stars in Pinchiero's series are posed in romantic gestures that underscore the gender roles at play in both telenovelas and classical sculptures.



From the *Telenovelas* series, 2025. Collages on paper in vintage brass frames. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

WANDA RAIMUNDI-ORTIZ

Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz (b. 1973, Bronx, New York; lives and works in Virginia and New York) is an interdisciplinary artist whose work is dedicated to telling stories of the Other. She takes inspiration from historical European portraiture, Puerto Rican folklore, and sketch comedy to address racial and gender biases in Latin America. The concept for her video *Los machos de mi vida* (The machos in my life) (2008) emerged after a hairdresser accidentally cut her hair too short, and she was told that she looked like a man. Filmed on a Puerto Rican estate, the video follows a desirable protagonist courted by numerous male suitors. The work explicitly critiques the societal expectations embedded in telenovela tropes. Raimundi-Ortiz plays each character herself. By presenting as both genders, she challenges the binary representation telenovelas rely on. She also examines the paradox of the strong Latina who suddenly becomes submissive in the presence of a man. While creating *Los machos de mi vida*, Raimundi-Ortiz came to see the genre as a tool of indoctrination that perpetuates archetypes for men and women in Latin American culture. She overturns those expectations by casting her film in the form of the genre itself.



Los machos de mi vida (The machos in my life), 2008. Video, 12:24 min. Courtesy of the artist

ABIGAIL REYES

Abigail Reyes (b. 1984, San Salvador, El Salvador; lives and works in La Libertad, El Salvador) is an artist who works primarily in video and installation as an act of resistance, challenging the representation and treatment of women in Latin America. Her video *Sí señor* (Yes, sir) (2016) is a collage that stitches together scenes from telenovelas in which women say “yes, sir” to a man. The video exposes a gendered trope rampant in telenovelas and criticizes female characters’ habitual obedience to their male counterparts. Reyes asserts that telenovelas are not only mass entertainment but also a kind of education, given their widespread reach and the recurrence of their themes. Telenovelas and the examples they set become ingrained in the collective consciousness, including the stereotypes they perpetuate, as shown in *Sí señor*. The work is part of Reyes’s ongoing series *60 palabras por minuto* (60 words per minute), which explores the standardization of education and references her background as a typist. The title alludes to moments when Reyes’s instructor timed her, prompting her to respond “yes, sir” to his authority. Reyes draws a parallel between the stereotypical subjugation of female secretaries and the growing capitalist drive to automate human labor. To create the work, Reyes watched hours of telenovelas over an entire year, a repetitive process of its own.



Sí señor (Yes, sir), 2015–16. Video, 4:33 min. Courtesy of the artist

REYNALDO RIVERA

Reynaldo Rivera (b. 1964, Mexicali, Mexico; lives and works in Los Angeles, California) creates neo-noir images of everyday subjects as central characters in all their glory. His extensive photographic portfolio captures vignettes of Los Angeles's queer and underground scenes, as well as intimate moments throughout Southern California and Mexico. Primarily self-taught, Rivera often references Latinx culture and aesthetics in his images, such as the emotions evoked by boleros and rancheras, as well as the golden age of Mexican film. *Bus Stop, Sonora* (1991) depicts a bus stop in the northwestern Mexican state of Sonora. In the foreground, a television plays a telenovela episode while people make travel plans in the background. The telenovela is frozen on a close-up of a female character lost in thought. Rivera imagines the people in the image as participants in their own telenovela; for all their lack of melodrama, they navigate their own narratives, much like the characters on-screen. The glamour of the television drama contrasts with the reality of the subjects' lives; the image memorializes the affective presence of telenovelas across Latin America. Rivera shot *Bus Stop, Sonora*, after getting off a bus in Sonora to pick up a few things while en route to Chiapas, only to be stranded when the bus abruptly departed along with his luggage. Rivera's own plotline becomes one more layer in an image where fictional and real stories converge.



Bus Stop, Sonora, 1991. Gelatin silver print. 17 × 12 inches (43.2 × 30.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art

FÁTIMA RODRIGO

Fátima Rodrigo (b. 1987, Lima, Peru; lives and works in Lima, Peru) constructs interactive installations to examine the concepts of modernism and media within the Latin American cultural landscape. She frequently aims to dismantle the hierarchical binaries perpetuated by colonial histories that determine what is considered “modern.” Her sculpture *Quinceañera [The Telephone]* (2026) extends this line of her artistic practice. The work presents a bright pink landline phone resting on a pedestal. Visitors are invited to pick up the receiver and listen to an experimental audio track of music and nonlinear dialogue from the Mexican telenovela *Quinceañera* (1987). The telephone itself is a sculptural reproduction of a prop from the original set, evoking the object’s recurring role as a device that structures moments of intimacy, conflict, and revelation through phone calls. Telephones are common motifs in telenovelas and often serve as key devices for communication and plot development. The participatory element of *Quinceañera [The Telephone]* pulls viewers into the melodrama. The work employs a modernist aesthetic, featuring a minimalist presentation and the revival of a Roman-style column, together with the popular culture surrounding telenovelas and their audiences. The clash of these two reference points—modernism and camp—highlights the contrasts within Latin American identities as they appear in mass media. Rodrigo’s sculptural landline combines these elements into a single object that seems to have come directly from a telenovela set and materialized in the gallery. In doing so, it collapses the distinction between the functional tools of telenovela production and contemporary sculpture, creating a site of engagement.



Quinceañera [The Telephone], 2026. ABS plastic, polycarbonate, metal and PVC cable, speaker, and audio player. Dimensions variable.
Courtesy of the artist and Livia Benavides Gallery

DANIELA ROSSELL

Daniela Rossell (b. 1973, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Berkeley, California) is a photographer and professor. She is renowned for her photo series *Ricas y famosos* (1994–2001), which documents Mexico's wealthy elite and shares its name with the Argentine telenovela *Ricos y famosos* (1997). For the series, Rossell invited her upper-class friends and family to select their own settings and clothing. *Ricas y famosos* became successful but controversial in Mexico and abroad for exposing how the wealthy live, including how they see themselves while the lower class struggles. This photograph from the series, *Untitled (Ricas y famosos) "Inge with Maid"* (1999), is an aerial shot of a young woman sprawled across a lavish sofa with her maid in the background, both beneath a brilliant chandelier. The image resembles a scene from a telenovela, another iteration of the wealthy-housewife-and-poor-housekeeper cliché. However, the photograph portrays earnest reality rather than ironic fiction. The overt economic and racial distinctions in the image show that fictional depictions in telenovelas are not as far from reality as one might believe. Inge's decision to pose for her portrait with her maid in the background, almost as a prop, emphasizes the social gap at play. This photograph calls into question the extent to which the wealthy and powerful perpetuate class stereotypes in the real world.



Untitled (Ricas y famosas) "Inge with Maid," 1999. Chromogenic print.
22 × 28 inches (55.9 × 71.1 cm). Courtesy of Alexander Brodsky;
Estrellita B. Brodsky Collection

MARCO ROUNTREE

Marco Rountree (b. 1982, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico) creates drawings, sculptures, and installations that investigate how physical objects acquire symbolic and cultural meaning. His artistic practice references ancient American and Mexican history to interrogate any single definition of “Latin American art.” His sculpture *Sin título* (Untitled) (2011) is a public work at the Jardín Botánico Culiacán and part of a public art series commissioned by Fundación Coppel that recreates the swing from the opening musical sequence of the 1987 telenovela *Quinceañera*. Starring the famous pop singer and actor Thalía, the acclaimed telenovela was one of the first aimed specifically at teenagers, centering on protagonists on the cusp of their fifteenth birthdays. This milestone is commonly celebrated among young Latin American women and their families with a large party, or *quinceañera*. Rendered at full scale, Rountree’s sculpture brought an aspect of the show into the real world. In fact, his intervention became so popular that Mexican teens began visiting the site to take photos for their own quinceañeras. *Sin título* thus enacts the interplay between reality and fantasy in the telenovela genre. For *Telenovela*, Rountree recreated *Sin título* as a small model, a scaled-down version that adds another layer to the fantastical appeal of the original sculpture. It inserts the swing into the museum space—its own narrative fiction—and pays homage to the real-life resonance of telenovela fiction and its depiction of everyday Pan-American life.



Sin título (Maqueta para un columpio en el Jardín Botánico Culiacán)
(Untitled [Model of a swing in the Botanical Garden Culiacán]),
2026. 3D print and metal. 16⅙ × 16⅙ × 5⅞ inches (41 × 41 ×
15 cm). Courtesy of the artist and guadalahara90210





Sin título (Untitled), 2011. Metal structure, swing, and bougainvillea.
Courtesy of the artist and Jardín Botánico Culiacán

STEFAN RUIZ

Stefan Ruiz (b. 1966, San Francisco, California; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York) uses photography to produce intimate portraiture and cultural documentation. Since 1994, he has photographed minority and subculture communities that are often overlooked—such as lowrider culture among Mexican Americans in Southern California, psychiatric patients in Camagüey, Cuba, and young alternative cumbia fans in Monterrey, Mexico—through the lens of his own Latinx heritage, often following his subjects for years. His series *The Factory of Dreams* (2003–11), a selection of which is presented in *Telenovela*, provides a behind-the-scenes look at telenovela production. From 2003 to 2011, Ruiz was welcomed into the studios of Televisa, one of the largest telenovela producers in the world, as well as its acting school, Centro de Educación Artística, in Mexico City. He invited telenovela actors to pose as they wished on set between takes. They appear in Ruiz's images not in their assigned roles but as themselves. Ruiz also frames his images with overhead light fixtures and production staff in view, capturing the artifice of the telenovela set. As coveted cultural products of Latin America, telenovelas represent the fulfillment of a dream for the Televisa actors pictured, many of whom were photographed early in their careers. Ruiz's rich depictions of television stardom speak to broader hopes and aspirations, resonating with many in the Latin American diaspora pursuing the immigrant dream.



From *The Factory of Dreams* series, 2003–11. Archival pigment prints. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

TERESA SERRANO

Artist Teresa Serrano (b. 1936, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico) makes work that is profoundly rooted in her firsthand experiences as a woman. She began making art in 1975, at the age of thirty-eight, after her children had grown, despite the opposition of her then-husband. Having embarked on her artistic path independently, she has created sculptures, paintings, drawings, photographs, and videos that confront sexism, violence against women, and power relationships rooted in gender. *Mía 1, 2, 3 y 4* (She's mine 1, 2, 3, and 4) (1998–99) addresses the rampant machismo and femicide in Mexico head-on. The work consists of four videos in a telenovela style and a printed fotonovela depicting gendered sexual harassment in the workplace. Serrano uses the telenovela form to illustrate the dangers women often face. The telenovela styling suits her subject, as telenovelas are known for themes of misogyny and violence against women, often with a troubling air of glamorization. Serrano even subverts the genre's gendered depictions of violence by casting a female harasser and a male victim. In *Mía 1, 2, 3 y 4*, Serrano showcases the versatility of the telenovela genre, which can serve as mainstream entertainment in Latin America and beyond while also addressing the issues facing the communities that revere it.



Mía 1, 2, 3 y 4 (She's mine 1, 2, 3, and 4), 1998–99. Photonovel and video. 8½ × 5 ½ inches (21.6 × 14 cm); 17:46 min. Courtesy of the artist

RODRIGO VALENZUELA

Rodrigo Valenzuela (b. 1982, Santiago, Chile; lives and works in Los Angeles, California) works across photography, installation, and video on Latin American sociopolitical history and themes of labor. He frequently blurs the line between reality and fiction to examine how individuals are depicted in the public eye. In *Maria TV* (2014), Valenzuela hired fifteen domestic workers to learn a script in the style of a telenovela episode and recorded their rehearsals. The resulting video documents the maids practicing their lines and grappling with the challenge of embodying their own livelihood through a fictionalized role. The women are unconvincing actors by design, demonstrating the distance between television and the real people it dramatizes. Valenzuela conceived *Maria TV* out of his interest in class representation across mass media, particularly how low- and middle-class workers are presented for upper-class consumption. The portrayal of service workers in telenovelas is a notable point of contention. Maids are recurring stereotypes in these shows, used as plot devices or as one-dimensional background characters rather than complex human beings. Despite their closeness to actual events, the melodrama of telenovelas often distorts their connection to the real world. Valenzuela exaggerates this phenomenon in the performance he constructed for *Maria TV*.



Maria TV, 2014. HD video, 17:15 min. Courtesy of the artist

YVONNE VENEGAS

Yvonne Venegas (b. 1970, Long Beach, California; lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico) is a photographer who explores themes of gender, class, and the photographic form. She often works with her subjects over extended periods to capture documentary images. In 2006, Fundación Televisa invited Venegas to document the final months of filming for the telenovela *Rebelde* (2004), which follows six teenagers as they build their band, RBD. The band became such a pop-culture phenomenon that it was signed to the record label EMI, went on an international tour, and was ultimately photographed by Venegas. The artist's images reflect the blurred line between reality and fiction that telenovelas often create. In her photographs, viewers see the complexity of television production and the existence of a fictional band in the real world. Venegas experienced this blurring of lines personally as well, as she was occasionally mistaken for her sister, the famous singer Julieta Venegas, while shooting RBD. The original photo series is titled *Inédito* because the project went unseen until years later, though the title also resonates with the frankness of its images. The installation of the photographs in *Telenovela*, titled *Thoughts on the Use of Photography (REBELDE)* (2026), mimics the photo collages that music fans make to celebrate their idols. Venegas's photos explore how telenovelas build fantasy while remaining rooted in reality, cultivating cultural sensations in the process.



Thoughts on the Use of Photography (REBELDE), 2026. Inkjet prints, chromogenic prints, fan photographs by David Isaac Mendoza, and colored pencil drawing on paper, on cotton acid-free board. 47¼ × 43¼ inches (120 × 110 cm). Courtesy of the artist

ERIKA VERZUTTI

Erika Verzutti (b. 1971, São Paulo, Brazil; lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil) is a painter and sculptor who creates amalgamations that merge real and fantastical elements. She often incorporates “accidents” into her work, such as scratches, breaks, and stains that feel both strange and familiar, in an effort to disorient the viewer’s perception. In particular, her bronze sculptures combine biomorphic and human forms, evoking the vegetation characteristic of her native Brazil through both abstract and figurative renderings. The artist’s first such sculpture, *Saramandaia* (2006), is titled after the 1976 Brazilian telenovela. The telenovela tells the story of the fictional town of Bole-Bole as it undergoes the bureaucratic process of changing its name. Created in the style of magical realism, the show chronicles the misadventures of its eccentric characters. Verzutti’s sculpture incorporates miniature symbols from the telenovela, including coral reefs and female busts. The artist recalls being unable to watch the telenovela when it first aired because it was off-limits to minors. Her sculpture captures the layers of her memory of the telenovela. By using bronze sculpture as her medium, Verzutti commemorates the show in the shape of a monument.



Saramandaia, 2006. Bronze. $18\frac{7}{8} \times 14\frac{1}{8} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ inches (48 × 36 × 45 cm). Edition 3 of 3. Andréa and José Olympio Pereira Collection

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI

The artistic practice of Francesco Vezzoli (b. 1971, Brescia, Italy; lives and works in Milan, Italy) interrogates the power of popular culture through close reproductions of media. He has created site-specific performances inspired by the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Spanish painter Salvador Dalí, and even directed a mock trailer for a remake of Gore Vidal's infamous film *Caligula* (1979). His work *O retrato de Julia de Souza Matos* (Portrait of Julia de Souza Matos) (2004) features an image of the title character, played by Sônia Braga, in the TV Globo Brazilian telenovela *Dancin' Days* (1978). The show follows Julia de Souza Matos as she attempts to reconnect with her daughter after being incarcerated for eleven years for accidentally killing a man with her car. *Dancin' Days*, and with it Sônia Braga, was a success in Brazil, especially for its portrayal of disco and club culture. Reflecting that success, *O retrato de Julia de Souza Matos* is a pictorial and sculptural representation of the lasting cult status of telenovela stars. The star-shaped frame and portrait vignette recall celebrity monuments like the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles. Vezzoli's admiration for both *Dancin' Days* and Braga's character extends beyond the work. He wrote his undergraduate thesis on Gilberto Braga, the renowned Brazilian telenovela screenwriter who created the show. *O retrato de Julia de Souza Matos* serves as an ode to the enduring legacy of a prominent telenovela and its luminous lead actor.



O retrato de Julia de Souza Matos (Portrait of Julia de Souza Matos), 2004. Color laser print on canvas with metallic embroidery in a star-shaped frame. $30\frac{3}{4} \times 32\frac{3}{4}$ inches (78 × 83 cm). Courtesy of Alessandra D'Aloia

MÁRCIA X AND AIMBERÊ CÉSAR

Márcia X (b. 1959, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; d. 2005, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) was an artist who primarily worked in performance and sculpture to question notions of sexuality and the role of art in society. Aimberê César (b. 1958, Aracaju, Brazil; d. 2016, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) was a performance provocateur known for his solo interventions and his work with the Brazilian art collective OPAVIVARÁ! The artists' collaborative sculptural and video work, *Soap Ópera* (1988), features a monumental stack of identical orange soap bars alongside video documentation of a performance. The sculptural component takes the term "soap opera," the English-language counterpart to the telenovela, literally. Often broadcast during the daytime and marketed to homemakers, soap operas and telenovelas have historically targeted women in the domestic sphere as their core audience. The artists emphasize the domestic nature of telenovelas through a large-scale visual representation built from an emblematic household item: bar soap. They allude to the lives of telenovelas' most idealized viewers and the household chores expected of them, from cleaning to cooking. In doing so, the artists criticize both the gendered implications of the telenovela genre and its cultural conventions. The video accompanying the soap installation combines performance, painting, choreography, opera, documentary, and other modes of expression to further destabilize assumptions about telenovelas and their intended audience.



Soap Ópera, 1988. Soap and video. Dimensions variable; Video: 10:37 min. Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro Collection. Gift of Therezinha de Jesus Estellita Pinheiro de Oliveira. Courtesy of the estates of Márcia X and Aimberê César and Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro

BRUCE AND NORMAN YONEMOTO

Brothers and artistic duo Bruce (b. 1949, San Jose, California; lives and works in Los Angeles, California) and Norman Yonemoto (b. 1946, Chicago, Illinois; d. 2014, Los Angeles, California) began jointly directing conceptual video works in 1976. Their work is known for its dreamlike visuals and psychoanalytic themes, even as it criticizes mass-media production and consumption. *Based on Romance* (1979), the first work in their three-part *Soap Opera* series, uses the melodramatic style of soap operas and telenovelas to illustrate how entertainment fabricates fantasies around desire, reality, and fiction. Like many telenovelas, *Based on Romance* tells the story of a modern romance, but it is uniquely set in the Southern California art scene. The video captures the distinct theatricality of telenovela acting and dialogue. While working within the telenovela genre, the artists also reveal its falsehoods, particularly the way this kind of entertainment is idealized to reel in mass audiences. The Yonemotos use the form to examine what it means for a work of fiction to resonate with a viewer's real life, as telenovelas often do, peeling back the layers of media representation and its impact on audiences. By setting the story in the art world, the Yonemotos draw a further comparison between the postures of art and television.



Based on Romance, 1979. Video, 24:15 min. Courtesy of the artists

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Aimé Iglesias Lukin is an art historian and curator. Born and raised in Buenos Aires, she has lived in New York since 2011. Since 2019, she has served as the director and chief curator of art at Americas Society, leading a program of research-based exhibitions and books that explore the art of the Americas from a hemispheric perspective, four of which were included in *The New York Times's* annual "Best Art" lists. She received the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Curatorial Work (2025) and was a fellow at the Center for Curatorial Leadership (2024). Her doctoral dissertation, "This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York, 1965–1975," became an exhibition and a book at Americas Society in 2021. She completed her master's degree at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts and her undergraduate studies at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. She previously worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, ISLAA, and the Fundación Proa in Buenos Aires.

Sarah Lopez is an art historian and exhibition manager. She holds an MA in art history and museum studies from the City College of New York (CUNY) and a BA in art history from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her art-historical research focuses on modern and contemporary art that engages with themes of urbanism, environmentalism, and sustainability, particularly within the context of Los Angeles. Her museological research examines the growing intersection of the art and sustainability sectors, with a concentration on the increasing availability and implementation of sustainable resources within art institutions. Previously, she served as associate curator of art and exhibitions manager at Americas Society.

Tatiana Marcel is an art historian and curator. She is currently an associate curator of art at Americas Society and a PhD student at the CUNY Graduate Center's Department of Art History. Her academic and curatorial writing has most recently been published in the *International Journal of Surrealism*, *Lapis: The Journal of the Institute of Fine Arts*, and *Vistas: Critical Approaches to Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art*. Marcel previously worked at David Zwirner and holds an MA in the history of art from New York University's Institute of Fine Arts and a BA in art history from Columbia University.

SPECIAL COMMISSION CREDITS

Pablo Helguera, *Instituto de la telenovela: Entre la gloria y el olvido* (Institute of the telenovela: Between glory and oblivion), 2026. Video and installation. Dimensions variable. Commissioned by Americas Society. Courtesy of the artist, and made possible by TV Globo, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, Pablo Echeverri, Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo, Saigón+ and Soleado Films, Universidad de los Andes, and Carolina Pincirolí

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Like any exhibition, *Telenovela* would not have been possible without the talented artists who contributed to the project and the generous lenders who allowed us to showcase their beloved artworks. Thank you to the Americas Society team, who worked tirelessly to bring this ambitious project to life despite our small size.

The genesis of *Telenovela* goes back to 2017, when artist Marco Rountree visited the Madrid residency that Aimé Iglesias Lukin shared with Humberto Moro and Teresa Riccardi. Rountree mentioned his 2011 public artwork (pp. 162–65), inspired by the swing in the opening scene of Thalía's telenovela *Quinceañera* (1987), noting that young girls were using it for their own birthday photo shoots. This became a revelation about the power of art and telenovelas to affect our everyday lives and an inspiration for making this exhibition. But telenovelas are beloved by so many people, so as soon as the project was officially launched, it became a collective endeavor. Dozens of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances shared ideas on artworks, references, and readings to add to the pool of emotions where telenovelas live.

A special shout-out goes to Pablo Helguera, our partner in crime since day one, who has studied the genre in his project, *Instituto de la telenovela* (p. 106–7), for more than two decades. We would also like to thank Pablo León de la Barra, a truly generous colleague who suggested more than a dozen artists and shared contacts with the curatorial team. He shared years of his passion for telenovelas, his other vocation after art. Ana Maria Maia Antunes from Pinacoteca de São Paulo and Ramiro Martínez Estrada from Museo Amparo in Puebla joined the project very early on, expanding its scope beyond Americas Society and ensuring its reach in Mexico and Brazil, the homes of the genre. We are also grateful to those who helped in so many other ways, sharing ideas, their experiences with the genre, or simply their enthusiasm, such as Ian Alteveer, Blanka Amezkua, Magali Arriola, Fernanda Arruda, Benedicta M. Badia, Zahra Banyamerian, Rafael Baumer, Brian Block, José Luis Blondet, Elizabeth Boylan, Marcela Caruso, Simon Castets, Alejandro Cesarco, Dawn Chan, Patrick Charpenel, C. Ondine Chavoya, Jean Cooney, Lauren Cornell, Kaeli Deane, José Carlos Díaz, Álvaro Enrigue, Miquel Enrigue, José Esparza Chong Cuy, Avra Fox Lerner, Pia Fuentealba, Alex Gabriel, Marita García, Gilberto González, Rita Gonzalez, Saisha Grayson, Alexa Halaby, Patricia Hanna, Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy, Kat Herriman, Tim Johnson, Donald Johnson Montenegro, Andrew Kachel, Ileen Kohn, José Kuri, Beatriz López, Diana López and Herman Sifontes, Mauricio Maille, Daniela Marín Aristizábal, Hollis McGregor, Holly McHugh, Alexandra Morris, Bernardo Mosqueira, Vik Muniz, Mario Navarro, Clarice Oliveira Tavares, Ikechúkwú Onyewuanyi, Víctor Ortiz-Palau, Miguel Osio Zamora, Jane Park, Belén Pena, Carolina Pincirolli, Pablo José Ramírez, Gabriela Rangel, Daniel Roesler, Laura Saenz, Danila Saiegh, Aldo Sánchez Ramírez, Agustín Schang, Erica Schmatz, Claudia Segura, Ana Sokoloff, Ronny Quevedo, Michael Wellen, Evan Calder Williams, and María Wills.

Besides being the coeditor of the comprehensive reader that accompanies this exhibition, Mariano López Seoane helped us co-organize the convening of scholars that fed this project. His knowledge, passion, enthusiasm, and friendship have determined this project's fate. The four convenings were held from April to October 2025 with presentations by: Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, Lee Artz, Alberto Barrera Tyszka, Mila Burns, Álvaro Cueva, Pablo Helguera, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Daniel Link, Ana Elena Mallet, Cecilia Palmeiro, Mauro Porto, Gabriela Rangel, Omar Rincón, Aldo Sánchez Ramírez, Paul Julian Smith, Liliana Viola, and Amy E. Wright. The speakers were joined by the following participants, who contributed to conversations that were equally generative and formative in the construction of the reader: Blanka Amezkua, Josefina Barcia, Nathalie Bouzaglo, Phil

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This exhibition unfolds through an ongoing series of public programs that expand its questions, resonances, and forms of encounter beyond the gallery space. We extend our sincere gratitude to the invited artists, speakers, participants, and collaborators whose generosity, critical engagement, and shared presence made these exchanges possible: Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Amelia Bande, Alberto Barrera Tyszka, Simon Castets, Dawn Chan, Mel Chin, Robyn Farrell, Julieta González, Pablo Helguera, Ana Janevski, Pablo León de la Barra, Lolo y Lauti, Mariano López Seoane, Ana Maria Maia Antunes, Mauricio Maille, Ana Elena Mallet, Christian Marclay, Daniel Merritt, Alfonso Morales, Daniel R. Quiles, Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, Martha Rosler, Danila Saiegh, and Evan Calder Williams. A special thank you to Music of the Americas, led by Sebastián Zubieta, whose partnership enabled us to present richer, more dynamic, and more diverse public programming, demonstrating how deeply intertwined music and visual art are in expressing the ethos of *Telenovela*.

We hope we haven't forgotten any names, which would, of course, be a melodrama. Above all, this project is dedicated to all those who make telenovelas and art, two genres that share a poignant but largely underrecognized reading of reality and offer us fantastic alternative ways to think about the world and our lives.

~

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Telenovela

Curated by Aimé Iglesias Lukin

September 9, 2026–March 27, 2027

Traveling to Museo Amparo, Puebla in 2027
and to Pinacoteca de São Paulo in 2028

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