Guiñadas Gráciles: Looking Out for the Queer in Latin American Video Art

How do you shine a spotlight on bodies kept in the dark too long, closeted away from the public eye? Conversely, how can a screen or camera do justice to bodies whose extravagances already mark them out for surveillance and sidelong glances? This exhibition showcases different ways in which Latin America video art and performance have negotiated these competing demands on the representation of gay men. On the one hand, queer bodies are nowhere near visible enough. Since gay activism’s arrival in the late sixties, imperatives to come out of the closet and struggles to attain public visibility have shaped queer lives throughout Latin America. On the other hand, as targets for surveillance by Central and South American military governments throughout the second half of the twentieth century, queer bodies have often been all too conspicuous. Seeing them as inherently dissident and diseased, those regimes screened individuals for telltale signs of deviance in public spaces and private encounters.

In representing gay men, in making them visible, the works in this exhibition arrive at a range of strategies to subvert, defy and deflect the policing gaze routinely trained on queer bodies. Hélio Oiticica’s fragmented quasi-film; Carlos Leppe’s inscribed, inscribing body; Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa’s slowly feathered flesh; Karen Harley’s undulating elegy; and Roberto Jacoby and Syd Krochmalny’s participatory chastity all wink gracefully at the eye they know watches. A knowing eye nonetheless incapable of apprehending, of capturing more than lens and light allow it. A gaze made aware of itself as one among many. A look transfixed.

Joaquin S, Terrones (PhD’09) Lecturer MIT