

retical justification for an unjust order based on the war market and the oppression of some nations under a few dominant powers.

The exhibition at Nieves Fernández Gallery features a number of objects that deal with the relationship between violence, economics, and politics. The idea for the project emerged when, following a mechanical cold process, the artist burned one hundred US\$1 bills and used the resulting ash to manufacture a pencil. Irizar's poet collaborators (Óscar Paul Castro, Eduardo Ruiz, Alejandro Lee, Leonardo González, and Francisco Alcaraz) then wrote seven poems about money using the pencil. The paper on which the poems were written was made from a copy of *The Wealth of Nations*. The poets were compensated with the equivalent of the pencil charcoal they used, which could also be seen in the exhibition.

The show, then, had a strong process and performance component. The display was complemented with a life-size replica of Picasso's *Guernica*: a global icon of humanity's potential for destructiveness and the consequences of war for civil society. Interestingly, the canvas has not lost any of its currency; recent history again makes it urgent and meaningful. On opening day at Nieves Fernández Gallery, Irizar intervened the work launching pieces of paper printed with images of the war in Aleppo, using a series of cannons that fired photographs chopped into confetti. In this way she signaled the contradiction that often mars our commemorations, celebrations and even the history of our visual culture: the ephemeral nature of our consumption of images that cover real stories of suffering and violence. Contemplating Irizar's work, another thought emerged: the ubiquitous presence of violence, of a gruesome history in black and white, and the obsolescence of consumer society that seems to be built upon and rejoice in the most superficial and frivolous values. The results could not have been more eloquent: *Guernica*'s unmistakable figures (the bull, the horse, the mother and child) in contrast with the confetti fragments, filled with color and so festive in nature.

We must not forget that Picasso carries specific and strong connotations in the history of art: modernity embodied in the "genius" artist, someone who dwelled in the centers of power (Paris and New York) and established his oeuvre on the basis of shrewd marketing moves. The radical aspect of Fritzia Irizar's project arises, perhaps, from that small gesture, subversive for many reasons: the authorship of a female artist, born in the so-called "periphery" as described by conventional narratives, who counters the past with an unbeatable dialectic—the power of the collective confronting images that incessantly pop up only to disappear into mere gimmickry.

ANA FOLGUERA

MARACAIBO / VENEZUELA

Natalya Critchley

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo del Zulia - Maczul

The landscape has been engaged as a subject in many different ways in the history of art, perhaps because it symbolizes the primordial origin of individual and collective identity, as an acknowledgment of our situatedness in a specific environment. In the space of the arts, the concept of identity is so enigmatic and mutable that an urgent need to recognize what defines it, and eventually makes it visible for the reassurance of some, recurs constantly.

Arriving in Venezuela in 1981, Natalya Critchley (Bournemouth, UK, 1963) was captivated by the local landscape. The following year she

moved to Puerto Ordaz, an industrial city located in the vast expanse of the Venezuelan Guyana. Light, climate, and nature complement each other as attributes of reality. Critchley's encounter with the light of the tropics drove her to paint the local industrial landscape in order to recognize herself in that environment and make it her own. This is why she used such furious colors to paint her new reality, the place she had chosen to forge a new identity under the cover of a suggestive, fierce landscape. The people Critchley found there were also pioneers, and like her, they were searching for their place in the world. This is how she began to give shape to the narrative of the social and industrial project promoted by the Venezuelan democracy in the country's southern region in the 1970s.

The exhibition *Crookedfield says Hi to Henri Hair Mattress*, presented at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo del Zulia in Maracaibo, is retrospective in character and brings together Critchley's production from the last thirty years. Medium and large formats reflecting a spell-binding scale that, transported to Caracas, will become the portrait of a city marked by chaos, inequality, and violence. From those long and productive pictorial processes Critchley gradually extracted recurring shapes that came to configure a personal alphabet. Signs of various referential, morphological, and symbolic references that on occasion seem to represent the curved, intricate nodes of high-speed expressways, and at other times the human body with its vital organs and its systems of fluids. The alphabet is a synthesis of signs that appear as a constant in many of Critchley's works, but the signs are also worked individually on large rubber sheets, emphasizing their emblematic graphics.

The title of the exhibition is a personal salute to Henri Matisse, for whom Critchley feels great admiration. Matisse was mocked as "Henri Hair Mattress" when the Armory Show exhibition traveled to Chicago in 1913.

Unfolding in the ample spaces of the Zulia museum, the exhibition features the unique images of a pictorial oeuvre that engages the landscape not as a site of pleasure, but in order to reveal its contamination.

Natalya Critchley. *Línea de producción (Production Line)*, 2016. Installation: PVC pipe and rubber. Variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.



Critchley deals with physical detritus, social violence, and industrial spaces via the complexity of symbols and allegories. Her approach is indebted to such masters as Paul Klee, David Hockney, and Philip Guston, as well as Matisse. Tangled structures, distorted perspectives, cluttered hodgepodes: the landscape as a stage for human action.

Natalya Critchley is one of the few artists working in Venezuela with the landscape as a constitutive element of the territorial imagination. This exhibition signals a radical shift in strategy for the process of inclusion in the work of art of the different human groups who make a living in the city outside all institutional systems of participation. Collaboration has pervaded the concepts that defined in recent years art exhibits and specific artworks seeking to open themselves up to democratizing political projects. It was perhaps the exhibition work around the *Metrocable de San Agustín*, presented at CELARG in 2009, that triggered this turn towards the collaborative. Then came *De San Agustín a Los Palos Grandes* at La Caja del Centro Cultural Chacao, in 2015, followed by *Oficina de Turismo* at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, in 2015, and the exhibition at MACZUL we are now reviewing. Concepts like citizenship, conciliation, emancipation, and identity are engaged via the collective execution of the work. Meanwhile, Natalya has developed leadership and group-management skills, and she has especially had to deal with the notion of solidarity. Art is a utopian dream, a vehicle for people's empowerment. For example, *Línea de producción* (Production Line, 2016) is an interactive work based on a plastic-tube structure that resembles an industrial warehouse, traversed by a large strip of black rubber. Carved with different images, that surface operates as a lithographic plaque upon which groups of people draw on paper plans. The participants "paint" their lives by means of images that they select on their own, and in that way build memory as well as personal and collective history. They come together, share, live the experience of creativity, and skepticism transforms into participation. Natalya Critchley continues to construct the cartography of her identity alongside people who, consciously or otherwise, go on the same quest.

TAHÍA RIVERO

MEDELLIN / COLOMBIA

Mauricio Esquivel

Lokkus Arte Contemporáneo

On a nude torso, two narrow red lines curve from the shoulders to the center of the sternum and then follow a precise, rectilinear downward trajectory, detouring only momentarily around the navel. In the lower portion, the lines extend beyond the boundaries of the image. Their inscription on the body, which at first could seem a poetic gesture thanks to the qualities of the photographic image, is, first of all, a remnant of the sinister. This work by Mauricio Esquivel (El Salvador, 1983) is titled *Líneas de referencia* (Lines of Reference, 2010); in it, the artist decided to tattoo himself and to document the entire process, bringing to the fore the place of the body in the process of violence that has ravaged El Salvador in the last few decades. The lines represent the cuts that medical examiners make during their autopsies of the many corpses they receive on a daily basis, given the high incidence of crime in the Central American nation.

Titled *At the Borders*, the exhibition at Lokkus gallery features a selection of artworks dealing with violence, migration, and the informal economy, issues that are common throughout Latin America and that in

no way happen in isolation, but as a complex lattice of social relations. This show, Esquivel's first in Colombia, can be seen as the synthesis of a process carried forward by the artist since 2010, focusing on the subject matter mentioned above. And of these topics, it is perhaps migration that most occupies the works on exhibit.

In 2010, in use of the Ibero-American and Haitian Creators Grant he had been awarded, Esquivel traveled to Mexicali, in Mexico, in order to develop a project about problems associated with the border and with processes of migration. Intent on making the crossing and documenting the entire process, the artist subjected himself to physical training for several months. Along with his exercise routines, Esquivel traveled to border spots to scout their geography and terrain, and to study the strategies used for those who risk the journey between Mexico and the United States. In the course of his research, he encountered unique situations that prompted the development of objectual works. For example, the "risk maps" distributed by the Red Cross, which Esquivel skillfully brings to an objectual resolution via prints on circular saws, an object that refers to the construction business that employs a large number of these very migrants once they reach their destination. Ultimately, Esquivel decided against making the crossing, a decision that defines his work as what he calls "a preparation for failure." Beyond whether the journey took place or not, the work, titled *Border Lines*, puts on display stories that belong to the reality experienced by those who inhabit such "non-places."

One of the show's most interesting works, specifically created for the occasion, is *Bandera* (Flag), an installation situated at the entrance to the gallery. Made from thermal blankets of the kind distributed to migrants after they are rescued, this work probes and critiques the fragile identities that traverse the problem of migration. Several of these blankets with their many creases and wrinkles are installed on the wall; on the floor are color ribbons corresponding to the flags of the migrants' countries of origin or of destination. An observer standing in front of the metallic material is confronted with a diffuse figure, indiscernible at first sight, an almost-hybrid identity like those produced by the economic relationships that Esquivel has engaged in several works since 2010. We could say that he finds, in places of diffuse boundaries, possibilities for the unfolding of existence.

Mauricio Esquivel. *Bandera* (Flag), 2017. Installation with heating blankets and color vinyl decal stickers. Photography: At the Borders Mauricio Esquivel. Courtesy: Galeria Lokkus and RoFa Projects.

