

Fernando “Coco” Bedoya: Traces & Infiltrations

Opening Reception: Thursday February 15, 6-9 pm

Exhibition runs through March 24, 2018

Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 11-6 pm

Henrique Faria Fine Art is pleased to present *Traces & Infiltrations*, Fernando “Coco” Bedoya’s first solo exhibition with the gallery in New York City. This exhibition highlights three important series, *Mecenas* (1979), *Siluetas* (1983-84) and *Cultura Trepa-Nación* (1991-93) from the artist’s early career, which found him straddling the avant-garde art scenes both in Lima, Peru and Buenos Aires, Argentina. The themes of the trace and the act of infiltration are salient aspects of all three series, as they point to the work of an artist attempting to insert himself into established structures such as, broadly, communication—whether through language and wordplay, its dissemination via mass media or its repression by government-sponsored censorship—or the tourist souvenir industry and globalist, exploitative economies through anonymous, interventionist or ephemeral actions. While the idea was central to the conception of the work of art, Bedoya also understood the limitations of the singular idea in enacting widespread change: that once the idea/artwork was set in motion, it no longer belonged to him but rather to those whose energy and input ensured its continuation and evolution to fit the needs of the people it served. As Irina Podgorny describes in the exhibition text, “Bedoya, recognizing this power [inherent in established institutions], has conceived of his practice as a collective and cooperative enterprise, in which sharing, recycling and exchanging represent an essential part of the creative process.”

Mecenas (Patron) was an early experiment that took the form of a classified advertisement that was published in the popular Peruvian daily newspaper *El Comercio* on three consecutive Sundays in March 1979. The ads were, at first glance, like any other classified ad, a private search left to the whims and circumstances of the reading public to be fulfilled, but closer inspection created more questions about the ad’s content than answers. An anonymous artist was searching for a patron, a “sensitive” person capable of financing art projects and serving as a “protector of the arts.” As Podgorny notes, this was quite an improbable search in the Peru at that time, given not only the country’s current economic state but also the state of the local contemporary art scene. While these classified ads were not successful in finding Bedoya a patron, they did connect him to other artists and led to the formation of the collective Paréntesis (Parenthesis). Their happenings and performances, developed in the spirit of political activism, served as a public platform to “[question] and [challenge] the artistic production in the country” by bringing art to the streets and usurping it with the goal of gaining more freedom for creative output.

Upon relocating to Buenos Aires in the early 80s, Bedoya, along with other members of Paréntesis, became involved with organizations that were nurturing the anti-dictatorship sentiments gaining momentum at that time, including the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The *Siluetas (Silhouettes)* were engendered as a response to the shock, sadness, desperation and silence surrounding the people who had been disappeared by the military regime. These people had vanished without a trace, leaving behind the hollowed presence of their bodies. This series of work was also born of the streets, with significant public interventions such as *The Whole Truth: Dalmiro Flores* and *El Siluetazo* (both 1983) where artists convened upon the Plaza de Mayo and covered the pavement and building façades with the stark outlines of the *desaparecidos*, the disappeared, and the known victims of the regime. The works on paper produced as a continued exploration on the theme, were made using Letraset with the intent to capture the forms of absence using “the letters with which newspapers and histories are written” as a means to understand “how the dynamics of history are imprinted on our bodies and [...] how the traces of our actions are engraved in the course of history.”

Bedoya’s practice brought him back to Peru in the early 90s to continue his investigations on cultural-historical marks. The *Trepanaciones peruanas (Peruvian Trepanations)*, taking the forms of intervened replicas of Incan pottery intended for tourist consumption, belong to a larger series that explores Peru’s colonial history of exploitation and cultural erosion. In Spanish, the word *trepanación*, or trepanation (the surgical perforation of the skull), when hyphenated, turns into *trepa-nación*, which means “climbing-nation”, a word-play interpreted by Bedoya to refer to “a colonized nation trepanned by opportunism, exploitation and by the ongoing tension between popular and fine art.” By sawing the handles off these ready-made vessels, Bedoya imitates the act of trepanning by leaving two holes in the body of the vessel. One hole is left open, bearing the mark of the intervention, while the other is covered up by a Coca-Cola bottle cap, the mark of the modern-day global exploiter.

As Podgorny concludes, the work of Bedoya, in its appropriation of the spaces and means for dialogue and exchange, becomes work about the fleetingness and ephemerality of these interactions that points to the eventuality of the traces we will leave behind, that will become like “faces drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea.”

Fernando “Coco” Bedoya (Borja, Peru, 1952) is a Peruvian artist who has been based in Argentina since the late 1970s and who is a key figure in linking the experiences of political artistic activism in both countries. Bedoya studied painting and drawing under the artist Cristina Galvéz and at the National School of Fine Arts in Lima, and went on to become a leading member of several artist collectives in Peru, such as Paréntesis and Huayco (1978-79). In Buenos Aires he continued his work by propelling the creation of the groups GAS-TAR and CAPa.Ta.Co, which used street interventions and public space to protest impunity of Argentina’s authoritarian regime with the use of political artistic language, memory and participation. He has exhibited his work extensively, with solo exhibitions at institutions such as the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI); Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires; Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires; Museo de Bellas Artes Juan Blanes, Montevideo; among many others. He has also been featured in collective exhibitions at the Museo Jumex, Mexico City (forthcoming 2018); Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; MALI, Lima; Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart; El Museo del Barrio, New York; and the Biennials of Cuenca, La Habana, Curitiba and Lima, among others. As part of his creative practice, Bedoya has taught workshops and seminars at art schools as well as federal prisons in Argentina. He has won international prizes and fellowships for his work and has had work acquired by public and private institutions. The artist lives and works between Buenos Aires and Lima.

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