

FRONT

**An
American
City**

**Eleven
Cultural
Exercises**

**FRONT
INTERNATIONAL:
CLEVELAND
TRIENNIAL
FOR
CONTEMPORARY
ART**

Published on the occasion
of the exhibition *An
American City: Eleven
Cultural Exercises*, July 14 to
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O Leão que ri III, 2016. Oil on canvas; 15³/₄ × 11³/₄ in. (40 × 28.9 cm). Courtesy of Galeria Luisa Strina

Juan Araujo (b. 1971, Caracas, Venezuela) meticulously copies images from books, catalogues, and magazines to create an archive that represents his own version of art history. A response to the texts that transported works of Western Modernism to Latin America, the seventeen black-and-white paintings that make up *Page 17* (2012–13) hang salon-style, filling a wall up to the ceiling. His small-format paintings, however, are faithful not to the originals but to their circulated copies, meticulously reproducing the material traits of postcards, magazine clippings, and well-worn book covers. Further blurring the distinction between originals and reproductions, Araujo inserts the oeuvre of Alejandro Otero, an artist of his own invention, among references to the work of many familiar figures.

Turning away from the Western canon, Araujo focuses on masterpieces of Latin American modernist architecture. His sedate canvases are based on his own photographs of Oscar Niemeyer's Casa de Canoas (Rio de Janeiro, 1951–53), the Ministry of Education and Health by Niemeyer and Le Corbusier with gardens by Roberto Burle Marx (Rio de Janeiro, 1930), Lina Bo Bardi's Casa di Vedro (São Paulo, 1951), Casa Luis Barrágan (Mexico City, 1947), Carlos Raúl Villanueva's Casa Caoma

(Caracas, 1951–52), and Marcos Acayaba's Residência Milan (São Paulo, 1972). Never replicating any of the photographs in their entirety, each of the resulting canvases highlights a detail of the architecture or interior design by enlarging only a portion of the original image. At the same time, Araujo continues to contextualize his work by replicating printed materials that refer to these architects, their work, and established masters of modernist architecture such as Frank Lloyd Wright. Rather than simply questioning the status quo, Araujo highlights the connected networks of thought between Latin American manifestations of modernist architecture and the European–North American canon.

Using a similar technique, Araujo's 2016 exhibition *Walled-in Shut* at Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy, responds to Mark Rothko's 1959 mural commission for the Seagram Building in New York. Rothko traveled to Italy seeking inspiration, which he found in the blind windows of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library (Florence, 1523–25/1571). When Araujo saw Rothko's murals, now installed at Tate Modern, London, he became interested in the links between historic Italian architecture and Modernism. He made a series of large-format paintings of the blind windows, as well as smaller canvases that depict isolated details of decoration and replicated ephemera. For Araujo, architecture is fundamentally a reflection of thought and an exchange of ideas. Other works



in the exhibition directly explored Rothko's paintings, including *'Red on orange' projection I* (2015), which uses an overhead projector to create a rectangle of red light on the surface of an orange-painted canvas. This mediated construction reproduces the visual effects of Rothko's use of color and the geometric structure of his paintings by appropriating an iconic piece of classroom technology, yet another allusion to the role of education in the establishment of the history of art.

Araujo lives and works in Lisbon. He was educated in Caracas at the Armando Reverón Institute

for Higher Studies in the Visual Arts. His work is included in the collections of Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas; Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas; Tate Modern, London; Colección Jumex, Mexico City; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centro Galego de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Inhotim Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; ArtNow International, San Francisco; Fundación Banco Mercantil, Caracas; Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas; and Berezdivin Collection, San Juan, Puerto Rico. —AS

Juan Capistrán

Nevermind (Nomos), 2015.
Aluminum, wood, cement, and
plastic; 56½ × 18 × 13
in. (143.5 × 45.7 × 33 cm).
Photo: Michael Underwood

A multidisciplinary artist, Juan Capistrán (b. 1976, Guadalajara, Mexico) addresses sociopolitical issues related to his upbringing as a Mexican American residing in a primarily African American neighborhood of Los Angeles. His critiques of American culture focus on issues of class, identity, and power. His work is suffused with wry humor and draws from sources ranging from protest movements to Conceptual art.

Many of Capistrán's works blend art historical references with nods to contemporary events and politics. For a series of nine photographs entitled *Hands Up... (Eudaemonia)* (2015), Capistrán depicts himself spouting a stream of water from his mouth with his arms lifted, palms open. Positioning himself at the juncture of two metanarratives, Capistrán strikes a pose that combines the protest refrain "Hands up, don't shoot" that emerged after the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, with a visual reference to Bruce Nauman's photo series *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* (1966–67). Nauman's series was itself a reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), imagining the body of the artist as the font of creative inspiration that Duchamp represented with a urinal. Appended to the series title *Hands Up...*, Capistrán includes the Greek word *eudaemonia*, meaning

"happiness" or "flourishing," covertly referring to the very goal of the activist movement that developed in response to the surge of black and brown lives cut short by police violence.

Capistrán's 2017 exhibition *There Is No Other World. There Is Only A Better Way To Live. (it is not what I am, but how I am what I am)* grouped together individual works to form a single installation. A triangular enclosure evoking the border fence separating the United States from Mexico took up the center of the gallery. Surrounding that ineffectual cage were images painted in a mixture of blood, sweat, and tears. A child-like flower painted directly on a gallery wall with an anarchist symbol at its center arched over the phrase "be the crisis." A large monochrome canvas contrasted with other paintings that depict hogs in the style of political cartoons. Hanging from a tree by ropes around their necks, one group of pigs is entitled *Humanity won't be happy until the last capitalist is hung with the guts of the last bureaucrat* (2017), a phrase that originated with Situationist graffiti in 1960s Paris.

An earlier use of the thin, rust-colored mixture of blood, sweat, and tears poignantly highlights the date March 3, 1991, the day when Rodney King was severely beaten by members of the Los Angeles Police Department. When Capistrán painted the work in 2012, twenty years later, King had been found drowned at the bottom of his pool. The format of Capistrán's



painting references the *Today* series by On Kawara (1966–2014), which consists of monochrome compositions that incorporate white block letters and numerals to record the date on which they were painted. These works are often stored in boxes lined with the day's newspaper clippings, and some have subtitles reflecting current events from the headlines.

Capistrán is a graduate of Otis College of Art and Design and the University of California, Irvine. In 2016 he and Hazel Mandujano co-founded

the project incubator Mandujano/Cell, a space designed to aid an international selection of artists in creating exhibitions and publications. Capistrán has had solo exhibitions at museums and galleries throughout Mexico and the United States, including Galería Curro, Guadalajara, Mexico; Visual Arts Center at the University of Texas at Austin; Zona Maco Sur, Mexico City; Mexican Cultural Institute of Los Angeles; and University Art Gallery at the University of California, Irvine. —AS

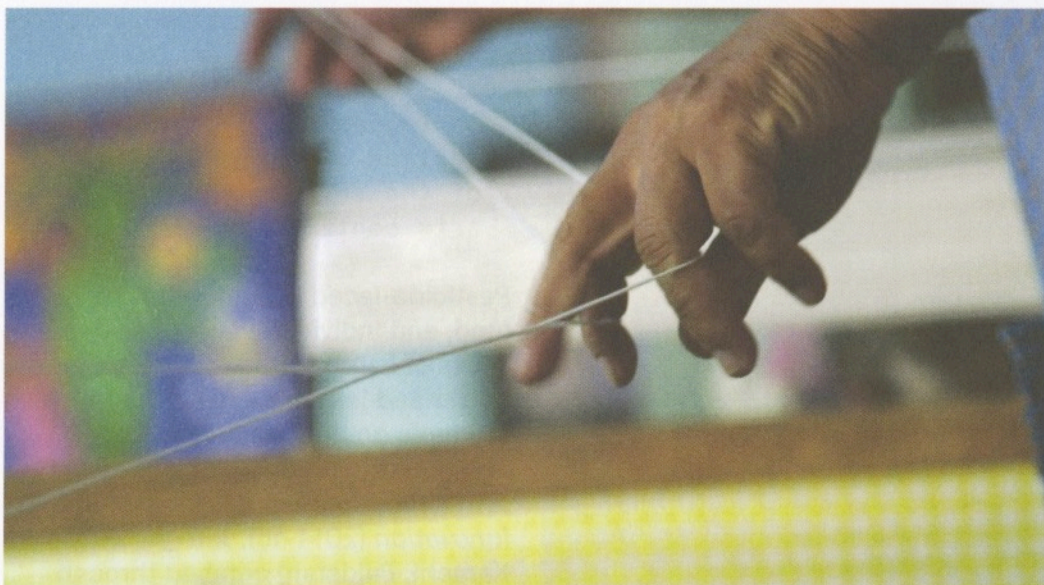
La Libertad, 2017 (still).
HD video, DCP, 29 min.

Moving between Europe and Latin America, Laura Huertas Millán (b. 1983, Bogotá) creates alternative histories that explore issues of exoticism, foreignness, and utopianism in the interaction between the old world and the new. Although she primarily works in video, her extended practice includes performance and curating, as well as written works that she signs as a transvestite alter ego, Arturo Lucía. In her videos, Huertas Millán lavishes attention on the landscape, the pensive stillness of her camerawork keeping the viewer at a distance even when her lens is zoomed in on geometric details. Her work blends documentary and essay-style filmmaking, carefully revealing isolated pieces of information that together describe her ideas with bell-like clarity.

Two of her early video works question colonial conceptions of the Americas as a verdant natural paradise without time or agency, awaiting the progressive ideas of outsiders. Recorded within the lush tropical interior of a brutalist greenhouse built by Jean-Pierre Secq in Lille, France, *Journey to a land otherwise known* (2011) is populated by feathered and masked creatures and a figure in full camouflage. The narration interleaves early European colonial accounts of first encounters with the New World in an artificial equatorial environment, structuring a fantasy within a fantasy. Likewise, her 2012 video *Aequador*, ambiguously set in the Colombian

Amazonas, features quotidian scenes of riverfronts punctuated by 3D renderings of modernist buildings. This imagery recalls the establishment of utopian communities in Latin American countries during the twentieth century and their inevitable ruination. With an undercurrent of violence, both political and organic, the video finally points to the need for coexistence between humans and the natural environment.

Huertas Millán's more recent work has turned to perspectives on indigenous peoples in the Americas. Her multimedia performance *The Cannibal Museum* (2015) conjures an imaginary institution for housing narratives of Native American cannibalism as described by colonial Europeans and depicted in five hundred years of media. Huertas Millán reworks the script and media cues in collaboration with a local projectionist for each performance, rearranging and reimagining how the imaginary museum is configured. Made under the auspices of the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard University, her 2017 video *La Libertad* meditates on the Navarros, a Zapotec family of weavers of Santo Tomás Jalieza in Oaxaca, Mexico. Images of colored threads woven together on backstrap looms are intertwined with lilting discussions of freedom: the freedom of mind in the meditative practice of weaving; the freedom not to marry; the economic freedom that craft production brings; the freedom to choose whether or not to migrate for work. Ultimately, the two



strands of liberty and creative work are brought back to Huertas Millán's own practice, as the formal qualities of her camerawork and editing reflect the tight control and rhythms of her subjects' weaving.

Huertas Millán holds an MFA and a practice-based PhD from École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, as well as an MA in art and cinema from Le Fresnoy, Tourcoing, France. She has had solo exhibitions at the Maison des Arts, Malakoff, France; Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Colombia; Cinéma Le Méliès, Paris; Metales Pesados, Santiago de Chile; Villa Arson, Nice, France; and Alianza Francesa, Bogotá. Retrospective and solo screenings of her work have taken place at the Art Institute of Chicago; TIFF Bell Lightbox, Toronto; FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkerque, France; UnionDocs, New York; Pitzer College,

Claremont, California; Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris; Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires; Lugar a Dudas, Cali, Colombia; and École supérieure des arts appliqués et du textile (ESAAT), Roubaix, France. —AS

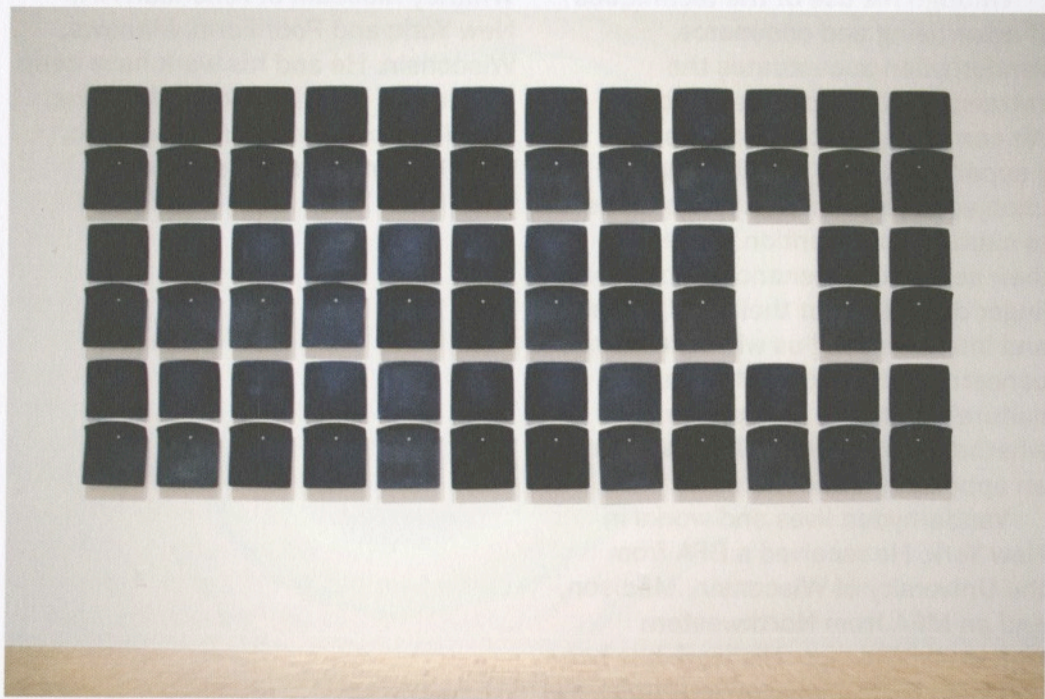
Jessica Vaughn

After Willis (rubbed, used and moved) #007, 2017. 35 individual pairs of used machine-fabricated public transit train seats (Chicago Transit Authority, 1998–2011). Courtesy of the artist and Martos Gallery, New York

In her abstract found-object sculptures and installations, Jessica Vaughn (b. 1983, Chicago) highlights how transportation systems contribute to the economic and racial segregation of cities. Her audio installation *Right-of-Way-Acquisition* (2014) mixes together recordings of highways transmitted on a megaphone installed in the gallery and live sounds picked up by microphones placed throughout the space. Highways typically function as

arteries bringing traffic to the heart of a city. In Houston, however, they cut off the Third Ward from the city center, stifling both the social and economic development of local residents. Vaughn's installation situates the impersonal roar of vehicles in a call and response with her audience, demonstrating that the multiplied voices of a community can overcome concrete obstacles.

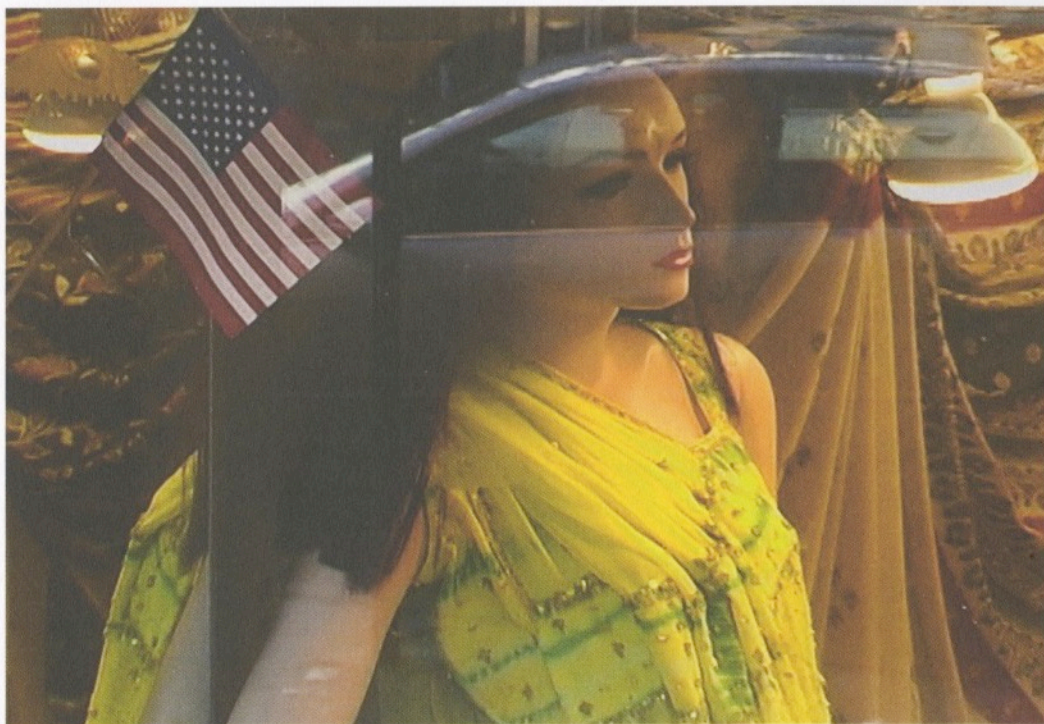
An interrelated series of artworks utilize public transportation within the sprawling city of Chicago as their medium. For *After Willis (rubbed, used and moved)* (2017) Vaughn assembles abstract grids out of worn machine-fabricated seats that have been removed from Chicago Transit Authority Blue Line trains. Placed tightly together in



various configurations on the gallery walls they begin to resemble the postmodern black-on-black grid of the Willis Tower, which looms above the last central station of the Blue Line before southbound trains run out into the suburbs. Exemplifying exclusionary transit decisions, the Blue Line's trajectory veers west to skirt the south side of Chicago, forcing the predominantly black and immigrant inhabitants of those neighborhoods to undertake excruciatingly long and circuitous routes to access the city's north side. Below these seats Vaughn places scraps of fabric directly on the ground, held taut by Plexiglas supports. Leftovers from the manufacture of transit furnishings, these cloth remnants outline the soft points of contact between trains and the bodies they carry. The outlines of future seats, armrests, and the like are titled using the manufacturers' names for the associated weaves or patterns, such as *Pacific Grey No. 48306*, *South Beach Blue No. 389*, and *Boomer Blue*, each signifying a vaguely aspirational setting far from the gray, postindustrial landscape that makes up much of Chicago. A third component is *Learning from the Work of Others*, a series of digital prints and photocopies of the paper trail that led up to Vaughn's project. A schematic diagram showing the punch pattern for the seat fabric is included alongside carbon-copy paper tracings of Vaughn's handwritten notes. While initially inscrutable, the inscription by photocopier and industrial fabric handling serve to

underscore the repetitive nature of machine manufacture. The title and these carbon-copy notes focus on repeatability, epitomizing how structural racism emerges out of quotidian municipal decisions taken up by urban developers in cities across the United States.

Vaughn received an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine. Her work has been exhibited at Martos Gallery, New York; FIAC, Paris; Arts Incubator: Art + Public Life at the University of Chicago; and University of Maryland Gallery, College Park. In 2018 she will have solo presentations at Emalin, London, and EXPO Chicago. —AS



Disappeared in America
Part 1: Patriot Story, 2005
(still). Video, 7 min.

The multidisciplinary collective Visible grew out of a network of activists, artists, and lawyers who organized and advocated for immigrant rights. In response to the Islamophobic climate following 9/11, the New York-based group concentrated on increasing awareness of working-class immigrants who were caught up in accelerated detainments and deportations as part of the so-called war on terror. Visible's body of work is conceived as a single extended project consisting of video, photography, installation,

and interactive elements under the title *Disappeared in America* (2004–7). Their *Fresh American Style* photographs, based on the visual framework of a Gap campaign called “Casual Fresh American Style” that featured actress Sarah Jessica Parker, depict monumental banners emblazoned with studio portraits of individuals who have been detained by the American government. The Queens Museum of Art installed the translucent images in a bank of windows so that they were visible both inside the gallery and from the street. Underscoring Visible's objectives, the series addresses the treatment of detainees and also presents them as Americans rather than suspects. An interactive map on

the collective's website, *Thousand Points of Light*, pinpoints detention sites inside the United States. Hovering over a given area pulls up a list of known incidents that have occurred there, along with identifying information about the detainees (names, countries of origin, and places of detainment). The map also enables users to search for specific people or add new information. Created in response to the lack of reporting on widespread arrests, the database functioned as a resource for documenting the increasing detainments and underscoring the systematic profiling of people from predominantly Muslim countries.

Visible also produced responses to post-9/11 antiterrorism policies. The interactive timeline *and then things piled up* illustrates the network of events, laws, and agents—political personalities as well as detainees—that contributed to the escalation of injustices perpetrated in the name of security following the 2001 passage of the Patriot Act. The overwhelming glut of information provided in the timeline makes it difficult to find a particular event or even a specific point in time. Their two-part installation *It's Safe to Open Your Eyes Now* presents, within a simple white frame, a pile of colorful strips of paper on the floor consisting of the shredded remains of photos taken by US Army and CIA personnel as they tortured and humiliated prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Part 2 consists of a large composite print of twenty-eight of those photographs, arranged four across and

seven down. The images are horrible to see—certainly it is more comfortable to look at the shreds—however, the act of shredding mirrors the attempts the United States government made to conceal this disturbing information from the public. The collective's ultimate goal is summed up by their name, Visible: they find graphic means to picture the systematic erasure of yet another constructed "other."

Visible was active between 2004 and 2007. It was directed by Naeem Mohaiemen and included Ibrahim Quraishi, Vivek Bald, Aimara Lin, Anandaroop Roy, Sehban Zaidi, Anjali Malhotra, Donna Golden, Kristofer Dan-Bergmann, Toure Folkes, Aziz Huq, Sarah Olson, Uzma Rizvi, and Jee-Yun Ha. The group's work has been exhibited at the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Queens Museum of Art; Artist Space, New York; Cooper Union School of Art, New York; FACT, Liverpool; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; and Gallery Nova, Zagreb, among many other institutions. Their projects have also appeared in *Sun Never Sets: South Asian Migrants in the Age of U.S. Power* (New York University Press, 2013) and are included in the e-Flux video library. —AS



Bye, Bye Deutschland! Eine Lebensmelodie / Bye, Bye Germany! A Life Melody, 2017 (still). Single-channel video installation, 21:49 min., looped. Courtesy of the artists and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro

Bárbara Wagner (b. 1980, Brasília) and Benjamin de Búrca (b. 1975, Munich) have collaborated on photo and video projects since 2011, focusing on disparaged forms of vernacular music that are considered lowbrow or tacky. Their video installation *Faz que vai / Set to go* (2015) presents four Frevo dancers from Recife, Brazil. Each performs a short routine that expresses his or her individual inflections on the dance. Their movements are as diverse as their costumes: one dancer wears only

a plain, brown pair of pants, while another appears in a sequined, pink leotard with layers of fringe, completed by a long blonde wig and glittering tiara. With their camera zoomed in on the movement of these bodies, Wagner and de Búrca reveal continued acts of resistance beneath the carnivalesque facade. Both a musical tradition and a dance, Frevo developed from military bands parading during Carnival celebrations in the nineteenth century. The dance incorporates acrobatic elements derived from Capoeira as well as a distinctive miniature umbrella prop, which is said to have replaced the knives that were carried in the early days, when dancers regularly got involved in fights. Now recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Frevo is promoted by the government as the tourist spectacle of northeastern Brazil.

Wagner and de Búrca are based in Recife, where they collaborated with singers from the local Brega scene on a narrative short, *Estás vendo coisas / You are seeing things* (2016). Brega, which takes its name from the Portuguese term meaning “tacky” or “kitsch,” is a style of danceable ballads with lyrics about love and infidelity that emerged in the 1970s. Today, the genre has developed into a youth culture mediated by DIY recordings and music videos that precipitate rave-like parties attracting thousands of attendees. *Estás vendo coisas* was written and performed by a group of Brega vocalists and follows a pair of central characters—MC Porck, a hairdresser, and Dayana Paixão, a firefighter—as they navigate their path from recording studio to nightclub. Highlighting the disjunction of their fantasy world from the economic realities in Recife, Wagner and de Búrca overturn typical representations of Brega, which tend to focus on the romantic and campy aspects of the genre. Similarly, their 2017 video *Bye, Bye Deutschland! Eine Lebensmelodie / Bye, Bye Germany! A Life Melody* takes a complementary view of the phenomenon of Schlager music in Germany. With its similarly sentimental lyrics, Schlager is a style of easy-listening pop music that emerged in the early twentieth century and is often viewed as parallel to American country music. *Bye, Bye Deutschland!* focuses on a pair of singers, Markus and Steffi, who are each known for their respective covers of Schlager stars Udo Jürgens and

Helene Fischer. Withholding judgment, Wagner and de Búrca train their cameras on Schlager’s reinvention by this new generation.

Wagner and de Búrca have had solo shows at Bruch & Dallas, Cologne, Germany; Solo Shows, São Paulo; Capibaribe Centro da Imagem (CCI), Recife, Brazil; Estúdio Madalena, São Paulo; Centro Cultural São Paulo; and Sala Nordeste, Recife. Their work can be found in the collections of DSM, Heerlen, the Netherlands; Museu de Arte de São Paulo; Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo; Museum De Domein, Sittard, the Netherlands; and the Ella Fontanals Cisneros Collection, Miami. —AS