



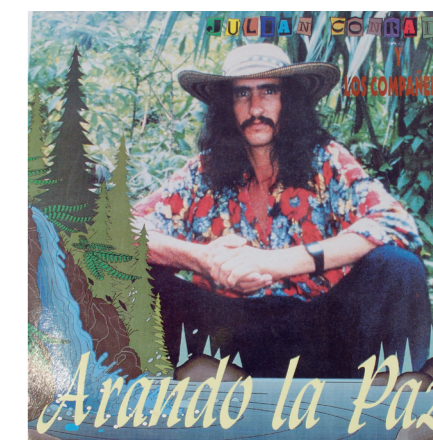
# CHIMERA. WILSON DÍAZ

29 APR. — 13 AUG. 2017

Through diverse art practices such as music, performance, drawing, painting, video and photography, Wilson Díaz investigates forms of visual communication and their transmission, as well as the links between individuals and communities. The artist takes strategies from advertising, printed periodicals and urban signage and reuses them in works often loaded with humor. Given that his work has a strong link with personal events and their surroundings, the Museo Tamayo spoke with him before the mounting of his exhibition to delve into his creative processes and his approach to the themes and discourses he analyzes in his works.

**The records included in Quimera (Chimera) range from the 1960s to the mid-90s. When did you begin collecting them?**

I have collected records at various times of my life. First during the 1970s and then from 2000 onwards. I began to compile them thinking that they could be part of an art project in 2008. In the beginning I did it out of an impulse to collect things I liked, and which had something to do with a particular preference. In the search process I discovered that there were issues related to what I was working on and researching in art, and I began to investigate if their presence was constant. I found, for example, the series of vinyl records launched by the presidential candidates in Colombia, which includes a selection of their speeches as well as songs composed for them. So I collected very intuitively and eventually it began to acquire a form. However, my interest in the use of propaganda dates back to the late 1990s.



**Has your focus changed between when you began collecting them and now?**

This kind of projects has a lot to do with the present, and their timelessness is very evident in them. The themes are made problematic by their moment, and there are also variations on their relevance: for example, the works relating to the guerrilla now have a new meaning, one which is very problematic and which they did not necessarily have when they were released. The same thing happens with records referring to cocaine. In this way the themes transform and they are very affected by their moment.

Imágenes:  
Elementos que forman parte de Quimera.  
Cortesía del artista

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**You have used the material from *Chimera* for other works. Do you consider an artwork as a development of previous ones?**

The first time that I exhibited the records was in 2011, as part of the piece *La flor caduca de la hermosura de su gloria*, interspaced with paintings that I made based on them. The records that comprised it were mostly by protagonists in the conflict that made music: soldiers, police officers, drug traffickers and guerrillas. Or people that dress rather romantically, in the style of guerrillas or *narcos*, perhaps influenced by cinema and by the history of Latin America.

In *Chimera* there is a huge collection of vinyl records that basically talk about the Colombian economy and production in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. They are divided into groups; there are records that talk about sugar mills, rice, oil, banks, etc., mixed with those by politicians, as if they were just another company, and which are arranged according to different state projects related to the health sector or culture. There are three stories inserted there which take the lead, and those are the watercolors.

**In other words, the order in which they are arranged has to do with the watercolors, with a constellation of records around each one.**

Yes. For example, the records that are arranged around *El hombre de los mil rostros*, which are about ten, are from Astro Son Records, a Cali-based record company that belonged to a drug trafficker in the 1990s. They were kept by the police for a long time, and then they began to go on sale in second-hand stores. I bought them. I knew about the story beforehand, but not the records, until I found them.

Then there is Julián Conrado of the band Los Rebeldes del Sur, which is a musical group playing the *vallenato* genre which is part of a guerrilla faction. This nucleus of records goes with a watercolor, together with a record by the FARC and others that Conrado recorded before joining the guerrilla, when he was one of the promising new acts of *vallenato*.

In 2000 I filmed a video of a concert by Los rebeldes del sur and I was very curious about the group. And later, by chance, I found one of their records produced by the FARC in a thrift store. That was when I discovered that Julián Conrado was an alias and that he had also recorded under his original name on albums where he was a singer or composer. I have been very interested in reconstructing his career as a musician. First, I worked with the images by drawing, because I couldn't get hold of the vinyl records for a long time, and I could only see them on the Internet. Then I found a vinyl on which he used his alias for the first time, and which, curiously, was released by a well-known record label in Colombia.

Finally, there is *Hombres de acero*, accompanied by two large-format watercolors and a smaller one surrounded by two vinyl records. This is a project based on comics and records released by the Colombian army. It struck me as interesting that they did not fight against *narcos* or the guerrilla, but against aliens. Apparently, it all began in 1985, during a very problematic time for the Colombian army: a group of guerrillas took over the Palace of Justice in downtown Bogotá with everybody still inside. As there was no dialogue, the army attacked the palace with tanks and burned everybody inside. Since then, and

perhaps to improve their image, they launched a publication which is part of their "psychological operations," as they call them. I started to collect the comic, and then saw that soldiers were selling them in malls. I took photos of them sometime around 2002 and did some drawings based on those images. It was later, when I was working on the musical part, that I found there were also vinyl records.



**You talk about different ways of working on your pieces from the same material, and in your work it is common for you to look back at other projects that you worked on before. Is there an aspect of self-reflection in your work?**

Yes, I am very interested in anachronism, in exploring what can be made with the same material but in another way and at a different time. Works therefore function as fragments that then connect again or fit together with previous and later works. In some cases, it has been due to the influence of forms of literature, of how a story is formed; and by art history, by artists such as Marcel Duchamp, for example. He thought a lot about his work, he created clues to then dismantle them so that they could not easily be found. It is a kind of game of connections.

I have also sought to revise previous works. It's something that began to take place over time, acquiring clarity in a very natural way. I realized that some earlier works served to relate to more recent ones, and that they gained implications that were different to those they had when I made them. It's a way of thinking the ideas from a fragmentary point of view.

**It could be said then that your approach to the fragmentary also has a personal history. Tell us a little more about that.**

Pitalito, the place where I grew up, is a little town in southern Colombia. I traveled a lot with my family, but I always went back there. That's where I went to high school, and it was a time that had a deep impression on me because it was my adolescence. Living in a little town is quite an experience because you know the whole place and all its inhabitants. In that sense you have a general idea of the context, a sensation of totality. Later, when I lived in cities such as Bogotá and Cali, during the 1980s, I had the opposite sensation, of only knowing a fragment. From there I tried to connect myself with the whole. It

is an impulse that affects many things in the sense of making very contextual art, but also regarding trying to connect it and widen it geographically.

**So reflecting on the context is not so much a premeditated aspect but something that emerges from the way in which you have related to your surroundings since many years ago.**

Yes, I think about that a lot. As I have also lived outside Colombia, being here these last few years has given me a very strong perception of what I can have, what I can work with and what not. For example, I can only acquire these vinyl records here, because they are Colombian, and you can only find them in second-hand stores. I couldn't do a work like this in another place. Furthermore, working with plants, seeds or coca pigment — as I do in other works — are things I can do precisely because I am in Colombia. Each place offers certain opportunities, and resources, which also allow me to speak of the context in the sense of the material.

**Do you also see this relationship with the local in reference to the public? You have often produced works in which the spectators, either due to their participation or their mere presence, are essential.**

The situation of the encounter with the public is attractive. The exhibition openings, for example. The relationship with the visitor has a lot to do with my work and often builds the meaning of the works. The works need them so that they occur. The public is based on experiences and situations that on many occasions are accidental and coincidental.

**Furthermore, you often seek to build a relationship with the public through performance and actions. Is your interest in these formats related to breaking with the one-dimensional or lineal of exhibiting objects? Are there other lines that you follow with this part of your work?**

I have done a lot of performance since I began working. In fact, my first works were paintings that had a performative element. Later I began carrying out actions, and since 1997 organize the Cali Festival of Performance that we have developed with Helena Producciones. Performance is a very problematic practice, and this is why I try to explore diverse manifestations of performativity, such as actions and presentations of another kind: close to the everyday, or, in some way, much more 'normal' than that otherness that performance implies. Now I increasingly approach to formats relating to radio or auditions in Cali bars. For a time, I carried out very intense performances. Then I stopped and only carried out presentations regarding music, concerts and communities. Recently I have carried out actions using the vinyl records, and singing a little.

Another aspect that interests me about performance is its relation to documentation. I did many performances that I registered in painting, a medium that it is not considered as precise or as objective as others. In this sense, painting is more suggestive than photography or video.

**Thinking about what you say about establishing links between communities, your gesture of placing paintings in public spaces is interesting, such as the signs around a park.**

Yes, there are two possible links. On the one hand, there are those who can connect them with what is in a museum and they can understand that those designs emerge from the record covers used by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). That is something that someone who comes to the exhibition will know. Then there are people who will see the signs without knowing the context. The image of the cactus and the skull, and then that Alpine landscape, are singular. The desert, from my point of view, is a very Mexican scene because of the number of deserts you have. It also has a lot to do with the connections between Colombia and Mexico relating to drug trafficking, violence and other histories in common.

On the other hand, I like the Chapultepec forest and I have walked through it several times. I think, on the other hand, about the skull. It is the clearest image in this sense: it could be seen as contradictory because the landscape there is not like that. Some people will just see the cactus and begin to make certain connections. Maybe they will give it one meaning, and make an interesting deconstruction of the narrative.

**In previous works you have used deconstructed certain visual strategies of advertising. Do you see those as public works in similar ways?**

Everything to do with brands and advertising images is very present in my work. My reference is the concern about the appropriation art in the 1970s. To whom do public images belong? Who produces them and who consumes them? These are recurring questions in my work. From a certain point of view, *Chimera* is a kind of exhibition on graphic design during various eras in Colombia in which, as well as presenting them, I am constantly interested in producing and copying similar images, exhibiting them and, sometimes, creating others that have the same forms but different content.

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Wilson Díaz (Pitalito, Colombia, 1963) began his career as a self-taught painter. His work has been exhibited in the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (1998); the Museo de Arte Moderno La Tertulia (1998), in Cali; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2012); the Venice Biennial (2003); the Liverpool Biennial (2004); the Havana Biennial (2009) and the Mercosul Biennial (2011). He is the founding member of Helena Producciones, an artists' collective that organizes the Cali Festival of Performance.