

SWINGUERRA
Bárbara Wagner
Benjamin de Burca
23.09–09.01

Exhibition guide
English

Kunsthall Stavanger

Swinguerra
Bárbara Wagner & Benjamin de Burca
23.09.21–09.01.22

Working collaboratively since 2011, Bárbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca have shown in exhibitions, biennials and film festivals, including: the 33rd, 35th Panorama de Arte Brasileira, the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, the 20th Festival de Arte Contemporânea Sesc VideoBrasil (São Paulo, Brazil); the 36th EVA International (Limerick, Ireland); the 5th Skulptur Projekte (Münster, Germany); the 67th, 68th, 69th, 71th Berlin International Film Festival (Germany); and the 72nd Locarno International Film Festival (Switzerland).

In 2020 they took part in Manifesta, the European Nomadic Biennial. In 2019, Wagner & de Burca represented Brazil at the 58th Venice Biennial, and unveiled solo presentations at Jumex Museum (Mexico City, Mexico) and the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, Holland). Their work can be found in collections such as: The Institute for Contemporary Art (Boston, USA), Kadist Art Foundation (France), Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Masp) and Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) (São Paulo, Brazil), Pérez Art Museum, (Miami, USA), and Arts Council of Ireland.

Kunsthall Stavanger is proud to present *Swinguerra* by Bárbara Wagner & Benjamin de Burca. In their work, Wagner and de Burca delve into expressions of popular culture in contemporary Brazil and their complex relationship to race, gender, identity, conflict, and desire.

At Kunsthall Stavanger, *Swinguerra* is presented as a large-scale two-channel video installation. The film, which was originally commissioned for the Brazilian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, takes its title from 'swingueira', a popular dance movement in the Northeast of Brazil, but with a slight spelling twist that makes the word end in 'guerra', meaning war.

With an affirmation of self-expression through popular music and dance, *Swinguerra* provides a deep and empathic view of contemporary Brazilian culture, at a moment of significant political and social tension. The film includes several integrated and rival dance groups: Cia.Extremo, Grupo La Máfia, Bonde do Passinho, and As do Passinho S.A., performing charged and flawlessly rehearsed routines of 'swingueira', 'brega funk' and 'passinho do maloca', genres of popular music from the outskirts of the city of Recife, where *Swinguerra* was shot.

The predominantly Black bodies on the screen (several of nonbinary gender) are in many ways the focus of contemporary disputes around visibility, entitlement, and self-representation in Brazil. Since Jair Bolsonaro came to power in 2019, his far-right politics have further marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ communities with frequent attacks and murders. In 2020 the country was the deadliest in the world for trans people. The majority of the victims were Black, mostly between the ages of 15 and 29. However, the challenges facing members of the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities are not exclusive to Brazil.

The dance styles in *Swinguerra* are ways for the dancers to escape everyday challenges and display their inner strength. In the film, we encounter members of the dance crews as they demonstrate their power and individuality, their bodies coming together in choreographies that require great skill, restraint, physical strength, artistry, and a comprehensive knowledge of how to move and exist within society.

The style of 'swingueira' originates from samba reggae, which had a particular resonance in Brazil's Afro-Brazilian social movements in the latter 20th century, and is usually performed by larger dance ensembles. Competing in events throughout the larger region of Recife, groups made up of young adults perform narratives around socio-political themes. These competitions allow for a fluid and complex exploration of gender, race, power, masculinity and conflict, which would have been frowned upon in more mainstream cultural spaces.

Brega funk has risen to national and international popularity since its conception in the early 2010s. Its DIY approach sits somewhere between the styles of trap, reggaeton and electronic Latin music and is perhaps easily

defined by what it is not — traditional, lowkey, conservative studio productions. Passinho do Maloca is a local treatment of the dance 'passinho', and in Recife the style has been altered and reclaimed, with the word 'maloca' ("thug"). Here, the dancers subvert the way their bodies are often feared by a white elitist class through mimicking the violence historically inflicted on their bodies, and drawing on humor in the retelling of these stories.

The most distinctive elements in *Swinguerra* are the dancing and choreography, but the quiet moments still resonate. In a close-up of the choreographer and dancer Clara, we see her struggle with her decision to leave the dance group Cia.Extremo and join La Máfia. As viewers we are subjected to her internal reflections and subsequently the reclaiming of her individual power as she steps out of the shadows that appear to have been following her, and claims her rightful place as a powerful player in her new company.

During the production of *Swinguerra*, Wagner & de Burca worked closely with the dance crews. The participants were an integral part of the process, and mindful makers of their own body, story, and image. As a result, the film sits between the format of a documentary and a fictionalization of the dancers' everyday lives.

Swinguerra, as in most of Wagner & de Burca's work, features the imagery and sound of high-end film productions. The polished finish lures viewers into the more complex and layered experiences of the film. This treatment does not intend to gloss over, but to lift up the elegance, refinement and complexity of a culture that some regard as lacking in such. This fits particularly well in *Swinguerra*, where the dancers themselves exist in-between the underground cultures growing out of the peripheries of the big city, and mass consumption on social media, where the dancers build online followings as a way to gain recognition for their craft.

Wagner & de Burca commissioned exhibition architect Marcus Vinícius to adapt Kunsthall Stavanger's exhibition space to give the audience a participatory role in the screening, including seating that reflects the dancers' own formations, and rubber surfaces that recall the outdoor public sports halls and community centres in which the dancers practice. The two video screens, initially seemingly in sync with each other, are in fact at times featuring different shots of the same scene, or different scenes entirely. These variations, while almost unnoticeable, emphasize the nuances, alternating perspectives and multiplexity that are prevalent throughout *Swinguerra*.

Dancers: Cia.Extremo – Eduarda Lemos, Willam Vinícius, Stephane Melo, Daivson Lima, Clara Santos, Aline Linhares, Marcílio Gomes, Myllena Mello, Melissa Salazar, Hefrain Nunes, David Helder, Wallisson Vieira, Vinícius Lima, Renato Victor, Williams Ferreira and Diego Matarazzo. Grupo La Máfia – Edlys Rodrigues, Myllena Moura, Bethy Carvalho, Kally Albuquerque, Aline Marques, Julia Vitória, Higor Leandro, Ailton Silva, Deivesson Mak-suel, Matheus Ferreira and Fábio Santos. Bonde do Passinho – Antonio Henrique da Sena Pinto [MC Fininho], Victor Adriano de Melo, Alex Martins da Silva and Wesley Victor da Silva. As do Passinho S.A. – Clara Damaceno, Julian Letícia, Tamires Gonçalves, Vitória Caiury Gentil da Silva and Angela Maria da Silva (Kinha do Tamburete)

Exhibition design: Marcus Vinícius with Aline Arroyo

Executive producers: Dora Amorim, Thais Vidal

Cinematographer: Pedro Sotero

Art director: André Antônio

Choreographers: Diego Matarazzo, Clara Santos, Edlys Rodrigues, Antonio Henrique da Sena Pinto (MC Fininho)

Commissioned by: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Brasil

Filmed in: Jaboatão dos Guararapes and Olinda, Brasil, February 2019

A full list of contributors can be found on Kunsthall Stavanger's website.

Swinguerra (2019)
Two-channel video installation, 2K, colour, sound,
21 min, loop

