

galerie dohyanglee

MARCOS AVILA FORERO

ATRATO - 2014

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GALERIE DOHYANG LEE



Atrato

2014, HD video, 16 : 9, color, sound, 13'52", edition of 5 + 2 AP, English and French version
Collection Centre National des Arts Plastiques - Fonds National d'Art Contemporain (France)
Courtesy of the artist and the Dohyang Lee Gallery

Alicia Knock, *Marcos Avila Forero*

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MARCOS AVILA FORERO

Born in 1983 in Paris (France) Lives and works in Bogota (Colombia) and Paris.

Marcos Avila Forero always starts working with site-specific components: a bunch of individuals and a political context. He is mainly involved with local communities, independent parties or palenqueros in areas populated with displaced communities due to the warfare between the Colombian government, guerrilla movements, and paramilitary groups. Marcos Avila Forero conducts utopian yet real collaborations. Spending part of his time in Colombian Amazonia, the artist meets locals striving to save their culture from oblivion and censorship. He is poetically joining their struggle, collecting their stories and memories soon becoming eclectic visual projects.

The *Atrato* (2014) project starts with the eponymous river. The Atrato River crosses the Choco forest in Colombia, which used to be a trade and migration path before becoming the backbone of the armed conflict. Along the river live expelled communities, including a group of Afro-Columbians, fighting for the survival of their traditions. Afro-Columbians are renowned percussionists: they used to play water drumming in the river as a communication tool. The tradition was lost but the artist, discovering similar water drum rituals in Congo, decided to revive it with locals. The film records the performance of men and women rhythmically "playing the water" of the river as if it were an instrument, therefore reenacting the lost ritual common to both Africa and Latin America. The experiment was conducted, with the help of professionals, as an anthropological and anthropophagic gesture, which would reconnect locals to their somewhat lost roots.

Drumming has always been a tool for political and cultural struggle in the region. During the performance, the artist thus asked the percussionists to "play" their own interpretation of the armed conflict. Marcos Avila Forero had already used arm-training sounds as an artistic material. He had also used drums in a former work, *Palenqueros* (2013), which consisted of two sets of drums made by French artisans, similar to those employed in some Colombian villages founded by escaped slaves. As always, the artist offered a setting that could openly be shifted by the protagonists involved: the drumming performance intuitively diverted from sound /music to body language and dance. Unconscious and potentially healing gestures appeared, such as ancestral gestures to swim up the river: "Things have a life of their own," the gypsy proclaimed with a harsh accent, 'it's simply a matter of waking up their souls?'¹

The artist is always dealing with real and sometimes scientific factors but reenacts traditions poetically: "It is one thing to write as poet and another to write as a historian: the poet can recount or sing about things not as they were, but as they should have been, and the historian must write about them not as they should have been, but as they were, without adding or subtracting anything from the truth."² Instead of reconstructing a tradition as an anthropologist or a historian, Marcos Avila Forero revives traditional gestures that ultimately flow, empowered, into the present.

Art and politics are intertwined in the artist's practice: his method comes from citizen relationship management and self-organized political movements. Encounters and community work fuel his research: the time spent meeting, working and living with locals deeply orients the artistic process. On the way, the artist tries to strengthen their political struggle in order to improve their lives. Marcos Avila Forero is a Don Quixote in Colombia, getting to unreachable places with the hope to shift a perspective through invisible actions, still floating on the waters he navigates: "The truth may be stretched thin, but it never breaks, and it always surfaces above lies, as oil floats on water."³ Studying at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, his basic visual training focused on craftsmanship techniques translated into stories and narratives. His artistic projects are however deeply driven by the encounters he makes in the villages where he stops. This led him, by accident, to work with dance, music, performance, sculpture and with anthropologists, musicians, peasants and priests. "'Obviously,' replied Don Quixote, 'you don't know much about adventures.'"⁴

Alicia Knock

1. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970, p. 9.

2. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, New York: Harper Collins, 2003, pp. 475-476.

3. Idem.

4. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, New York: Harper Collins, 2003, pp. 475-476.

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