

En el mismo río

“My critical approach does not intend to offer autobiographical solutions to universal problems. I believe art should encourage us to question the status quo and the structures that allow it to persist.”

Lothar Baumgarten

The words of the German conceptual artist Lothar Baumgarten are the starting point of the installation project *En el mismo río*, presented by Katherine Di Turi and Piers Veness in The Art House, an exhibition vitrine space at the University of Worcester. Baumgarten's phrase fosters the idea that art is an effective vehicle that allows us to reflect on the problems of our contemporaneity, and that the mission of the artistic practices of our time is to bring us closer to our realities, concerns, and disquietudes in order that we contemplate and understand what we were, what we are, and what we could be. From this perspective, *En el mismo río* brings together a series of works that addresses the scourge of illegal mining in the Venezuelan Amazon and its consequences for both the ecosystem and the social fabric of the area; a topic that has local but also universal relevance since it highlights the relationship between humans and nature as an issue that cuts across contemporary reflections to define political and social agendas at a global level. Artist duo Di Turi and Veness also assume the role of curators of *En el mismo río*, bringing together work by the artists Ana Alenso and Santiago Méndez with the aim of making sense of and drawing attention to the ecological ordeal suffered by one of the most important green lungs on the planet because of the trafficking and excessive exploitation of metals and illegal mining. Consequently, the viewer is challenged to reflect upon a topic that affects us all. *En el mismo río* is structured, then, around three pieces that create a mutual dialogue: *Green Screen*, *Mercurio Orinoco* and *Lo que la mina te da, la mina te quita*.

Green Screen is an installation piece by Di Turi and Veness. Located in the largest window of the exhibition space, the work is formed from several layers of green fabric that, like a kind of large-scale scenery backdrop, simulate the jungle. Devoid of figurative, vegetal, and ornamental references, it is a metaphor for the desecration and progressive deterioration of the jungle. In formal terms, this reproduction of the jungle has its roots in the tradition of geometric abstraction, its range of flat colours which conclude in a block of grey establish a dialogue with the works of Méndez and Alenso. Di Turi and Veness's installation is conceptually constructed and complemented by their curatorial intention: the viewer establishes interchanges, relationships and cross-readings between *Green Screen* and the videos *Mercurio Orinoco* and *Lo que la mina te da, la mina te quita*, located in the second vitrine space of The Art House.

Méndez's video *Mercurio Orinoco* is a chillingly eloquent 3D recreation of the Orinoco River and the surrounding jungle in its process of pollution and destruction seen from above. The transition from lush vegetation to a metallic dull husk is expressed through colour: the vivid green of the Amazon ecosystem becomes a leaden grey that gives the impression of an infertile, barren land. The consequences of illegal gold mining in the region have generated many environmental as well as social impacts, and the excessive use of mercury to extract the precious metal has contaminated the natural habitat, turning it into dead and infertile land, into a sick and infected terrain.

Lo que la mina te da, la mina te quita by Ana Alenso is a video that is part of a much broader artistic and ecological investigation, a fragment of which was included in a solo exhibition in Germany, and which included the publication of a book that deserves rereading several times. In the video selected by Di Turi and Veness, the artist documents the blind single-minded actions of humankind in the drive for wealth and the consequences that this excessive ambition generates within the Venezuelan Amazon. The video brings together both a series of documents and satellite images about the mining, as well as sculptural artifacts that Alenso has constructed which simulate the gold extraction process and allude to the socioeconomic crisis generated by these practices and their lethal impact upon the ecosystem.

En el mismo río therefore must be read as an energizing and enhancing of relationships and iconographies which reach further than the Amazon ecocide and its communal and social consequences. Within these parameters, the aim of the exhibition is to promote an expansive wave that ripples across other frequencies and establishes links between space, time and content.

Beyond any reflections on how this very real problem will affect their own existence, at the heart of Katherine Di Turi and Piers Veness' *En el mismo río* is an emotional drive towards the environmental imperative. They suggest that there is a need for the collective consciousness to consider the environmental and climatic problems that we suffer locally and globally due to the unscrupulous actions of humankind on nature.

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