

ROMEOS, LUCHADORXS E INSECTO

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DORA GARCÍA

ROMEOS, LUCHADORXS E INSECTO, EXPANDED

Pilar Rubí

“Romeos, luchadorxs e insecto” is a compendium, a synthesis of Dora García’s artistic practices, displayed via four inter-linked projects that propose to the spectator a repositioning regarding history, social conduct and the function of a museum.

This repositioning fits within the artist’s usual *modus operandi*: to explore the mechanisms involved in the relationship between artist, work and public. It is the latter who, by adopting a certain point of view, conditions the relations of meaning between the works themselves and their relation with the institution that hosts them, in this case, the museum. In order to generate this assemblage of relations, García uses media such as performance, photography, text, drawing and video.

The four projects—“Frases de oro” [Golden Phrases], *Luchadorxs*, *Los Romeos* [Romeos] and *The Bug*—belong to four series the artist has been developing and represent an updating of the work itself through research processes that incorporate a contextualised reading of the whole corpus that materialises in situ.

Dora García’s work intentionally questions us and in that way immediately captures our attention. As soon as we pass through the entrance to the exhibition at Es Baluard Museu, we notice a phrase, written on the wall in golden letters, that attracts and silently magnetises us: *Si pudiera desear algo* [If I Could Wish for Something]. Like a grand slogan, it enunciates that which, when read, activates a spring in our thoughts. In the blink of an eye and without moving, we have travelled far, each of us embarking on an introspective journey of an undetermined distance. That instant, that moment, which lasts as long as each one of us wants it to, changes and transforms the relationship we establish with our surroundings, with the museum, which is no longer a neutral

Dora García, *The Bug*, 2023. Installation. Pastel drawing on nine wood panels, dimensions variable. Courtesy of Galerie Michel Rein, Paris

container, empty of meaning, but rather becomes a place we inhabit in a more intimate way.

Si pudiera desear algo is part of the series “Frases de oro”, in which the artist proposes the reading of a poetic, evocative and potentially plurisignificant maxim that appears written in gold leaf on the wall of the exhibition room, inviting us to an open interpretation that inevitably anchors us in a specific space and time, and that we complete with our own reading, as in the case of Umberto Eco’s ever-relevant *Opera aperta*, making it an open work that gets updated in each exhibition space.

The inscription actually contains both a longing and a demand. It belongs to a song performed by transgender Mexican musician and composer La Bruja de Texcoco, in Spanish, for one of the films in Dora García’s own *Amor Rojo* [Red Love] trilogy, inspired by the figure of revolutionary feminist politician and thinker Alexandra Kollontai (Saint Petersburg, 1872 – Moscow, 1952), which bears the same title, *If I Could Wish for Something*: “If I could wish for something / I’d wish to be a little happier / but not too happy / because then I’d long for being sad,” goes its chorus. It repurposes a song from the 1930s, written by German composer Friedrich Holländer and performed by Marlene Dietrich, which for García poetically expresses a complex concept: the disillusionment of women due to the delay of the unfulfilled promise made to them by the revolution. The sadness derived from this feeling of abandonment has become both a refuge and a shield. We use pain as a conduit to recognise the suffering of others, which opens up the possibility of a coming together with other struggles.

This alternative slogan is directly linked to the *Luchadoras* project, not only formally through the use of images and text, but also in terms of discourse. It is a piece that recovers memory while at the same time generating a sort of archaeology of the present through 18 posters in which photography is combined with slogans of feminist struggles, many of them present in demonstrations over the past five years. The images run chronologically from the month of August 1936, during

the Spanish Civil War, and we can see the *milicianas* of the women’s battalion on the Son Carrió front in Mallorca, but also the most recent International Women’s Day protests on 8 March in different cities. They remind us critically and collectively that the process of women’s emancipation began a long time ago and continues to be an ongoing process, full of desire (*Si pudiera desear algo*).

The interaction between performers’ and spectators’ bodies in the museum is made explicit in *Los Romeos* and *The Bug*. In *Los Romeos*, Dora García bases the work on a historic occurrence which took place during the years of the Cold War (1947–1991). Markus Wolf, head of the Secret Services of the German Democratic Republic (Stasi), developed the Romeo Method to put into circulation young, attractive agents whose mission was to seduce lonely secretaries in order to gain access to the confidential files of their bosses in the Federal Republic of Germany. Inspired by these events, the *Los Romeos* performance is set in motion at Es Baluard Museu, and the public is informed of it by means of a massive poster in the space. Various performers casually circulate around the rooms of the museum, approaching visitors and trying to engage with them in cheerful and polite conversation, which may evolve into a deeper relationship or friendship. Knowing this, how will Es Baluard Museu’s public to any gesture of kindness and interest from a stranger? Will they be constantly suspicious? Will these kindnesses be well received despite the suspicion that they are mediated by a contract between the performer and the museum?

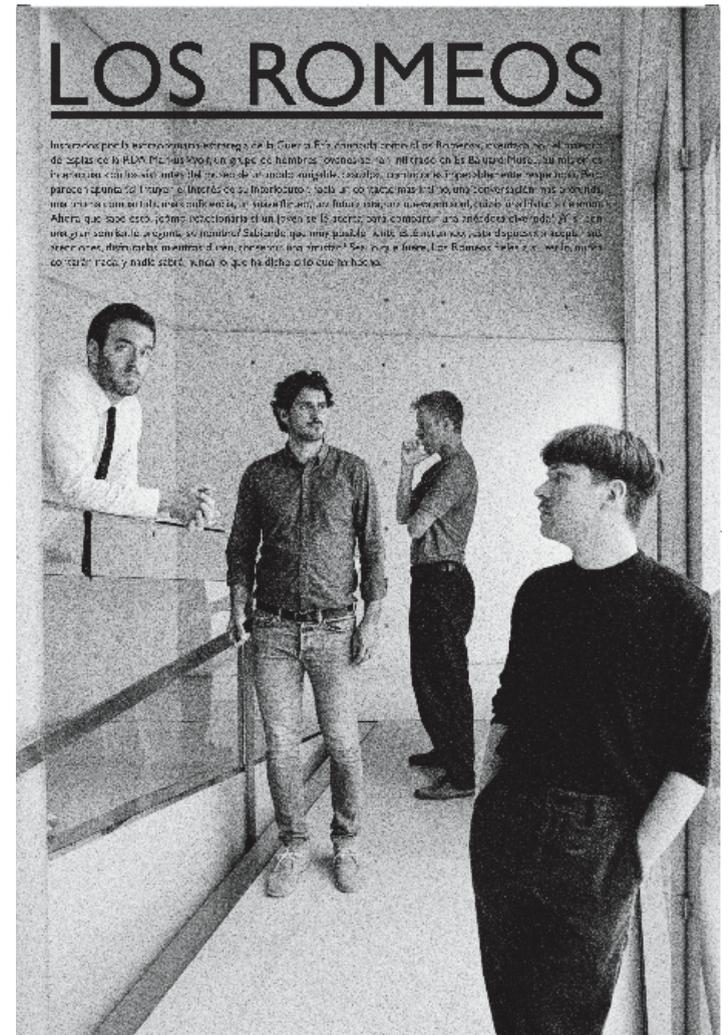
The itinerary concludes with *The Bug*, an installation of drawings on nine blackboards that manifest the intersection of the visual arts, the performing arts and literature present in the artist’s practice. On the front side of the work are nine drawings that condense the nine scenes of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s *The Bedbug* (1929), written months before his suicide. This piece uses the science fiction theme of time travel to speak of the disenchantment of revolution, the

cyclical nature of history and the existence of an accident, an insect, a bug, which prevents this cyclical structure from passing without casualties. On the reverse side, a timeline that will be created collectively to analyse the present and its actors.

The Bug is a work of a collective and relational nature. It will be activated various times during the second week of November by means of a specific programme of performances in a public rehearsal format, allowing instant feedback from the audience so that no one present is left out.

In the same week and in a single one-day screening, Dora García will present *Amor Rojo* (work in progress, 2023–2024). The film forms part of the aforementioned trilogy based on Marxist feminist Kollontai, once Soviet ambassador to Mexico, whose powerful ideas continue to appear in the so-called fourth wave of feminism, the engine of which is in Latin America, above all in Mexico, Argentina and Chile.

This double programme complements and completes the artist's solo exhibition project, which can be seen for the first time at Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma.



Dora García, *Los Romeos* [Romeos], 2008. Performance and printed material (poster), variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist



Dora García, *Luchadorxs*, 2023. Digital print. Set of eighteen posters, 98 x 68 cm each. Courtesy of the artist

IN CONVERSATION WITH DORA GARCÍA

by Eva González-Sancho Bodero

EGSB: One of your “Frases de oro” [Golden Phrases], presented on two occasions to date, in Catalan and English, respectively, states: *Ella tiene muchos nombres* [She Has Many Names]. The phrase—which doesn’t feature in your exhibition at Ès Baluard Museu—seems to me, however, to contain three main constants of your work, intimately interconnected. On the one hand, your interest in feminist activisms and their local, national and international struggles and contexts versus the patriarchal structures of capitalism. On the other hand, the question of authorship, or rather its loss or dissolution for the benefit of the collective and also in opposition to the capitalist system. And thirdly, Love as a revolutionary and disruptive force against the hierarchies we’re subjected to and which, again, are a constituent part of the capitalist social and economic system, that is, the system built on a regime of industrial capital goods as well as land tenure and use based on private property. I’m fascinated, in fact, by the light-hearted, often even amusing way in which you handle these types of issues and content.

Ella tiene muchos nombres leads me to the pieces in this exhibition: the Mallorcan anti-fascist, feminist and, specifically, republican women, fighters and *milicianas* who you make visible through the series “Posters”. They were many. Then, the situation between the public and performers, both with the freedom to act and respond, yet clearly established under the guidelines of a narrative presented in the exhibition room. The public won’t be caught off guard. And finally, the projection of the latest *Amor Rojo* [Red Love] film (in its final stages of completion), as well as the golden phrase that is present in the exhibition: *Si pudiera desear algo* [If I Could Wish for Something].

Can you tell me about these four pieces? And if you could wish for something, Dora, what would it be?

dg: “Frases de oro” are a series of pieces that began in 2002 and that, like the rest of the work, have evolved with me, adopting different themes, moods, terminologies, during these more than twenty years in which I’ve been producing them. The golden phrases *Ella tiene muchos nombres* and *Si pudiera desear algo*, as well as *Revolución, cumple tu promesa* [Revolution, Keep Your Promise] (all from 2022), come out of the same period and research. If there’s one theme that’s constant in the work I do, it’s the attempt to understand the relationship between artistic practice and political practice. Perhaps because throughout my education, in the 1980s and 1990s, I was taught that art and politics should be kept strictly separate, seeing as the worst thing that could happen to art, my teachers used to tell me, was for it to be “propagandist”—the prototype of bad art was socialist realism, a style I’ve made peace with since then. But, well, even then, in the early 1990s, I realised that what was actually being done was to bury the very rich political conceptual tradition, the politically committed and at the same time very formally sophisticated art of Félix González-Torres, of Hélio Oiticica, of Ana Mendieta, of Lee Lozano, or of Esther Ferrer, for example. And it wasn’t buried innocently, it was buried because it was necessary to promote “apolitical” art (you can’t be more political than when you are apolitical, that means accepting and reinforcing the status quo, and the status quo is always disgusting, it’s an accomplice of injustice). Because of all this, and because I realised that these relations between art and politics were more complex than simply a question of content, and that they had to do with forms, with formats and with circuits, well, this is the main theme of my work. It has gone through different phases, and around 2018, I focused a lot on, let’s say, the most radical feminist genealogies, the ones furthest from the comfortable and liberal feminism that has given us such repulsive

aberrations as terfism (trans-exclusionary “feminism”). These more combative feminist genealogies, centred on the most marginalised (as is the case of trans women and men), seemed to me to be directly linked to the revolutions of the beginning of the century (many, but mainly two: the Soviet and the Mexican) and their principles, so identified with sexual freedoms and other modes of family and society—principles that were abandoned and came to nothing, but their memory endured. I was interested in that memory and in seeing how it has surfaced in what’s happening now, and therefore the reading of Alexandra Kollontai, Gloria Anzaldúa and the observation of the chants from the demonstrations that have taken place, especially since 2015, following the Green Wave in Argentina, etc. Those phrases come from there, and are very contemporary; in comparison to earlier ones, such as *El arte es para todos, pero solo una elite lo sabe* [Art Is for Everyone, but Only the Elite Knows It], from 2003, a period when I was more focused on the social function of art and the art institution. That’s how it evolves.

The issue of love has always been at the heart of the “revolutionary struggle”, and although I’m far from being a revolutionary (I’m more of a “mere observer” type, who sometimes dares to believe in change), I’ve always been very impressed by Che Guevara’s famous phrase: “A revolutionary is a man in love.” In fact, I believe that love, not understood as an exclusive relationship between two people, but as the cohesion of a community that wants the best for everyone within that community and displays solidarity and tenderness to each and every one of them, is what will really change the world. It isn’t simple; and, of course, it’s an idea as old as the world. But I like to think of a love as something that’s far removed from this commercial idea that’s sold to us (the family as a unit of consumption and production, genetic inheritance equivalent to the inheritance of capital). A love that, on the contrary, would blow up all those structures that are, at heart, structures of selfishness and privilege.

What more to say... All these ideas correspond to a series of readings that have certainly changed the way I see the world. I'd always thought of artistic practice as something marginal, something done by social outcasts and misfits, and I was very satisfied with that idea, but I've realised that in reality this concept of the "marginalised artist" is nothing more than a commercial format, with the function of deactivating, in every possible way, the subversive potential that art can have—and that which is subversive is always directly related to the collective. That's why fleeing from the notion of the unique author, of the "genius" (luckily, as the Guerrilla Girls say, we women don't have to go through the embarrassment of being called that), of the unique and unrepeatable work, is a way of dynamiting this continuous domestication of art. But it's difficult.

If I could wish for something, I would wish for exactly what it says in the song from which the phrase is taken: "(...) If I could wish for something, I'd wish to be a little happier, but not too happy, because then I'd long for being sad..."¹

EGSB: The connection between your work and fiction is present in many of your pieces. *The Bug* involves a lot of fictionalised narratives, it's about analysing our present in terms of repetition, melancholia and action. I'd like to talk to you about the role of fiction in your work and, in particular, about your relationship with the reading of history. "It's not the past, but the future that determines the present." Can you clarify this cycle for us?

DG: I believe that everything is fiction, to varying degrees (more or less based on real events). This is now very well understood since the concept of "narrative" and "winning

1. This phrase is part of a song by Friedrich Hollaender, "Wenn ich mir was wünschen dürfte", covered for Dora García's film *Amor Rojo* by La Bruja de Texcoco under the title "Nostalgia".

the narrative war" became popular. The U.S. "won the narrative war" in World War II, and on a global level we've accepted the idea that the U.S. is a force for good and can therefore drop atomic bombs and kill millions of civilians with after-effects that last for generations, invade sovereign countries, hold thousands of people in detention for decades without trial, prop up dictators as it did in Spain, overthrow democratic governments as it did in Chile, train assassins as it did in Operation Condor, etc. We believe that they are "forced to do it" to defend themselves and defend us, because they're "the good guys"—we've seen thousands of films that prove it. The narrative is falling apart at the seams, in the same way Israel's narrative has completely fallen apart already, and the question is: Which narrative is going to replace it? What exactly was the Cold War? Did the Soviet Union ever have a chance? Why have democratic governments in former colonies always been suppressed by means of blood and fire? Why is the Haitian revolution (1791) never spoken about as one of the great revolutions alongside the French revolution (1789)? There are thousands of narratives to be reconstructed, new perspectives to be practised, texts to be rescued, forgotten figures to be recovered as a matter of urgency. And all this has to be done based on the future. For there to be love, there has to be a future, there has to be a project for life and society—that's the project we want, the one that makes us look back and view in a different way what's been presented to us as obvious, even though it's far from being so. *The Bug* is an adaptation of Vladimir Mayakovsky's play *The Bedbug*,² a very interesting play for many reasons, one of them being that it proposes time travel as a way of understanding the past, present and future. And a second reason

2. *The Bedbug* (Russian: Клоп, Klop) is a play by Vladimir Mayakovsky written between 1928 and 1929 and published originally by *Molodaya Gvardiya* magazine (no. 3 and 4, 1929), and then as a book by Gosizdat in 1929.

is the disillusionment with the revolution, a very painful and bitter feeling that completely permeates Mayakovsky's text. And I think that what's even more interesting than revolutions, which are always incomplete, are the disappointments that revolutions produce, because these disappointments are always the seed for a new revolution, one that will go even further, in historical, poetic and social terms.

EGSB: The question of the distribution of content via different channels and times seems to be characteristic of your work. Posters, books, works on the internet, films, performances, etc. are in many cases open processes that you continue nurturing and that can reappear in a different way days, months or years later... Some of your characters could come back to life, and your phrases (in many cases emancipatory in the face of complex situations) continue to circulate, and therefore to act. I've always wondered to what extent these processes can survive your own existence, and your own authorship. Do you think it's possible? And is this something that matters to you?

DG: I'm not worried about posterity, if that's the question. I think there's this paradox: we have an obligation to be generous, to be fair, to create beauty if we get the chance, and at the same time be very conscious that nobody will remember us, and that's not a problem either. How many people have been forgotten, and how many would've deserved to be remembered. On the other hand, I think my work is better than I am and has a life of its own over which I don't have much control, and which often surprises me, and that's a positive thing, something I'm happy about. It gives me joy to come across my characters after many years, to have someone tell me how they discovered this or that piece, and how perhaps those pieces have inspired other artists to create their own work. How my work—or what my work has become—can help to see the world in a slightly different way.

EGSB: I believe you are a revolutionary. And not only in terms of content, as in the case of your reading and reconstruction of past narratives based on the future, but in your use—very ahead of its time in art—of the technological formats of the 20th century that have radically modified our perception and experience of the world (internet, social media, etc.) and have led to a public sphere steeped in post-truth, and, to a large extent, mediocrity, where the boundaries have disappeared.

I'd like to end this exchange as it began: with a golden phrase, not exhibited in the exhibition, but that seems to me to hover over all the pieces present, and has always given me hope: *El futuro tiene que ser peligroso* [The Future Has to Be Dangerous]. Are we still taking risks?

DG: The phrase is *El futuro debe ser peligroso* [The Future Must Be Dangerous]—which is one of the first “Frases de oro”, and its story is quite funny, because it's a phrase that has caused a lot of reactions. For example, it was exhibited at the Biennale de Rennes, titled “Ce qui vient”, a long time ago (2010), and it inspired a series of graffiti around the city that read, in French, “The future is already dangerous”, and then during the pandemic, comments appeared on social media: “It didn't need to be so dangerous.” Then, quoting Juana de Aizpuru, she once said: “I very much agree, you can't live thinking about a safe future, you have to live with the awareness that the future is always dangerous.” This is true, and goes against the idea that we can control the future. It's obvious we can't, and suddenly the real thing (pandemics, climate change, loss of biodiversity) explodes in the face of our present filled with comfort, electric cars, solar panels and “nothing's going on here”. But, at the same time, there's great bitterness in the phrase, the thought that we're never safe, that we can never breathe easy, and it's also clear that certain rights that we thought were here to stay are being lost every day.



Dora García, *El futuro debe ser peligroso* [The Future must be Dangerous]. “Frases de oro” [Golden phrases] Series, 2003. Gold leaf on wall. View of the exhibition at FRAC Dijon, 2005

Romeos, luchadorxs e insecto
Dora García

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