



# CARLOS MOTTA

Carlos Motta is a New York-based artist whose work engages with histories of queer culture and activism. “Carlos Motta: *Formas de libertad*,” a survey of his career to date, is on view at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Colombia, through February 18, and his exhibition “The Crossing” is at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, through January 21.



**1.** Susana Aikin and Carlos Aparicio, *The Salt Mines*, 1990, video, color, sound, 47 minutes. Sara. **2.** José Leonilson, *Todos os rios* (All the Rivers), 1988, acrylic on canvas, 84¼ x 39¾". **3.** João Pedro Rodrigues, *O ornitólogo* (The Ornithologist), 2016, 2K video, color, sound, 118 minutes. Fernando (Paul Hamy) and Jesus (Xelo Cagiao). **4.** Robin Campillo, *BPM* (Beats per Minute), 2017, 2K video, color, sound, 144 minutes. Thibault (Antoine Reinartz).



## 1

**SUSANA AIKIN AND CARLOS APARICIO, *THE SALT MINES* (1990)** This raw film follows the lives of three Latinx and homeless trans women who lived in abandoned garbage trucks on Manhattan’s West Side piers in the 1990s. Aikin and Aparicio’s committed relationship to their subjects reflects the harsh realities of sex work, drug addiction, and social marginalization. *The Salt Mines* made me nostalgic for a time when hyperformal cinematography and HD imagery weren’t the norm for documentary film.

## 2

**“JOSÉ LEONILSON: EMPTY MAN” (AMERICAS SOCIETY, NEW YORK)** Leonilson’s art breaks my heart. I identify with his queer voice, and I see my and my community’s concerns reflected in his existential compositions about isolation, loss, and death. This small, carefully curated exhibition presents the complexity of his practice, from 1980s abstract paintings to embroideries and drawings that reveal his experience as an HIV-positive man during the AIDS crisis. The show is a first step toward giving Leonilson the place in art history he deserves.

## 3

**JOÃO PEDRO RODRIGUES, *THE ORNITHOLOGIST* (2016)** No filmmaker I know of since Fassbinder has spoken to the complexities of queer desire more succinctly than Rodrigues. His *O Fantasma* (2000) inspired me to dig deep and find a way to confidently express the intersections of my fetishes and the politics of homosexuality through my art. Rodrigues’s final feature is a weirdly religious masterpiece, weaving together biblical narratives, personal history, and queer desire, and drawing from art-historical imagery and fantastical mythologies. Its exquisite structure and challenging story are models for any artist interested in layered, reflexive narratives.

## 4

**ROBIN CAMPILLO, *BPM* (BEATS PER MINUTE) (2017)** A rare and moving look at ACT UP Paris through the lives and AIDS-related deaths of some of its activists, *BPM* (*Beats per Minute*) focuses on the group’s complex discussions of strategies for direct action to resist François Mitterrand’s and the pharmaceutical companies’ ineffectual responses to the AIDS crisis. But for me, the most beautiful part is the love story of Nathan and Sean, a sero-discordant couple who meet at the gatherings, fall in love during the epidemic, and are ultimately separated by death. This is the fictional AIDS film we deserve: informative, politically responsible, and emotionally reflective.

## 5

**“BARBARA HAMMER: EVIDENTIARY BODIES” (LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSEUM OF GAY AND LESBIAN ART, NEW YORK)** Legendary lesbian artist Barbara Hammer makes art with astonishing intimacy and care for her community. Her solid voice (and eye) defies the patriarchal male gaze, delivering works of potent personal and political agency. An enlightening, if incomplete, retrospective that presents decades of work, from her germinal films to performances and intriguing ephemera, this exhibition makes evident Hammer’s subtle sensibility and her ability to tackle issues of individual and collective subjectivities.



# 6

**“LA GUERRA QUE NO HEMOS VISTO” (THE WAR WE HAVEN’T SEEN) (MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO DE BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA)** Artist Juan Manuel Echavarría developed art workshops with demobilized Colombian guerrilla and paramilitary soldiers, who painted their experiences of violence during the war. On view as part of his retrospective “*Ríos y silencios*” (Rivers and Silences), these childlike compositions depict scenes straight out of a horror film. Characters are abused, tortured, and dismembered, and the wall labels narrate the scenes in chilling detail. In light of the recently signed ceasefire between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas, these rare points of view brought tears to my eyes and reminded me that another perspective of the conflict has yet to be told.



# 7

**EMMA REYES, THE BOOK OF EMMA REYES: A MEMOIR (PENGUIN CLASSICS, 2017)** In her fascinating epistolary memoir, painter Emma Reyes speaks about growing up in abject poverty, being abandoned in Colombia, studying with nuns, and becoming an artist. She shares moments of her life in Europe among some of the greatest artists and intellectuals of her generation, all of which occurred while she remained practically unknown. Reyes’s letters to historian Germán Arciniegas were edited into this revelatory autobiography of a self-determined woman who followed her dreams. The harrowing stories illustrate Colombia’s class struggle, but their strength lies in Reyes’s courage to *become* despite countless obstacles.

# 8

**“AIDS AT HOME: ART AND EVERYDAY ACTIVISM” (MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK)** Alternative forms of family and caretaking are central to queer life. Often disavowed and rejected by our biological families, we seek nurturing friendships. This beautiful exhibition looked at caretaking and support during the AIDS crisis and reminded me of a story Frank, my building’s super in Chelsea, told me about his experience of AIDS in the 1990s, when he was the only person caring for a dozen men who would die of the disease. He made daily rounds in the building to ensure these men were clean, eating, and making their medical appointments. He would eventually find them dead and have to let their biological families know the time had come for them, finally, to care.

# 9

**“A THIRD GENDER: BEAUTIFUL YOUTHS IN JAPANESE PRINTS” (JAPAN SOCIETY, NEW YORK)** This delightful exhibition of objects and prints that portray the *wakashu* (beautiful youths) of Japan during the Edo period (1603–1868) was eerily contemporary. These “third-gender” subjects had a special place in Japanese society, and their stories illuminate our current struggle for the recognition of gender-nonconforming identities and sexual minorities.

# 10

**ROOSTER ROCK STATE PARK, CORBETT, OR** Gay men build communities and gender-segregated places to connect socially, culturally, and sexually. Cruising grounds have been defining sites where we can express our (often) unconventional desires in public. Despite the rise of digital cruising culture, there are still places around the world where we meet to play or simply be with one another. This summer my boyfriend and I went to Rooster Rock, a gorgeous beach not far from Portland, Oregon. We were captivated by its beauty and the way it provided visitors sexual freedom—democratically, and at no cost. This natural treasure contained forested alcoves and secluded paths to cruise . . . until a teenager tossed a smoke bomb into the nearby Columbia River Gorge and burned 7,300 acres, including Rooster Rock, to ashes. □

6. Carlos Mario, *Y nadie pregunta por ellos* (No One Asks About Them), 2017, vinyl paint on wood, 39% × 82%. From “*La guerra que no hemos visto*” (The War We Haven’t Seen). 7. Emma Reyes, *Untitled*, 1990, oil on canvas, 51 1/8 × 34 3/8”. 8. L. J. Roberts, *Chaplain Christopher Jones at Home in Harlem*, 2017, embroidery on cotton, 6 × 4”. From “*AIDS at Home: Art and Everyday Activism*.” 9. Artist unknown, presumed portrait of Tomoe Gozen, ca. 1830–35, woodblock print on paper, 6 × 5 1/2”. From “*A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints*.” 10. The artist at Rooster Rock State Park, Corbett, OR, 2017. Photo: John Arthur Peetz.

