REQUIEM FOR MIRRORS AND TIGERS

NAUFUS RAMIREZ-FIGUEROA
At grunt we are very excited to show an ambitious new series of works by Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa and to host the launch of a new publication by If I Can’t Dance, Requiem for Mirrors and Tigers (2015-2017) features six new performances produced in six locations around Europe and America. The series, curated by Susan Gibb, is shown for its first time at grunt.

Special thanks to If I Can’t Dance and to Susan Gibb.

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa’s cycle of performances, Requiem for Mirrors and Tigers, was commissioned and produced as part of Corpus, an international network for commissioning new performance work. Corpus is: Bulegoa z/b, Bilbao; CAC, Vilnius; KW, Berlin; If I Can’t Dance, Amsterdam; Playground, STUK and M - Museum Leuven; and Tate Modern, London. Corpus is co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

In response to our invitation to create a new work, artist Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa requested he take the opportunity to exhaust his interest in the Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996). The topic defines his practice as it is intimately connected to his biography. Born in 1978 in Guatemala City, Ramírez-Figueroa grew up amidst an intensification of the war, forced Ramírez-Figueroa and his surviving family to flee via Mexico to Canada. It was in Canada during his teenage years that the artist developed his art practice that spans performance, video, watercolour, sculpture, and installation. He often uses his displacement from, and more recent return to, Guatemala as the lens through which to explore the entanglement of history and form.

So how can one disentangle oneself from such a defining history? Is there a way to move beyond the material and psychological impact of war? How can one become and approach this otherwise? As an attempt, Ramírez-Figueroa proposed a cycle of performances developed and presented at intermittent moments across the commission’s twenty-four month period. He staged these among a network of presentation partners—Tate Modern, London; If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Amsterdam; CAPC musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; and Casa do Povo, São Paulo. Importantly, the artist approached “the stage” as both distinct spatial location in which performances would occur, and as temporal points, periods, or steps in a process of development, as moments to be passed through.

Likewise the meaning of “duration”—in terms of its most common application within the discipline of performance—became double: it came to refer not only to the endurance of the body through a physical act across an extended measure of time, but also to the larger, more unruly understanding of time’s passage. As writer and curator André Lepecki reflects via a reading of Henri Bergson:

**A REQUIEM FOR MIRRORS AND TIGERS**

**INTRODUCTION**

by Glenn Alteen

**A REQUIEM FOR MIRRORS AND TIGERS: A CYCLE OF PERFORMANCES**

by Frédérique Bergholtz and Susan Gibb

If I Can’t Dance, Amsterdam

**by Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa**
century artistic tradition of tableaux vivant (living picture). Watercolour
would construct a single image likened to the popular nineteenth-
Within this general schema, for each new stage of the cycle the artist
clearly demarcated the space of performance as theatrical, drew a line
lighting bars also lit the space, carefully laid on the ground by Ramírez-
source of light. In contrast with natural illumination, HMI or fluorescent
day to the next to full metaphorical effect, the moon's glow was often a
Ramírez-Figueroa further evoked the dream state by presenting each
spew forth in excess, with their amplified tones and scales suspended
and symbolic realm of the dream. Colours and materials overflow and
(2015–2017)—set within the subjective
A
(2016); and Terminus
Illusion of
Linnaeus in
(2016);
This question of how time is felt is at the heart of Ramírez-Figueroa's
transformation and in which time is no longer measured,
between the ego and external objects” endures a profound
quasi-unmediated exchange between a conscious subject

A Requiem for Mirrors and Tigers (2015–2017)—set within the subjective
and symbolic realm of the dream. Colours and materials overflow and
spew forth in excess, with their amplified tones and scales suspended
between a haze of memories and imaginative flights of fancy, grounded
by the unerring and incontinent presence of life within a
theatrical space.

Ramírez-Figueroa further evolved the dream state by presenting each
performance at night-time. Using the transitional passage from one
the day to the next for metaphorical effect, the moon's glow was often a source of light.
In contrast with natural illumination, HMI or fluorescent

In thinking of the weight of history latent in A Requiem for Mirrors and Tigers, it is crucial to consider the artist’s careful choice of
the verb “exhaust” rather than “extinguish” to name his intention
in dealing with this history's force. This distinction is particularly
relevant to his decision to film the performances—with some never
occurring before a live audience, performed only for the camera—
for example, the underlying content might cause one to expect
a literal references to the war are transfigured, most often into

Ramírez-Figueroa’s memories are those of his child self, a view from
from which this story of the war is narrated. One is reminded that

The staging they divine, look nothing like photographic reportage
documenting the Guatemalan Civil War. Within the cycle, any
literate references to the war are transfigured, most often into
something softer or more domestic. Their benign quality both
relieves and amplifies the traumatic tension for which they stand in
this abstraction is also at the forefront of the personal position
from which this story of the war is narrated. One is reminded that
Ramírez-Figueroa’s memories are those of his child self, a view from
before language and rational understanding would enable him to
give a name to what was being seen, as well as from the stretched
and taut space of daily reality, where life goes on even while it is
under threat.

For example, the underlying content might cause one to expect
skeletons or other visceral representations of the dead to crowd his performances. Instead, one sees furniture stripped of its upholstery
to reveal its bare frame; in place of a gun-toting government army or
militia, children hold fantastical oversized props; where there might
be an anonymous victim of war or torture, a figure is defined, with
a well-dressed and friendly ghost appearing. Similarly, the colours are
not those you would expect given the subject: luminous whites, ultramarine blues, azure blues, and vivid yellows—no red in sight. As astutely
observed by writer and editor Matthew McLean in a profile on
Ramírez-Figueroa, even when the performance involves physical harm
(byارة’s hand) or shedding of blood into an im, or sewing buttons into his
skin) no visible blood is shed.2

On Ramírez-Figueroa’s use of colour across his oeuvre, artist,
educator, and social justice worker Betty Martin has suggested that
he is a two-dimensional artist, and whilst the music and dance of his


2 Naurão Ramírez-Figueroa’s cycles of performance was commissioned and produced as part of Group C, network for performance practice: Group is Bahagia Collective (Bilbao); CAAC, Kunst; KCET, Berlin; C/O Dance, Amsterdam; Playground GUT & M - Museum. Leuven); and Tate Modern, London, and is co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union. Its structure assists artists in developing work over time and
in realising in, through different initiatives within the network collaborating on
the presentation of these works at different institutional locations. Ramírez-Figueroa seized
the potential of this network structure, as a way to create an elaborated and operatic scaled
performance.

3 Matthew McLean, “Don’t Go Seeking Answers in the Earth,” KCET, 14 October 2016,
https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/naufus-ramirez-figueroas-color-and-tone-metaphors, 14 October 2016,


Matthieu, “Don’t Go Seeking Answers in the Earth,” KCET, 14 October 2016,

Matthew McLean, “Don’t Go Seeking Answers in the Earth,” KCET, 14 October 2016,

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