

Sergio Vega

Latin American Art Museum Department of Parrots

IRL



" A comb, a traditional painting, a sewing machine, an umbrella, a table may find a place in the museum in different sections, depending on their classification. We see sculpture in a separate space, paintings in another, ceramics and porcelains..., stuffed animals....Each space is in turn compartmentalized, perhaps intended to be a section - snakes, insects, fish, birds - susceptible to being divided into departments - parrots, gulls, eagles. "

Marcel Broodthaers, Ten Thousand Francs Reward, pg. 46

IRL is pleased to host the "Latin American Art Museum, Department of Parrots, Section Décors", to present "A Summer Garden" and "Genesis According to Parrots" by Sergio Vega.

The artist's endeavor is intended as a continuation of the work initiated by Marcel Broodthaers' *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles*. Vega's project differs substantially from Broodthaers' in subject matter primarily because parrots are not eagles. If in Broodthaers' work the eagle signifies imperialism, in Vega's, the parrot stands for the colonized subject and its uncertain fate. In that context, the artist advocates the role of the parrot as the allegory of an emerging post-colonial avant-garde. "Perhaps because I saw the seed of a Dadaist in its attitude, a playful, mischievous manner of dismantling the logic of language and a relentless predilection for the profane, that I became interested in the parrot and its dramatic potential as the main character of a story... I sense in the parrot the backbone of a true revolutionary.

After all, the revolution would be a Dionysian event, or would not be at all..." (Parrot Reflections, Sergio Vega, 2009)

"A Summer Garden" is a forest-like decor in which the viewer must part the braches of palms in order to discover the art behind the vegetation. This dialectic between culture and nature leads to the exciting discovery of an array of appropriated imagery that illustrates plausible configurations of natural history, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, art, architecture, design, music, consumer culture and fashion. If the task of the western rational is to expand its reach and attain further specialization at mastering the world, the authority of the museum to name and assert knowledge could then be diversified into multiple possible disciplines and sub-disciplines.

"A Summer Garden" is also a metaphor for an earthly paradise located not in Mesopotamia, but in the heart of South America. The texts that accompany the illustrations are unaltered citations from "El Paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo" by Antonio de León Pinelo. In this book, released in Seville in 1650, the author demonstrated that the Garden of Eden was located in the center of South America.

Has the urban subject forever lost its primeval connection with nature? Can art serve to reestablish it by fostering an interactive engagement with the viewer? Could a return to Eden (or a vacation in Latin America) finally restore that lost bond?

On his second voyage, Christopher Columbus sent a letter to the Queen of Castile indicating that he had found the entrance to the terrestrial paradise described by Marco Polo. His assertion initiated the myth of South America as "paradise found." The discovery of many species of parrots in South America, particularly in Brazil also contributed to the proliferation of this belief. "For the parrot occupied a special place in the traditional imagery of paradise. All other animals have lost the power of speech as a result of the original sin; the parrot alone had retained this faculty that linked it with human beings. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the parrot was always a 'bird of paradise.' In addition, parrots live to a great age; they may therefore have experienced the earthly paradise." ¹

The chronological account of the events that took place in the Garden of Eden was, for the first time, registered in 1649 in the treatise entitled "Historia sacra Paradisi terrestris et sanctissimi innocentiae status" by the Sicilian Jesuit Agostino Inveges. In Europe, the discovery and colonization of the New World had triggered an array of debates and speculations about the actual location and the chronology of the events described in the Genesis. Mythology and the temporal and spatial configurations of the imaginary realm

were then easily confused with history and geography. The intellectual endeavor at stake was, in part, an attempt to reconcile the theological account of the history of the world with the newly developing scientific discourses of natural history.

If terrestrial paradise was located in South America, its colonization must have been a biblical incident. "Genesis According to Parrots" is a video installation featuring the testimony of several parrots' eyewitness account of the events that took place in the Garden of Eden. In the video's narrative, the role of the creator becomes that of the colonizer, engaging with the colonized in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic fashion. In the parrots' accounts, the colonizer "played God" in an attempt to re-create the other to resemble him, yet the act ultimately confirmed that the colonized was doomed to fail at becoming like its master. After filming the testimony of these parrots the artist wrote, "On my way back to town, I contemplated that possibly one day these parrots would lead a massive biblical exodus to the northern side of the globe. Gradually, their colorful plumage would invade the pale skies of the northern cities. As part of the effects of climate change their presence would seem natural. Comfortably installed on top of the highest buildings, these parrots would do enough talking to run the world."

"Genesis According to Parrots" has been exhibited at the 51st Biennale di Venezia, Italy, and at "ARS 06: Sense of the Real," International Art Biennial, Finland, among other venues. "A Summer Garden" has been exhibited at "Programme Tropic-Vegétal (Lost in Paradise)" at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, and at "De Ponta Cabeça," Bienal Ceará America, Fortaleza, Brazil. Both projects are shown for first time in the US. The installations are featured in the permanent collections of Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Finland, Dragão do Mar, Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Ceará, Fortaleza, Brazil, and the Berezdivin art collection in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

IRL is an art space run by artists Eddie Negron and Marla Rosen.
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1. *Visão do Paraíso*, Sergio Buarque De Holanda, pg. 207-9