



Title

Patricia Domínguez

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Patricia Domínguez

by Anna Souter • 22.08.2019

Patricia Domínguez's solo presentation *Green Irises* at Gasworks, London, consists of a multi-screen video installation integrated with a series of altars and totemic figures **FIG.1**. Drawing on the artist's long-term exploration of South American ethnobotany and indigeneity, the exhibition examines and imagines healing practices that emerge in the liminal spaces created by colonialism.

Across the gallery's two exhibition spaces, human and botanical objects and images are combined with technology **FIG.2**. There are holograms, dead flowers, resin models of hands in various positions of prayer or blessing, items of clothing printed with images from a poorly worded Google search, fake rocks, emojis, plaits of hair, feathers, pottery, new-age crystals and masks. The titular 'green irises' appear in the form of a pair of videographic green eyes, whose gaze roves over the exhibition space like a fantastical surveillance-era T.J. Eckleburg. There is a lot going on: a web – or network – of associations, allusions and experiences. This is ethnobotany with a post-internet aesthetic, a hyperlinking of how we relate to indigeneity, colonialism, plants and computing.

At the centre of the presentation is the twenty-five-minute video installation *Eyes of Plants*, which combines digital animation with filmed footage of actors performing healing rituals old and new, showing both traditional indigenous techniques and Western 'wellness' routines. Many of these healing practices involve roses, introduced to South America by European settlers and adopted as a powerful mystical symbol by the unique Catholic culture that developed as a result of colonisation. In the legend of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for instance, the Virgin Mary caused roses to bloom for the first indigenous American saint, Juan Diego. The film's hallucinatory scenes – in which Domínguez employs her family as actors – bring together indigenous characters, plants and contemporary technology in an uneasy bricolage. In one sequence, a man lying on a modern massage table is stroked with roses. In another, an older woman spits into a plastic tube for a DNA test before unplugging the USB connection from an LED light therapy mask worn by the younger woman beside her **FIG.3**. Some characters' faces are superimposed with emojis (Domínguez frequently chooses the 'Pile of Poo' emoji). Viewers are left with a powerful sense of uncertainty over which cultural thread will prove dominant – or whether cultural superimposition ever really succeeds in blotting out the layer beneath it.

Central to the film (and to the holographic animation beamed out

in front of the video screen) is the *jarro pato* – a South American ritual vessel shaped like a duck, which is often depicted weeping, combining human and animal attributes **FIG.4**. In the artist's newsprint publication that accompanies the show, Domínguez comments on the duck vase's tears, which she claims:



Fig. 1 Installation view of *Patricia Domínguez: Green Irises* at Gasworks, London, 2019. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Marco Godoy).

run down into a river of cosmic weeping. We all have cried the exact same recycled waters. The same tears running down the cheeks of indigenous peoples run also through the cheeks of settler-colonists, eventually falling down from the eyes of our contemporaries, glued to the screens of their mobile phones. *Little by little, all these tears have reshaped my face.*¹

The text is accompanied by the 'Crying-Face' emoji; perhaps this little yellow symbol is the contemporary *jarro pato*, a talisman that both expresses and safely externalises our emotions.



Fig. 2 Installation view of *Patricia Domínguez: Green Irises* at Gasworks, London, 2019. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Marco Godoy).

This externalisation – akin to the fetish – can be found throughout *Green Irises*. The video monitors are set up on a sort of cybernetic altar. The screens are arranged like a triptych, with the central film flanked by the artist's green eyes, a symbol of her European colonial heritage. Holographic lilies bloom below, playing out a parody of organic growth and reminding us of our tendency to project our emotions onto flowers and plants in human rituals of love and death.

The totemic figures placed around the room could be interpreted as worshippers at this technological shrine, but they also appear

altar-like themselves **FIG.5**. Clothes give them a humanoid appearance and they have both hair and hands; but the positioning of these hands in gestures of blessing recalls devotional statues from the Catholic tradition. The figures are raised on pedestal-like fake rocks **FIG.6**, and the inclusion of dried leaves, feathers and printed pictures of material goods **FIG.7** recall offerings left at shrines, suggesting the fetishistic worship of human-like figures.

This notion of objects as personages – as both worshipers and worshipped – perhaps relates to what Domínguez refers to in her text as ‘channelling’, or ‘connecting oneself to another entity so as to call down intangible energies’. She notes that: ‘When I channelled the *jarro pato*, I became that vessel. But now this object stared back at me. I could see myself through its ancestral eyes’. In this context, objects can become interfaces for interconnection, from the ancestral vase to the smartphones and screens incorporated into the installation.

Interconnection, or recognising the inextricability of all human and nonhuman lifeforms, is a fundamental principle of emerging ecological and ethnobotanical studies, as well as of many indigenous world views and Eastern religions. Separation, on the other hand, is a key premise of colonialism, capitalism and anthropocentrism. Domínguez’s practice as an artist helps us to recognise the multidirectional interconnectivity of existence and to accept a worldview in which mud and flowers and rocks can offer both spiritual and physical therapy. Domínguez’s work puts her in the position of a healer, helping viewers to recognise new ways of negotiating a broken world and to find new possibilities of living, like plants, between the cracks of modernity.



Fig. 3 Still from *Eyes of Plants*, by Patricia Domínguez. 2019. 4K video, 24:54 min. (Gasworks, London).

Green Irises offers a many-sided narrative about living in an ongoing state of transformation. Her video and totemic figures feel inherently open: to interpretation, to different worldviews, to

technological change. They suggest that our current ways of living are making us sick, but that we still retain the power of healing ourselves through our interactions with plants and objects – as long as we retain an open mind.



Fig. 4 Still from *Eyes of Plants*, by Patricia Domínguez. 2019. 4K video, 24:54 min. (Gasworks, London).



Fig. 5 Installation view of *Patricia Domínguez: Green Irises* at Gasworks, London, 2019. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Andy Keate).



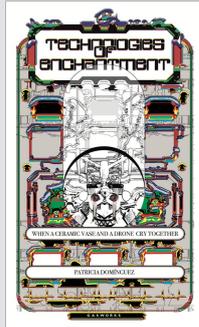
Fig. 6 Installation view of *Patricia Domínguez: Green Irises* at Gasworks, London, 2019. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Andy Keate).



Fig. 7 Installation view of *Patricia Domínguez: Green Irises* at Gasworks, London, 2019. (Courtesy the artist; photograph Andy Keate).

Exhibition details Patricia Domínguez: Green Irises
Gasworks, London
4th July–8th September 2019

About this book



Technologies of Enchantment: When a Ceramic Vase and a Drone Cry Together
By Patricia Domínguez
Gasworks, London, 2019

Footnotes

- 1** P. Domínguez: *Technologies of Enchantment: When a Ceramic Vase and a Drone Cry Together*, London (Gasworks) 2019, p.2

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