

*Real Artists Don't
Have Teeth*
2009
Performed by
Jakob Tamm
Installation view
'L'Inadecuato,
Lo Inadecuado,
The Inadequate'
Spanish Pavilion,
54th Venice Biennale
2011



Notes & Queries

The collaborations and performances of **Dora García**, who is currently representing Spain in the Venice Biennale, engage with radicalism, inadequacy and the excluded *by Max Andrews*

L'Inadeguato, Lo Inadecuado, The Inadequate
2011
Artist book



Dora García's art of the last several years deliberately refuses an overview; like Herman Melville's scribe Bartleby, it 'prefers not to' conform to expectations while specializing in a kind of plagiarism. As a James Joyce scholar proposes in *The Inadequate* (2011), one of two videos which form a part of 'L'Inadeguato, Lo Inadecuado, The Inadequate', García's project for the Spanish Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale, holding out for any *dénouement* in the Irishman's novels is futile. Instead, we're destined to endlessly perpetuate readings and interpretations, to wander or dance around them. Similarly, García's recent work could be catalogued under the title of her series 'Mad Marginal' (2009–10): wilfully inconclusive, it's composed of a perpetual inquiry into, and recirculation of, the work of various misfit artists, writers, poets and comedians – 'inadequate' and volatile figures whom she admires for their singular indifference to success and convention. Taking the form of situations or performances which are

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more-or-less scripted, her works are often modified through their presentation or trigger loops of feedback. Repurposed for Venice, *Instant Narrative* (2006), for example, involves someone sitting with a laptop hooked up to a projector as they type a text describing the visitors' behaviour in the Pavilion, a scrivener–surveyor situation, while *Rehearsal/Retrospective* (2010) comprised coaching about how to enact further performed pieces by García, including *The Artist Without Works* (2008), a speech in the form of a tour about artists who refuse to produce anything.

'L'Inadeguato ...' is an exasperating, accumulative performance-in-progress and partial retrospective which resists adding up to a 'proper' exhibition. Dialogues, more usually supplementary events to the institutional display of art, are the core content, and the entire central atrium of the Pavilion is taken up by a platform that hosts a multitude of conversations, monologues and presentations throughout the six months of the Biennale,

which focuses on the Italian underground scene since the 1960s. Developed with the help of a team of collaborators including Marco Baravalle, Barbara Casavecchia, Eva Fabbris, Peep-Hole gallery in Milan and Cesare Pietroiusti, and expanding to include almost 100 participants through the Biennale, the exhibition has grown into an unlicensed, unregulated and undocumented research project which exorcises and airs radical and marginal art, politics, literature, gay subculture and anti-psychiatry with their lines of inheritance alongside the position of the dissident, the excluded, the exiled, the unofficial and the obsessional. The 'players' who represent themselves and the work of others in this meticulous *pavilion des refusés* comprise novelists, philosophers, sociologists, activists, publishers, cinema directors, economists, curators, historians, psychiatrists, urbanists, architects and distinguished art veterans such as Gianfranco Baruchello and Nanni Balestrini. The 'players' who are represented by others – a small troupe of

actors incarnating characters in dialogue routines which run throughout the months of the Biennale – include the irrepressible filmmaker-performer Jack Smith; playwright, director and latterly psychiatric patient Antonin Artaud; and stand-up comedian and obscenity-outlaw Lenny Bruce (all three characters in García's one-man play *Real Artists Don't Have Teeth*, 2009), while the reading of Bruce's routines also comprises the work entitled *Censorship/Just Because Everything is Different it Does Not Mean That Anything Has Changed: The Essential Lenny Bruce* (2008). Charles Filch, a bit-part beggar from Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), whose incarnation through actors on the streets of Münster was García's contribution to Skulptur Projekte Münster in 2007, also put in appearances.

Gilles Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1997) is a collection of studies on writers and artists, some of whom might easily find a place in García's panoply of real and impersonated characters – including Lewis Carroll, T.E. Lawrence and Alfred Jarry – under the conceit that evaluating the qualities of their 'minor' work is much like diagnosing a new rare disease. Not uncoincidentally, such afflictions frequently bear the name of the clinicians who first agree that a particular set of symptoms are meaningful. Likewise the Pavilion's congestion of proper names, both known and unknown, and its equivalence of detail, similarly recognizes, and suffers from, eponymous aesthetic positions – (Jack) Smith's or (Lenny) Bruce's Syndromes, perhaps. Correspondingly engaging and unreliable, ostentatious and banal, trivial and profound, the project is thus an explicit defence of radicalism, dignity and truth, being comprised of critical analysis as well as being 'bad form', and always something of a joke. Or, in other words, as the García-designed T-shirt – that accompanied an exhibition, which included works by Jack Smith and Guy de Cointet, that the artist co-curated this summer at Museo de Art Contemporáneo de Castilla y León – read: 'Yes We Camp'.

Yet it is the writings of the pioneering Venetian psychiatrist Franco Basaglia that are the most contagious syndrome here. His vision to outlaw mental hospitals in Italy in favour of integrating 'madness' into society found its clearest expression in his work as a director of the hospital in the city of Trieste in the 1970s. Basaglia's articulation of the patient as a victim of the destructive institution offered García a framework for considering anti- or de-institutionalization, both in insane detail and through a dubious stance towards her own evident success and presence at the centre of the institution of art in the guise of the grandest biennale. By taking on Basaglia's accusation that 'an institution is something that does not change', García's accumulative occupation of the Pavilion instigated something akin to the de-institutionalization of institutional critique as a form of art practice only capable of producing a generalized aggression towards the fabric of the white cube. Instead, García's dissent in not offering an easily digestible public entity with the expected obligations of legibility, prudence or justification, and her obvious doubts about the credibility of one artist representing Spain, was amplified through the Pavilion's multi-author set-up,

and the fact that, if representing anything, it far better stands for Italy. The case for inadequacy is further present in the fact that the central dialogues are not public events per se but rather events in public – one can join in, but in order to participate rather than eavesdrop. They are purposely not positioned as lectures in need of an audience and, apart from the actors or García herself, it is unlikely that throughout the months of the Biennale anyone could experience more than a fragment of them. This unceremonious programmatic directness extends to the orchestration of the 'devices' and installation of the Pavilion: with nothing committed to the walls, folding chairs available as needed for talks or watching films, monitors on wheeled media trolleys as they might be in a media library rather than a gallery, and little or no artificial light, the emphasis is on the transparent and the pragmatic. Intervention-light, suspicious of making itself at home in the Pavilion, the project

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avoids obligation to the building, declining to identify with its loaded territorial status.

The lateral spaces of the Pavilion contain archival material and props related to García's recent works – including Filch's ephemera from *The Beggar's Opera* (2007) – but moreover host an amazing array of loaned manuscripts, art, correspondence and photographs by a range of artists and writers whose work was unheralded when it was produced – a kind of reef of marginal practice and García's web of research. These include facsimiles of the Swiss writer Robert Walser's astonishing 'micro-scripts'; documents produced by Francesco Matarrese and from the 'Uffici per la Immaginazione Preventiva', the transnational office of literary liberation initiated in 1973 by Franco Falsca, Carlo Maurizio Benveduti and Tullio Catalano; reproductions of documents related to the time Joyce spent teaching English in Trieste; an archive of the dreams of maximum security prisoners; letters sent at random to the Pavilion by the poet and graphic novelist Aldo Piuomalli; work by the Arte Povera black sheep Emilio Prini, whose participation in the 1968 laboratory-cum-exhibition 'Il Teatro delle Mostre' (Theatre of Exhibitions) was an early influence for the Pavilion; as well as the storage of films to be screened during discussions by Fabio Mauri and experimental cinema pioneer Alberto Grifi. Brilliant and self-consciously flawed, indulgent and maddeningly dispersive, 'L'Inadeguato ...' deliberately neither functions to clearly convey information nor to entertain, yet is carried by García's infectious commitment for the contents of her reluctant occupation.

The two documentary films that are casually presented on monitors in the corner rooms of the Pavilion crystallize many strands of García's research through talking-head interviews, voice-over commentaries and films of workshops in psychiatric hospitals.

Springing from work made in the context of the São Paulo Biennial in 2010, *The Deviant Majority (from Basaglia to Brazil)* traces the influence and legacy of Basaglia's work in Brazil. We see a psychiatric hospital theatre group acting out in present day São Paulo: a role-playing patient sports packets of pills in his hair, caricaturing stigmatization. In keeping with the entire project, which oscillates between margin and centre, inter-titles function as both footnotes and headings: 'I know of one Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line,' reads one, quoting Jorge Luis Borges. An interview with 'C.R.', a woman closely involved with the radical anti-psychiatry movement in the 1960s and '70s offers an amusing yet telling anecdote about a party in a disabled ward in a Greek hospital supervised by Franco Rotelli and Félix Guattari in which the latter could not bring himself to join in the dancing. In this episode, 'C.R.' witnesses what she disappointingly understands as the philosopher's ultimate failure to put his ethics and aesthetics into practice.

Despite the near-invisibility of García's name at almost every conventional point of artistic attribution, it is her willingness to choreograph the Pavilion as well as to dance herself – across the roles of artist, curator, fan and impresario – which gives it traction and clout. García's formidable radicalism-jamboree, and her care and enthusiasm for the anomalous and volatile heritage of recent Italian history, shames the populist rhetoric of the Italian Pavilion and provides a timely context for considering the normalization of outrageousness, of genius, madness and the mirage of authentic art. ●

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Dora García lives in Barcelona, Spain. In 2010 her work was included in the 29th São Paulo Biennial and she had solo presentations at *Oficina para Proyectos de Arte A.C.*, Guadalajara, Mexico; *Kunsthalle Bern*, Switzerland; and *Index Stockholm*, Sweden. García represents Spain at the 54th Venice Biennale, which runs until 27 November.

Top and middle row, left:
Installation views
Spanish Pavilion,
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Middle row, right:
Charles Filch
A Lecture on Spaghetti Western, Best Regards From Charles Filch
2011
Performance

Bottom row:
Dora García
Where Do Characters Go When the Story is Over?
2011
Performance by
William Holden
and Geoffrey Carey



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