

OPENINGS

ENRIQUE RAMÍREZ

LILLIAN DAVIES



Enrique Ramírez, *Brises*
(Breezes), 2008, 16 mm and
35 mm transferred to digital
video, color, sound, 12 minutes.

Enrique Ramírez, *Strap for securing cap in the wind*, 2013, digital C-print, 36 x 53 1/8".

Opposite page: Two stills from Enrique Ramírez's *Océan 33°02'47"S / 51°04'00"N*, 2013, HD video, color, sound, 24 days.



THERE ISN'T A CLOUD IN THE SKY at the beginning of Enrique Ramírez's video *Brises* (Breezes), 2008, but the gray-suited actor in the opening shot is drenched, water dripping from his fingertips. The young man walks toward Santiago's Palacio de la Moneda, the official seat of the Chilean president. He passes two fountains before entering the silent monument, his pace unrelenting. Visitors are meant to exit from the palace onto the Plaza de la Ciudadanía, but the actor pointedly heads in the other, "forbidden" direction. The site itself, where Salvador Allende's life ended during the 1973 military coup, is not the only indication that Ramírez's work is an exploration of history. "Breathe . . . and feel the water that cleans everything," a measured voice recites in Spanish. "Breathe . . . and feel the breeze, the breeze that goes over you." At the end of the film, attendants standing atop two trucks positioned just outside the palace spray water onto the lonely figure as he walks past. Only then does he finally stop and look back.

Made while Ramírez was a student at Le Fresnoy in Tourcoing, France, *Brises* anticipates the Chilean-born artist's subsequent engagement with his native country's history and especially the legacies of colonialism (and American interventionism) in a growing body of work in video, photography, and installation. Ramírez is now based in Santiago and Paris, and his work is correspondingly multipolar, multilingual, and multivalent in a way that brings to mind the writings of the historian Michel Espagne: "Becoming attentive to cultural transfers involves revising, at least virtually, the structures of collective memory . . . as complex interactions between many poles, many languages." In Ramírez's art, spatial trajectories often provide a



form and metaphor for addressing the bold, frequently solitary act of crossing from one cultural and political sphere to another. These journeys are often maritime: In 2013, for example, the artist traveled on a cargo ship from Chile to France, to make *Océan 33°02'47"S / 51°04'00"N*, 2013, a continuous twenty-four-day shot that documents, in real time, the passage from Valparaíso northward along the Pacific coast, through the Panama Canal, and then across the Atlantic to Dunkirk. The film, first shown in its entirety on a 24/7 public viewing screen on the place Charles de Gaulle in Dunkirk, was only part of a wealth of material Ramírez collected during his voyage. He also used a ship's log, still photography, and handheld film footage to produce a book and a website chronicling each day, capturing both the overwhelming immensity of the high seas and the intimate details of life onboard.

These materials and metaphors of seafaring partly originate in the artist's biography. Not only does he move frequently between continents, but his father still has a sail-making workshop in the suburbs of Santiago. In the artist's first exhibition at the gallery Michel Rein, Paris, in 2014, one of his father's sails was turned upside down in an echo of the contours of South America. Titled *La invención de América* (The Invention of America), 1998–2013, the work references Joaquín Torres-García's iconic drawing *América invertida* (Inverted America), 1943, in which the South Pole is placed at the top, in a direct

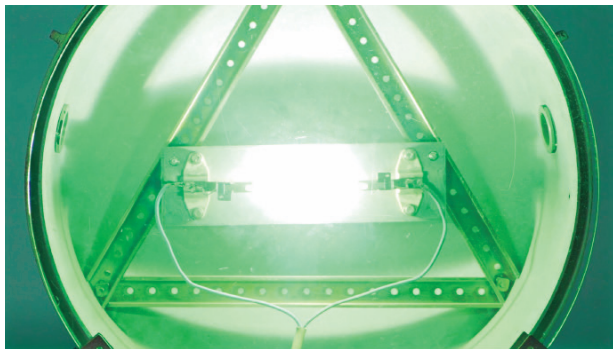
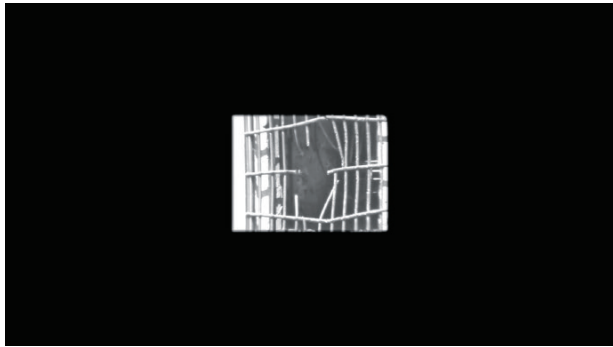


refutation of the subordinate position of Latin America. In a more recent work, shown earlier this year at Kadist in San Francisco, Ramírez expanded on this idea with another inverted sail titled *The International Sail*, 2017: a battered and partially repaired bootleg copy of the sail of the well-known Laser dinghy. The replica, originally made by Ramírez's father, bears the traces of the journeys it has been on, while also being what the artist calls a "cartography that resists history." Above all, however, it is the "construction and translation of a communal work" whose internationalism defies the growing isolationism of our times.

Following a residency on the island of Ushant off the coast of Brittany, France, in 2016, Ramírez made a video addressing another kind of isolation: that of the Créac'h lighthouse. The title of the work describes the light cast from it: *Dos brillos blancos agrupados y giratorios* (Two White Beams Grouped and Rotating), 2016–17. First shown earlier this year at Le Grand Café in Saint-Nazaire, France, traditionally the European port of arrival from Latin America, the video opens with enigmatic footage of a gray-haired man climbing into a sailboat, after which close-ups of the lighthouse and its surrounding Atlantic waters are accompanied by a chorus of iconic (and infamous)

Ramírez's work implies a voyage that is at once historical, maritime, political, and philosophical, and it becomes a cipher for the turbulence of history.

Left: Enrique Ramírez, *La invención de América* (The Invention of America), 1998–2013, Dacron polyester, twenty-eight etched-glass frames, overall 16' 4 1/8" x 9' 2 1/4".



twentieth- and twenty-first-century voices, among them Martin Luther King Jr., Steve Jobs, Jacques Chirac, Fidel Castro, Louis Farrakhan, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. Most of them speak as luminaries, launching various ideas about dreams or revolutions, while others espouse or critique bleaker visions of the world's future. The work implies a voyage that is at once historical, maritime, political, and philosophical, and it becomes a cipher for the turbulence of history, with occasional flashes of illumination to guide us or warn us of danger as we navigate toward an uncertain future.

Ramírez's video *Un hombre que camina* (A Man Who Walks), 2011–14, which is included in this year's Venice Biennale, was filmed in the Salar de Uyuni salt flats of Bolivia. In this stunning location, a man wears a fantastical mask based on those once worn in traditional dances to mock the conquistadores. This modern-day shaman slowly walks through shallow crystalline water. Dragging ten black suits, some stitched together at the cuff, as if holding hands, he sings as he walks, blessing Mary and bidding farewell in melodic Spanish. With the sky reflected in the water around him, he moves forward into nothingness, yoked to and yet pulling the icons of colonialism behind him. Later he discards the suits and his mask, and as he walks on asks, "I am walking, but what if I were dreaming?" His reflection starts lingering behind him, and a procession follows with banners, cymbals, drums, and a plethora of wind instruments.

The sublime, often surreal imagery of Ramírez's work is an outcome of his engagement with the histories, beliefs, and materials through which a culture is formed. In particular, he seems to draw on the history of Latin American magic realism—but in contrast to the densely populated universes of, say, Gabriel García Márquez, Ramírez sharply pares down the characters and objects that fill the vast spaces of his videos. He is aware that their presence and movement is already loaded with the complexities of hybridization and cultural transfer. He works as what Espagne would call a vector, connecting disparate times and places, while also challenging established historical narratives by showing how each link is itself a kind of rupture. □

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Above: Two stills from Enrique Ramirez's *Dos brillos blancos agrupados y giratorios* (Two White Beams Grouped and Rotating), 2016–17, 4K video, color, sound, 24 minutes.

Below: Two stills from Enrique Ramirez's *Un hombre que camina* (A Man Who Walks), 2011–14, HD video, color, sound, 21 minutes 35 seconds.

