LYDIAN STATER

Carlos Franco
*I like América like
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October 20 - November 18, 2023

Lydian Stater is t(h)rilled to present a solo exhibition of new works from Carlos Franco.

It's a funny thing to write about an artist who doesn't believe in language. Is 'funny' even the right word? Maybe it's not that Carlos Franco doesn't *believe* in language[1], just that words don't have stable meanings.[2] Words are ever in flux, always malleable. I suppose this is nothing new, depending on how you comprehend the concept of 'new'. Regardless, whichever post-position you, the art-bourgeoisie, undoubtedly view the world from, you likely also think of language (and images and data) in this way. But when a barista asks you how you take your coffee, does it prompt a spirited discussion of the coffee industry's colonial history, its current role in neo-imperialism, and the question of who exactly *took* the coffee beans in the first place? I think this might be what happens when Carlos Franco orders a cup.

Upon entering the gallery, viewers are confronted with an architectural endoskeleton, designed for this room but adjustable to any, containing a variety of apparati. The main event, *MxxIP*, is an interactive video work nestled within an assemblage of square metal tubing that make up the superstructure. With sadistic irony that mirrors the social media platforms that are embedded within the piece, *MxxIP* encourages community (or mannequin collecting) while simultaneously repelling viewers. The video feed reacts to the number of bodies that amass in the container in both predictable and unpredictable ways. Alternating through a series of randomized behaviors, the work at times becomes wildly animated and sonically chaotic as the remaining physical capacity of the space decreases. Sustained focus becomes near impossible due to psychological overload as a repetitive barrage of Instagram ads, memes, and influencers invade the senses. How does the saying go, "mo followers, mo problems"?

A sculptural work installed within the structure, *div. Bucket,* consists of a mirror-interiored bucket half filled with water, custom built hardware, a gyroscope, and underwater thrusters. Franco has submerged the hanging gyroscope, subjecting it to a fusillade of propulsions from directly opposing sides. The gyroscope has no control over its movements, nor the ripples it causes in the water, and acts as a metaphor for the way our lives, and bodies, are subject to targeted algorithmic forces.

These random temporal thrusts are processed by custom hardware using fungible data. Unseen, but certainly not unimportant, these data sets with labels like SUPER_TRUMPWNED, GUANO_ISLANDS_USA, and PORNHUB_GASOLINA explore convoluted relationships such as the links between the K-Pop band BTS, the Suez Canal, hurricanes in the Caribbean, and dubbed episodes of Dragonball Z aired on Telemundo. These tangled relations between seemingly disconnected subjects are meant to reflect the extraordinarily complex way that globalization has obfuscated our connections to and impact on one another. Perhaps the median household income in Latin America during the year that McDonald's made their highest revenue compared with the number of Kentucky Fried Chicken party barrels sold in Japan during Christmas in 2021 could tell us something of value?[3]

Additionally, strewn about are a handful of what the artist calls "imgs", collages from a variety of source material constructed over time printed on PVC cutouts taking the shape of objects identifiable by computer vision under encrypted conditions. Hung from meat hooks, these digital découpages[4] point to the way the internet has made us always on display, hanging for passersby to view through the windows.

Riffing off Joseph Beuys' quasi-synonymous seminal exhibition *I Like America and America Likes Me*, Franco puts himself in dialogue with Beuys' work.[5] In Beuys' performance, he famously cohabitated a gallery space with a wild coyote, acting as a shaman working to communicate with her; understand her instincts and rituals. Using a regimented sequence of repeated actions, Beuys was able to negotiate a precarious fluctuation of agency with the animal, eventually earning enough trust for her to allow an embrace. In Franco's work, the globally connected, omnipresent technological forces that control when and what we see have taken Beuys place. Which makes us the coyote in this scenario. As we continue to allow our personhood to be mined for information and mapped onto an expanding and far-reaching network of data, what types of agency are given and taken away?

And while Beuys famously stated that "everyone is an artist," i.e. there is a creative impulse that exists in every person that is not necessarily Art with a capital A, Franco extends this idea with something akin to "no one is an artist," i.e. Art with a capital A may well not even exist and we are just 1s and 0s meandering towards oblivion.

Carlos Franco is an artist living and working in Brooklyn.

/ Artist Footnotes /

[1] Don't know if it's that I don't believe cause it is a pseudo fact as cartography, but that it's a technology that's really old- and it's development was our cultural evolution but then now we can start seeing its shortcomings —"AI?!"

[2] But now we are cementing down so as to create "meta"(not Meta, more in the sense [but also cringe] - 'meta' as in 'after' in Greek {metaphysics being... I'll stop}, anyway "realities"- supposedly, or factually cause [digit]al :: what biases are embedded within these old technologies and what happens when a language becomes the main go to for "coding" these afterealities? Have you ever stopped and really thought about the "0"- it used to drive me kind of crazy as a kid and freeze me in math texts - do I start counting from the 1 or from the before which is not really a thing as a thing is —- alas. Imagine me counting all of those little holes in the install— also 0- invented by the Mayans and Mesopotamians independently of each other... wait invented or found? Is binary thinking inevitable ?!?0100010 I need to mat-me-a-rix.

[3] Does it? Haha. But it does point at a kind of flattening effect of "datafying" everything. Which can point at many —-

[4] "Mon Dieu!"

[5] Didn't think about so deterministically — I appreciate a certain kind of complexity that in North America inventing the like button to which everyone is addicted to but also the claim of liking América as a continent. Like it like me. — looping back to the first comments the shortcomings of language, and also its potential once decoupled from the determinism of the steel grid

Many opposable thumbs made this work possible:

Javier María - structural engineering, an army of one.
Yuno Choi - python scribe and TD maestro.
Paul k. - hardware hacker.
Maks Kupreichyk - CAD'er.

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// no artists, just nodes in the network.