ENG

Carlos Motta



Pleas of Resistance

21.02 / 26.10.25

MAC BA

Pleas of Resistance is the first major European museum exhibition dedicated to the transdisciplinary work of Carlos Motta (Bogotá, 1978). Featuring over twenty-five years of artistic practice, the exhibition combines early photographic self-portraits with more recent video performances and installations presented in four intersectional chapters. These address pre-Hispanic homoeroticism, the politics of care as spaces for queer liberation, acts of self-determination beyond the human, as well as storytelling around silenced histories as modes of knowledge sharing mutual sustenance and rebellion. Permeating the totality, of the artist's work, is a firm commitment to minority communities of dissident identities and their struggles against erasure and epistemicide. Often engaging in artistic collaborations, Motta realises the potential for social change through fabulation and performative rewritings of history, consistently eroding official narratives in a journey that is always blasphemous, bodily and political.



Carlos Motta. *Nefandus,* from *Nefandus Trilogy* (2013), video still. MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation. LOOP Barcelona Collection. Long-term loan of Screen Projects.

1. Queering Colonial Histories

In this section, Motta delves into colonial history and the instrumentalisation of Christianity as an ideological tool for the oppression of dissident sexualities and genders. Various works of the *Nefandus Trilogy* (2013) – a series of film essays, photographs and objects – explore the Spanish and Portuguese conquest's imposition of exclusionary epistemologies on pre-Hispanic bodies. Motta engages in performative acts of rewriting forcefully erased, forgotten and outlawed homoerotic stories. These acts of 'inversion' re-narrate and critically question Western norms, evidencing and countering the concealment and silencing of homosexuality in pre-Hispanic cultures, as in *Towards a Homoerotic Historiography* (2014), a museum-like display of miniature gold and tumbaga sculptures depicting acts of homoerotic sex. These works also reveal latent sexual tensions and contradictions within Catholic doctrine. In *Réquiem: Inverted World* (2016) the artist features his own 'inverted' queer body in a video-performance of self-affirmation, connecting to a legacy of enforced repression, of desires and sexualities condemned to the margins by religion.

Since his early works from the late 1990s, Motta has navigated the personal and political realities of being a Colombian artist residing in the United States – a country that has consistently exercised oppression and brute force over those living within and beyond its borders, to exert its political and military hegemony over much of the globe, particularly in Latin America.

2. Deviant Bodies
Throughout his artistic trajectory, Motta has examined the body as a field of knowledge in relation to sexual and gender politics. The experimental documentary multimedia installation *We Who Feel Differently* (2012) interrogates the concept of democracy through the critical perspectives of traditionally 'marginalised' embodiments of citizenship. The artist explores how the notion of difference within LGBTQIA2S+ communities is enacted and conceived as a political process of social transformation, after decades of sexual dissidence and struggles for liberation. Motta's work thus engages with diverse histories, iconographies, testimonies and symbols of queer movements, from the 1960s to the present day.

In the museum corridor, a series of works pay homage to the queer legacy of sustaining spaces of action and transformation of the social and political body. In dialogue with activists, academics, artists and personal testimonies, Motta foregrounds the collective history of those perceived as deviant or sick, and of hiv+ bodies. Several works, including the endurance performance *Legacy* (2019), commemorate and trace the stories of livelihoods lost to the hiv/aids epidemic, as well as the exhaustion endured and resisted by those sustaining the politics of care within shared struggles. The corridor is marked by *The Void* (2020), prominently featuring two large triangles, an inversion of the emblem of gay stigmatisation as a counter-monument celebrating communities of queer revolt and emancipation.

Following the two recent global pandemics that penetrated so many of our bodies, Motta's work poignantly foretells and resonates. Incisive questions are posed around the fragility and politics of the ailing body, highlighting diverse forms of rebellious mourning and mutual care as communal learning spaces of resistance and solidarity.



Carlos Motta. *Corpo Fechado: The Devil's Work* (2018), video still.

3. Acts of Faith. Love as Resistance
Strategies of queer rewriting and incantation are put into play in these photographs, video performances and installations that explore the weight of colonial archives on dissident bodies. Several pieces navigate the reductive archival classifications imposed on those deemed deviant by legal, religious and medical institutions during the colonization of the Americas. In works such as *Corpo Fechado: The Devil's Work* (2018), which tells the story of an enslaved man tried by the Lisbon Inquisition for sodomy and sorcery, Motta questions how such institutions and their categorizations have shaped contemporary thinking around sexuality

and bodies. The artist reflects upon how these categories continue to inform what is considered morally and legally acceptable or intolerable, and which behaviours are deemed good or evil.

Attentively reanimating proscribed histories of the blasphemous – of sodomites and 'hermaphrodites' – Motta works against the erasure of counter-normative stories of defiant love and desire. In *Deseos / رغبات* (2015), experiences of same-sex love between women in times and geographies far removed from one another are juxtaposed, narrating history in a non-linear, non-hegemonic manner. The artist explores iconographies and representations of sexualities that approximate the magical, the visionary or the demonic.

In paintings and sculptures, the figure of the devil as a fallen angel was traditionally used by the Church to represent heretical and deviant sexualities. *We The Enemy* (2019) is a defiant sculptural act that embodies these religious fantasies with a small army of demons, while *Mourning Stage* (2022) uses drawings as a performance score to playfully and subversively reappropriate such imagery, in affirmative fabulations that mobilise beyond the normative, biological or binary. The artist increasingly enters a fluid terrain of indeterminacy or returns to aspects related to inner drive and self-determination. In his work, sodomites, intersex and trans-interspecies-dragon bodies are destigmatised and revered as part of a new queer mythology.



Carlos Motta. *We The Enemy* (2019), sculptures. Photograph of installation view: Edouard Fraipont.



Carlos Motta. *Untitled Self-Portrait* (1998), black-and-white photograph.

4. Transliminal Worlds

In this last section, which includes some of the artists earliest works, the limits of the libidinal body are strained and transgressed, treading into worlds of self-determination beyond the human. In black-and-white photographs from the late 1990s, the young artist interprets scenes for the camera, transforming himself into fictional characters that are reminiscent of hybrid human-animal figures or mummified, monstrous beings. Motta explores the fragility of the body and the corporeal memory of disease – for example, by donning the wigs once worn by his terminally ill mother. The setting, the garments, the makeup, his own gender and sexuality: all of these elements function as transformative props. Each poses a liminal approximation to the animalistic, the irrational or the posthuman. These pieces offer a candid premonition of artistic explorations around body-transformation, as developed in later works such as *When I Leave This World* (2022), which centres a story of radical transitioning with the aim of exiting the human stage altogether.

Practices of transgressing Western-centric epistemologies are also present in the installation *Jjagɨyɨ: Air of Life* (2023). Its songs, stories and sculptures reference notions inherent to ancestral Indigenous cosmogonies of the Colombian Amazon. In an invocation that embraces the kinship of living and inanimate beings, the piece, like many others in Motta's trajectory, points to practices that resurrect and care for the life that surrounds and connects us in a protective organic network of interspecies knowledges and collective ways of being.

Exhibition Curators
Independent curator Agustín Pérez Rubio and María Berríos, Director of Curatorial Programmes and Research at MACBA.

MACBA app

The **MACBA app** features explanatory notes and audio descriptions of a selection of works, along with videos and interesting facts about the exhibition and the museum.

Expanded Exhibition

Public Programme and Publication
The International Queer/Cuir
June 2025

The International Queer/Cuir brings together artists and activists to imagine alternative narratives around the hiv/aids pandemic from a decolonial perspective of the present, rooted in the local, and focused on experiences from the Global South. This gathering of queer bodies and dissident collectives is convened by Carlos Motta and Equipo re (Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés).

An upcoming publication will include contributions from previous editions of The Interational Queer, a series of experimental collaborative symposia initiated by Motta in 2012, along with material from this ninth edition at MACBA.

Tours, Opening Hours and Admission

Tours
From 2 March
Sundays at 11 am

Free activity. Register in advance.
Further information at **macba.cat**

Friends of MACBA
Wednesday, 26 February, 6 pm.
Led by curator María Berríos.

Check out all the exclusive tours for Friends of MACBA at **macba.cat**

Become a Friend of MACBA from €18 a year.

Opening Hours
Mon, Wed, Thu and Fri: 11 am to 7.30 pm
(between 25 Jun and 24 Sep, 10 am to 8 pm)
Closed Tue (unless a public holiday)
Sat: 10 am to 8 pm (free admission between 4 pm and 8 pm)
Sun and public holidays: 10 am to 3 pm

Museum tickets are valid for one month. Activate yours at reception and return as many times as you like.

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Front and back cover image: Carlos Motta. *Untitled #5,* from *Middway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a forest dark / For the forward pathway had been lost* (2019), digital C-print.

