

00:00:00:00 **EVAN CALDER WILLIAMS:** I'm extremely glad and happy to be able to introduce Miguel A. López, who's a long-time friend of CCS and has been a major touchpoint and influence and thinker and curator for all of us here, and many sort of student projects in the past. I had the particular good fortune of being in Lima with Miguel and CCS students a couple years ago, which was an incredibly generative experience, not only in terms of getting to know the artistic and institutional sort of scene there, but also, I think, as an instance or example of Miguel's mode of working and the profound care with which he takes both sort of theoretical research and something we might think of kind of like human research or deep attention to the sort networks of communication and defense and solidarity that constitute both experimental aesthetic practice, but also social ones, in certain regards there. So I'm very grateful that you're here with us today and that we were able to bring you. I'm not going to say too much as in intro, in part because amongst the thing that your work has been important for us here, but also as evidence today, is again, this balance between, I think, deep historical rigor and conceptual precision, but also an interest in experimental style and taking very seriously methodologies that don't rely upon scholarly tropes, just because they do. And towards that end, I know this presentation itself follows from that, extending the deep thinking with Giuseppe Campuzano into a different format for today. So I'll just— Would you like a bio read for you?

00:01:42:27 **MIGUEL A. LÓPEZ:** If you want to. It's not really necessary.

EVAN CALDER WILLIAMS: I'll read a bio so we have a record here, in some sense then, because there's much to say on here. But in deference to format, I'll say that. So Miguel A. López, born 1983, is a Peruvian writer, researcher, co-director and chief curator at TEOR/ética, a center for exhibitions, research, and publications on Central American and Caribbean contemporary art, in San José, Costa Rica. His work investigates collaborative dynamics and transformations in the understanding of and engagement with Latin American politics and feminist rearticulations of art and culture. In recent decades, his texts—but I hope you've all read some of, but if not, please do—are available in journals like *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *e-flux*, *ramona*, *Art in America*, *Art Journal*, *Manifesta Journal*. And he's curated widely: City of Acuña, a retrospective exhibition at Witte de With in Rotterdam, in 2019, which you mentioned, is continuing to move and travel in new iterations.

00:02:39:25 *Social Energies / Vital Forces: Natalia Iguñiz: Art, Activism, Feminism (1994-2018)*, at ICPNA in Lima; 2018, *Teresa Burga: Estructuras de aire*, which was a collaboration with Agustín Pérez Rubio at MALBA in Buenos Aires; and the *God is Queer* section for the thirty-first São Paulo Biennial in 2014, amongst many other things. Recently published the books *Dissident Fictions: The Land of Misogyny*, put out by Pesopluma in 2019, and *The Words of Others: León Ferrari and Rhetoric in Times of War*, which was with Ruth Estévez and Agustín Díez Fischer, with REDCAT and JRP-Ringier. Lastly, he was the editor—and timed to this tonight—of *Giuseppe Campuzano: Saturday night thriller y otros escritos, 1998-2013*, a collection of writings by drag queen Giuseppe Campuzano, published by Estruendomudo in 2013. And I think which forms the ground for this today. So thank you so much again for making time to be with us. We're very grateful to have you here.

00:03:42:14 **MIGUEL A. LÓPEZ:** Okay. Well, thank you. Thank you so much for this very noble invitation. I'm very happy to be here, after four years. The first time I was here in Bard was for a symposium

organized between LUMA Foundation, the De Appel curatorial program and CCS, around the question of the future of curatorial practice, co-organized by Paul O'Neill, from here. And yeah, I always wanted to return, so this is really special for me. And I wanted to— Yeah, well, as Evan said, [inaudible] curator of an institution in Costa Rica. I've been living there for five years now. And I've been traveling in Latin America a lot, but also in different parts of the world. And my curatorial practice is mostly based on research and writing. I'm very into publications. I love publications. I love working on them, and also collaborating with museums. We're talking with Lauren now about acquisitions. I'm also a lot into how the museum is building collections in Latin America, and also in some other places.

00:04:58:00 So for this— Well, after this invitation, I was thinking what to share with you. And I thought that maybe this project of Giuseppe Campuzano could be useful. Giuseppe Campuzano was a drag queen, philosopher, and queer activist. He passed away in 2013. We were very close. We worked together for a decade. And he— Well, Giuseppe created an experimental museum, museological project called the *Transvestite Museum*. Which for me, also introduces very important questions about what it means to be a curator not— I mean, he doesn't use the word curator himself, but he's creating some narratives in a very experimental way, that I think could be, yeah, good for us to share and to discuss. And when Giuseppe passed away in 2013, I was, of course, trying to share as much as I can about his amazing, you know, contribution. And at some point the last two or three years, I started to think that maybe I needed to shift the way I talk about Giuseppe and maybe not talk about Giuseppe anymore, but talk with him again. And trying to think how can we continue this kind of interrupted conversation that happened after his death. So this presentation is not a conference, it's a letter that I wrote to Giuseppe, in an attempt to continue this conversation. So yes, I'm going to read and you will see images and some video that we will [inaudible]. So yeah. The title is "Letter to Giuseppe Campuzano."

00:06:51:15 Dear Giu, I don't know how to begin this letter. It's like we never stopped talking to each other, even when the sound of your voice was no longer physically present. I remember the last time we talked, on November 7th of 2013, two days before your departure. That night, we didn't use our voices either. We talked through the eyes. You were in your bed motionless, after a long, brave battle against sclerosis. And I was stood by your side, next to your bed, reading the introduction that I just wrote for a book that was a few days away from being sent to the press. A book that collected your luminous writings, which you didn't have the chance to see done. That night, Giuseppe, next to you, it was hard for me to read. How to address in a few pages, my deep gratitude and admiration for you; the impact that your work and activism had on me and in many others. How to express the sensation of sadness and desolation of seeing you leaving. I had to stop reading many times. My voice broke many times.

00:08:11:24 I know that you don't want me to remember you in bed, but as the scandalous goddess, fabulous drag queen you were. Giuseppe, you wanted to relate history all over, to unfold the bitchy version, the one with mascara running down your face. You wanted to tell us the stories that were taken from us more than twenty years ago, when you were dressing up in feathered costumes and high heels, going from queer to queer, week to week, salon to salon. You began to wonder about the lost ancestors of your joyful transvestite body. Your questions were a performance and a portable revolution about to explode. Out of your silver bag, you took a series of writings, images, and objects that you were accumulating since your childhood—your album of becoming transvestite. This collection of recycled fictions was the beginning of your unstoppable vampire journey, constituted by activism, writing, sexual practices, and cultural production. It was a vital journey that led you to create the amazing archive, warehouse, and arsenal that in 2003, you called *Museo Travesti de Peru*, the *Transvestite Museum of Peru*.

00:09:36:01 Giuseppe, you should know that this not a private letter, but a public one. I'm sharing this with many people that probably don't know who you are, what you did, and how you changed for many of us, the way we think about the future. I'm sure you wouldn't be bothered by this exposure and publicity; you always loved the flashes and cameras, and you knew how to direct them to the social struggles that were important to you. I'm reading this letter at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard Collage. It reminds me how you constantly avoided the defining yourself as a curator. The fact that in Latin America, the curators were often confused with *curanderos*, or the spiritual healers, was your perfect alibi to reclaim a genealogy not of curators, but of shamans whose practice involved transformation and makeover of subjectivity, states of awareness, and body energies. You decided to move from the idea of being the *curador del museo*, the museum's curator, to a queer shaman of the [inaudible], of the new sex; attempted to build alliances between the transgender community and indigenous ancestors. Your *Transvestite Museum* was a sharp response to a global context marked by the neoliberal takeover of the institution. In a time when the market had begun to turn sexual identities into consumer products, a museum seemed removed from any agenda reflecting on sexual politics. The emergence of the *Transvestite Museum* in 2003 demanded to redefine the political role of the museum; responded to an official history erected, who bonded erasure of sexual disobedience. Its emergence was a deliberate perforation of the museum apparatus, which is also a sexual apparatus, in a moment when the neoliberal pragmatism of transnational economies and the corporate marketing of the cultural machinery had attempted to establish a hegemonic model of museum.

00:11:44:24 But as you remember, my fabulous queen, it wasn't an easy path. Your toxic pink poetic weapons responded to the urgency and desire of invented possibilities of gender and sexual resistance against white heteronormative violence. And you used everything available for that. You confused many people in the process. You were unable to categorize. You were a beautiful, noisy excess. Like the time when, in 2007, you cross-dressed as the Mater Dolorosa and stood on a cliff of a beach near Lima. You appeared still, inducing, as you said, a series of "aborted pilgrimages by those bystanders who, imagining seeing a glowing Virgin over the sea, quickly approach to spot the faggot and beat a retreat."

Actually, my favorite apparition of you in your gorgeous Mater Dolorosa dress was in a video from 2011. You were singing a nostalgic song performed by one singer called *Di Da Di*, which can be translated as *Oh, Oh, Oh*. You were holding a video record in your hands, creating a partial solar eclipse with your body, while at the bottom of the screen, wordplays appear, evoking the transvestite body as a medal of the colonial resistance.

00:13:16:21 **[CLIP PLAYS]**

00:14:14:01 That short video was a stunning queer sci-fi manifesto, an indigenous evocation of a cosmic shamanic androgynous past and future. What I most adore about your *Transvestite Museum* is that born out of love and fury, it was both an act of care and rage. You envisioned a different history, demanding the stop of the devastating amount of violence and the criminalization of the transgender community. You weren't here just to be a witness; you were a game changer. Since the late 1980s, you started to explore the political possibilities of your cross-dressed body at parties, discos, street fairs, protests, and art galleries. It was your questioning of the public role of the drag queen in the context of a misogynistic dictatorship in Peru in the 1990s that brought you to initiate a visual, historical, and philosophical archaeology of cross-dressing origins. Giuseppe, in 2008, I quote, "I see transvestism as a ritual, like a priest performing a liturgy or a shaman of the native cultures," end of quote.

00:15:28:23 Cross-dressing was, for you, a useful analytical concept capable of visualizing and exploring the processes of colonial resistance, hybridization and [inaudible]. You went back to indigenous bodies and androgynous [inaudible] that predate colonization and pointed out how all [inaudible] national identities are always [inaudible] drag practices. I quote, "All Peruvianness is an act of transvestism," end of quote. It was one of your favorite statements, which also presented in the form of photographic piece. Of course, you were never alone. You were part of a community of friends, *locas*, drag performers, sexual workers, and transgender activists who were aiming to create safe spaces for collective love, wacky art, and self-expression. You were a struggling art resistance, both in the streets and at the parties, with makeup, dancing, wigs, lip sync, and black jokes, sharing with your close drag queens and coconspirator [inaudible], Eduardo [inaudible]—all of them inventors of unique languages, gestures, styles, and worlds, with glamorous dissidence.

00:16:46:18 That effective landscape of transgressive revolt and queer fury was one of the driving forces behind the wildest fantasies the *Transvestite Museum*. Giuseppe, the encounter with you and your project was a defining moment in my life. I remember vividly that moment. It was 2004. I had twenty years. I was visiting an exhibition space in Lima and found you by chance. This place wasn't a traditional art gallery, but an onsite museum dedicated to the nineteenth century War of the Pacific between Peru, Bolivia, and Chile, which had begun to receive some contemporary art projects. That was your exhibition, if we call it that. But yours wasn't a traditional display of personal creative work, but a parasitic intervention in that war museum. The title of your show, *Coneste, el otro lado, estudio para un museo de travestis—contest, the other side, study for a transvestite museum*, was [inaudible] upon creating attention between the memory of the military combat and your desire to transform it into a beauty contest. You used the temporary art galleries, but also the museum's permanent collection, which was comprised of historical paintings, objects, and ephemera related to the war, to deploy a nongendered mixture of objects, cheaply printed photos, photocopies, textile, craft, press clippings, and replicas of pre-Columbian artifacts. I love the way you confronted the symbols of patriarchal nationalist heroism, highlighting the struggles of queer communities invisible in official records. At that time, I was studying photography and producing some art projects revisiting my childhood and how some of us were constantly penalized for straying from violent masculine norms. Encountering your *Transvestite Museum* was finding a space for healing.

00:18:53:11 Soon after, you moved to Lima's historic center, turned into a small pink kiosk. Unlike large institutional projects, you did not attempt to represent and integrate minorities into the dominant discourses. On the contrary, your museum was an artificial device that crashed the privileged site of heterosexual subjectivity, which turns all difference into an object of study. The [inaudible] mention of your museum was, for me, a brilliant metaphor of other social and political transits, the mass movements from the provinces to the capital, people of Andean and indigenous heritage reorganizing social hierarchies and ways of living, but also other forms of migration by often invisibilized subjects whose life is between life and death, the HIV seropositive, the undocumented immigrants, the intersex bodies. Very early, you clearly understood that to fracture the centrality of heteronormative narratives, you had to cannibalize the museum, one of modernity's most effective apparatuses of political discipline, one of the most sophisticated Western promises of truth. Your anachronistic methodology and queer strategies of display, the museum used as a Trojan horse, ambition of a different relationship with history that denaturalized the expectation of scientific truth and legibility, deploying forms of belonging beyond national state accounts, and reclaiming social models that puncture and disengage from the demands of national identities. The concept you used to organize the museum was always a delight to me. Notions such as [inaudible], duality, epic, miscegenation, choreography, *plumaria*, which could be translated as feathery, among many others. You

- 00:21:47:00 avoided traditional categorizations, deploying a different specialization of history, using what I would call non-concepts, evoking what Eve Sedgwick, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, called the “nonce taxonomy.” That is, the production that critical performative taxonomies. It is funny how I always sound very theoretical, when one way for you to talk about this would be raising your left eyebrow and saying out loud, “I was just having fun, darling.”
- 00:21:31:03 In *Plumaria* section, one of my favorites, you took the feather as a pretext, charting an iconography trajectory that started with imperial dress— Oh, sorry, this is [inaudible]. The imperial dress of Manco Cápac, first leader of the Incan Empire in the thirteenth century, linked to paintings of angels of the seventeenth and eighteenth century by indigenous artists from the Cusco School of painting, who used colonial Catholic iconography to represent glamorous warriors, linked with many other representations that included, of course, plumages of showgirls and drag queens. I told you many times this section blew my mind. Presenting Manco Cápac, the leader of the Incan empire, as the first *loca*, as a healing queer bitch, and therefore, as a queen of a whole kingdom of indigenous faggots, was deliciously brilliant. If the Incas were one of the most important drag queen communities between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, and we didn’t know, that means that history really needs to be urgently rewritten. I think of that and I still can hear your evil laugh.
- 00:22:49:10 There are other sections that I love. In *Choreography*, you collected objects and representations of historical Andean dancers that include cross-gender dressings, including non-genderous masks and contemporary popular festivities. In *Mestizaje—Miscegenation*, you wove together representations that provide an account of ethnic and sexual migrations, such as the veiled *las Tapadas Limenas*, women with their face veiled, of nineteenth century presences that prove ambivalent and therefore subversive for gender identification. With a transvestite singer from a Chinese opera in Lima in 1870 and with images of black queer portraits by painters from the Pacific Scientific Commission expedition of the nineteenth century, as well.
- 00:23:46:29 By juxtaposing elements not necessarily previously reclaimed by queer history, your museum avoided falling easily into community information based on identification and recognition. Your promiscuous [inaudible] readings challenged Western scientific knowledge systems by taking the drag indigenous body as a locus of enunciation, a prosthetic body whose nature is uncertainty, as you like to say. You reclaim other forms of preservation of history. This explains why your museum was not based on the premise of a massive building. It was neither a collection of queer objects, but an operation of queering the history of graphic [inaudible], displaced languages, displaced base knowledges, and the relational systems of meaning.
- 00:24:45:09 Giuseppe, you were asking us to begin again. Your corrosive and discontinuous fictions visualize and realize past and alternative bodies, antagonists to the social facts of realist historiography. You show us how drag practices and the operation of the construction and self-fashioning one’s body are a helpful model for an erotic relationship to knowledge, as your amazing performances, where you and your drag queen family, a stage character from the collection of the museum, producing a collective reanimation influenced by vernacular and the unreligious festivities, performative arts that undid the distinction between mythological and factual, between living and inanimate beings, but also between feeling and interpreting. Your desire to bring into life these characters was an attempt to transform them into a resource, to offer them for collective use. For the active [inaudible] scholar Gregg Bordowitz, the queer reenactment of the past means the act of taking control of history, by becoming its subject through repetition. I quote, “Rather than producing a revolutionary break with history, the artist repeats moments of queer relation over and over, to the point where the past becomes an ever present tense,” end of quote. This means going beyond simply showing bodies, elements, or representations. By

contrast, it aims to become, within these episodes and experiences that cannot be affixed to any particular identity. But for you, of course, beyond any theory, it was just a great excuse to throw a party.

00:26:43:18 **[CLIP PLAYS]**

00:28:59:14 Watching this video, I remember how easy it was to become friends. I think I saw in your desire to stop being a man, to run away from being a man, something that I was also looking for for me. Your project was a celebration of anti[inaudible] anger, which went way beyond any desire of policing identities. Perhaps because you always saw queer feminism not immediately identified with any specific subject, but as a contested terrain open to endless struggles and transformations. I also remember telling you six years ago that my partner at that time had started to experiment with testosterone, and exploring the possibility of transition, and later, both of us talking with you about the effect of hormones in the body. Transition was a key concept for you, which anyhow, left us with so many questions as formulated through the voice of a common friend, Jorge [inaudible]. I quote, "Can cis men disidentify themselves from dominant patriarchal masculinity? What does it mean today to be a trans feminist? Can we speak about feminism beyond the framework of identity politics of Western social democracy? What would be a feminism without men and women? What does it mean to speak of queer politics beyond your position of heterosexuality and unsexuality?," end of quote.

00:30:37:02 Giu, I know this is too long, and I promise I'm finishing now. I'm not sure if I succeed from my attempt to mingle my feelings and memories with yours, but I try. I always love your ability to mix your voice with other people's words and voices. That is what I called once the transvestite language. Your ability to cut and paste, to infiltrate and falsify. And you did that until the very end, in your last silent performance, entitled *The Two Fridas—Blood/Semen, Lifeline*, 2013. You appeared with your friend Germain Machuca, asserting the [inaudible] time perceptions by showing your almost motionless body in drag, in a wheelchair. You were once again reclaiming the devaluated body and rejecting the social structures that label nonnormative sick bodies as disordered, invoking through your dresses, prostheses, and props a genealogy of AIDS activism and experimental queer art practice in South America, such as the queer duo, Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, from Chile and the queer theater group [inaudible], both from the 1980s. This is one of the many conversations we didn't have time for, how your own perception of the glamorous drag changed radically after the experience of your sickness. At some point between 2011 and 2012, when you couldn't travel anymore because of the sclerosis, you started to ask different people to be your imposter and public events. I remember you telling me that it was your queerest fantasy, the [inaudible] of many Giuseppe Campuzanos, to leave behind your own body, to live in other people's bodies. Like when our common friend, the artist and drag queen Marco [inaudible], reincarnated as you in London in 2013. This is how Marco ended that reincarnation.

00:32:59:22 **[CLIP PLAYS]**

00:34:43:21 The text your imposter Marco was reading, "The Transvestite Manifesto" you wrote in 2013, is one of the most delicious examples of your brilliant queer tongue. I always love the way your words create a space for themselves. I want you to hear your own words you said then coming alive at this time, in the voice of a friend of mine, Vladimir, who you never met.

00:35:12:27 **[CLIP PLAYS]**

00:36:50:18 Giuseppe, you left the sea of knowledge open for us to begin again, for us to fantasize, to unlearn, to reorganize, to dynamite normative limits, to undermine places of power and

authority, to interrupt, to falsify, to throw heteronormative gaze into the trash, to disassemble and make strange the very idea of museum, to infiltrate, to ironize, to cross-dress in incisive ways, in order to shape different futures. And this very long letter, my gorgeous and brave queer diva, was only to say thank you.

[APPLAUSE]