

Giuseppe Campuzano's Living Museum

Travesti Methods and Performing History in the Andes

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OBJECTS OF STUDY

Created between 2003 and 2013 by the late Peruvian artist, philosopher, activist, and drag queen, Giuseppe Campuzano, the Travesti Museum of Peru is an art project or portable conceptual work that has been exhibited in museums, galleries, street corners, public parks, protests, conferences, and red light districts. It contains an archive whose collection includes visual and cultural practices from pre-colonial times to the contemporary moment. Together, these objects present history through the bodies of colonized and pathologized queer and indigenous communities, or what Campuzano describes as the androgynous indigenous and the *mestiza/o travesti*. The Spanish term "travesti," which translates to "transvestite," is usually understood as a pejorative term for transgender individuals in English. However, much like the term "queer" in North America and Europe, "travesti" is now being reclaimed by some South American travesti activists as an empowering term.

The Travesti Museum archive has at its core a specific conceptualization of the *travesti* described by Campuzano as a fluid gender, a gender in-transit, or as a continuous questioning of gender itself. Campuzano tends to use the *travesti* as a body-strategy for understanding the colonial history of Peru and the contemporary life of queer individuals in Peru. Within this context, the main object of study is a 2008 performance called *Museo Travesti Viviente* or "Living Travesti Museum." In this performance, characters from the Travesti Museum archive come alive, as the actors portraying these roles participate in a performance art piece that resembles an Andean patronal festival.

THESIS

This project focuses on the differences and similarities between (re)producing history within the archive and through more embodied practices of cultural memory such as performance art and ritual. In this thesis, the Travesti Museum is approached specifically in terms of the way history changes when it is presented in an embodied and ritualistic context, namely through a performance art piece based on the Andean patronal festival. It explores how through performance, artists can create methods that allow for the creation and understanding of a history that unfixes indigenous and queer people from colonial and Western accounts of history and modes of creating memory. Even though the contents of the archive are briefly discussed, the focus of this research is to explore how its contents become embodied. This focus will then allow for a complex analysis that examines the way history and memory are created and understood through Andean performance practices that include ritual and performance art.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does memory become history through ritual and performance?

What occurs to the body when it is performing in the context of an Andean patronal festival? And how does this change, if at all, when done in the context of performance art?

How does the *travesti* body remember?

How does memory work in the Andes? And how does the performance of this memory unfix history?

SOURCES

For my preliminary research, I read texts written by Campuzano and also texts written about him and his work by other scholars. I became acquainted with the objects in the Travesti Museum collection and their histories. At the same time, I started researching writing about Andean conceptions of time, memory, gender and ritual. Although it was not discussed in my paper, Irene Silverblatt's *Moon, Sun and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* provided valuable historical analysis that I used as the context to my research. My arguments build upon ideas from performance theorist Diana Taylor and anthropologist Gisela Cánepa Koch. Other than a couple of articles written in Spanish, this is the first in-depth academic analysis of Campuzano's work in English and it is the first to discuss the Travesti Museum in an art context with a focus on its performative and ritualistic qualities.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

This research is an attempt at historicizing certain performance art practices found within the Travesti Museum. Doing this places Campuzano's work within the context of popular performance in Peru and conceptualizes the *travesti* as a mutant characteristic or character that lends itself to become embodied by others. Future research into this topic includes studying the function of memory and the understanding of history in other public iterations of the Travesti Museum such as in public parks, protests, and street corners. This examination, unlike the one done for this thesis, would have to include the unplanned participants and collaborators of the project and the public reactions to such events. This perspective would allow for an analysis of the Travesti Museum in the public sphere, where it can be discussed in the context of sex work, political protest and engagement, as well as other artwork being created in Peru and neighboring Andean countries about sexuality, gender, and history.



Baltasar Jaime Martínez, *Danza de Hombres Vestidos de Muger* (The Dance of Men Dressed as Women), 1782-1785
Image published in Campuzano's *Museo Travesti del Perú* (2008)



Q'oyllur Riti celebration, Cusco Peru. *Peru: Customs and Festivities* (1997)
Photograph by Javier Silva Meinel



Giuseppe Campuzano, *Simulabáse una vez...*, 2008, Digital Collage

BIOGRAPHY

Maya Wilson-Sanchez is an emerging writer, researcher, and curator. Her interests include social change, performativity, language and gender in contemporary art by artists in the Americas. Maya has worked in collections, research, programming, and curatorial roles at Onsite Gallery, Xspace Cultural Centre, the Art Gallery of Peterborough, Gallery TPW, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum. She has published her writing in *Volume*, the *Journal of Visual and Critical Studies*, and the *Senses and Society Journal*.

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