



Karen Lamassonne
Ruido / Noise
September 14, 2022 – January 8, 2023

Ruido / Noise is the first international survey of the work of Colombian American artist Karen Lamassonne. Lamassonne was a central figure in the male-dominated Cali and Bogotá art and film scenes of the 1970s and 80s, and throughout her career has maintained a focus on self-portraiture and depictions of intimacy. Her practice was initially centered on painting, yet her involvement with cinema led to an engagement with video, photography, animation, storyboarding and art direction. Spanning from her early years to today, the exhibit at Swiss Institute shows Lamassonne's radical, longstanding commitment to portraying women as desiring subjects.

In a watercolor series from early in Lamassonne's career entitled *Baños* (1978-81), a naked woman is seen in a decoratively tiled bathroom, an atmosphere of cool privacy. Lamassonne has tended to describe these paintings as self-portraits, though the figure is usually anonymized: shown only from the shoulders down or from the back, posed on toilets and bidets, and in showers and baths. Though the washy pigment is delicate, there is a matter-of-factness to the paintings, which position bodies between dirtiness and cleanliness, between excretions and ablutions. An exhibition of the works in 1979 at the Galería del Club de Ejecutivos in Cali was prematurely shut down because of complaints from some of the "executives." In later self-portraits, Lamassonne pictures herself in relation to other domestic spaces, as though her environment is an extension of her subjectivity, using mirrors to fragment her representation across the space.

In the 1980s, Lamassonne became involved with a number of filmmakers known as the Grupo de Cali (Cali Group), who often employed popular B-movie genres such as horror or crime to create political allegories that also skewered mainstream Colombian cinema. Lamassonne worked in many capacities on several of these films, notably *Pura Sangre* (1982), directed by her then-partner Luis Ospina, for which she was art director, assistant editor and made the storyboard, which is included in the exhibition. The profound influence of these filmmaking projects can be seen in her cinematic paintings such as the *Cali* series (1989), in which giant, noirishly rendered figures caress one another, dominating the lurid city skyline in scenes reminiscent of *Attack of the 50-Foot Woman* (dir. 1958 Nathan Juran).

Bringing several of these facets together, the exhibition features the first realization of an installation that Lamassonne proposed in 1984 entitled *Ruido* (Noise). Television screens playing an experimental video made while the artist lived in New York City one winter are used to light several paintings installed around them, which each depict a woman's body illuminated by the glow of a TV. In this video of contrasts, the heat of a lone body is pitched against other environments and temperatures, eventually meeting the freezing city snow.

Lamassonne's paintings, photographs and collages are characteristically guided by a search for spaces in which to be: locations where it is possible to express oneself and one's sensuality, alone or with others. From the tiled bathrooms where a room of one's own can be found behind locked doors, to the urban bridges and parks seen in the *Cali* paintings, Lamassonne's work presents varied possibilities for occupying spaces as a form of erotics in a shifting sociocultural landscape.

Ruido / Noise is organized in partnership with Swiss Institute, New York; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; and Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín.

In conjunction with the exhibition and in partnership with SI, Anthology Film Archives will present a series of screenings starting in September that focuses on the film work of Karen Lamassonne and Luis Ospina. Details forthcoming at <http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/>.

This exhibition is made possible with the generous support of the Terra Foundation for American Art.



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This exhibition is organized by former SI Director Simon Castets, Curator at Large Laura McLean-Ferris, and Senior Curator Alison Coplan.

About Karen Lamassonne

Karen Lamassonne (b. 1954, New York) lives and works in Atlanta, GA. She has had solo exhibitions at the Museo de Arte Moderno la Tertulia, Cali (1989 and 2017); Museo Rayo, Roldanillo (2019); and Facultad de Artes ASAB, Bogotá (2019). Recent group shows include *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-85* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, the Brooklyn Museum, New York and Pinacoteca, São Paulo; *The Art of Disobedience* at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Bogotá (2018); and *Voces íntimas* at the Museo Nacional, Bogotá (2017).

About Swiss Institute

Founded in 1986, Swiss Institute (SI) is an independent non-profit contemporary art institution dedicated to promoting forward-thinking and experimental art making through innovative exhibitions, education, and programs. Committed to the highest standards of curatorial and educational excellence, SI serves as a platform for emerging artists, catalyzes new perspectives on celebrated work, and fosters appreciation for under-recognized positions. SI is committed to being an organization that is diverse, equitable, and accessible in its work, structure, and programming. Open to the public free-of-charge, Swiss Institute seeks to explore how a Swiss context can be the starting point for international conversations in the fields of visual and performing arts, design, and architecture.

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