

PARIS / FRANCE

Julio Villani

Galerie RX

With this third personal exhibition in a few months in France, the Brazilian artist Julio Villani (Marília, São Paulo, 1956)—represented in São Paulo by Raquel Arnaud Gallery—corroborates the solid foothold for the circulation of his work in two continents. Soon he will present, in the beautiful Cistercian abbey of Thoronet (in the south of France), a large installation of 250 square meters produced by the Palais de Tokyo.

Villani's second exhibition in the Parisian gallery RX provides a new opportunity to find his characteristic style, at once playful and constructive. Villani has transformed that seeming contradiction into a strength, making it the intellectual and formal core of his work. The joyfulness that pervades in his art also contributes to shaping a permanent accomplice duality, fueled by his undeniable inventiveness, for more than thirty years.

The exhibition, which occupies two floors, includes mostly recent works (2018), but also some from 2012, 2014 and 2016 (paintings, drawings, collages, objects, and sculptures). In the first room, five large-format canvases, vertical triptychs, whose separations are almost imperceptible, express—as the artist explains—a continuity that his life between Brazil and France could have fragmented.

These recent paintings also reveal his complicity with the sensitive and almost “musical” geometry of Alfredo Volpi, a Paulista like himself. Villani shares with Volpi the same freedom of creation, the delicate and transparent approach to color, and perhaps a more emotional than an intellectual construction. The reflective and perfectly orchestrated fusion between opposites or oppositions that we can observe in the center of all of Villani's creations—whether they are paintings, objects or collages—between tension and loosening, rupture and continuity, movement and stability, humor and nostalgia, self-portrait and portrait of the world. The title of the work, *Deambulo por una calle que atraviesa varios países* (*I Wander down a Street That Crosses Several Countries*), is the common thread of all this existential and sensitive plot. It

Rafael Soldi: *Cargamontón CM-9*, 2018. Archival pigment print. 8 x 10 ¹⁵/₃₂ in. (20.3 x 26.6 cm) image on paper 15 x 17 ³/₄ in. (38.1 x 44.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist



ties those multiple roots, that permanent wander, and that stasis that allow us to weave the bond of Villani with the geographies and cultures in which his life, for many years, on both banks of the Atlantic. Exile is not for him a rupture but rather an inexhaustible vein, a quality of life that continually inspires him, a matrix where he ceaselessly combines the two faces, front, and back of his life, whose regenerative duality feeds each one of the creative gestures of the artist, in a vital work in constant renovation.

The second exhibition hall gathers objects and paintings, as well as an embroidered fabric composed of parts that are joined with stitches, a technique he has been using since 2004. The embroidery, which was originally made in Brazil, is now made in France by professional embroiderers. They are followed by series of strange and funny objects, utensils of daily life, from which “portraits” are constructed, such as *Sourire* (“Smile,” metal plate and red wire, 2014). Finally, three drawings and collages (2018) on the pages of a Bible dating from 1665 bear unusual titles such as those that Villani usually invents: *Instrument poétique* (Poetic Instrument), *Ver de lune* (Lunar Worm), and *L'infini turbulent* (The Turbulent Infinite).

Seemingly eclectic, this selection of works concentrates a good portion of Villani's conceptual, artistic, and technical knowledge, as well as his emotional and aesthetic memory. Complementing it on one of the walls is a selection of objects, paintings, embroideries, eccentric assemblages, and drawings (in other words, something like a *cabinet de curiosités* or “secret study”). It brings to mind André Breton's wall now at the Musée National d'Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou collection, gifted in 2003.

We could quote—and perhaps attribute to Villani's work—the description made by Didier Ottinger (conservator of the MNAM) of this wall: “The whole, shaped by a strange caprice, with a paradoxical order that weaves personal and the respect that is due to the hidden powers, to the laws of magnetism, to the surprises of chance. The ‘wall’ of André Breton, as a challenge to the Museum of Modern Art, as the core, still hot, of a reactor of enormous power.”

CHRISTINE FRÉROT

PHILADELPHIA / PA

Rafael Soldi

The Print Center

The Print Center, a non-profit gallery located in the heart of Philadelphia's historic district, presented two series by Seattle-based Peruvian artist Rafael Soldi. Soldi was one of the three winners of The Print Center's ANNUAL International Competition, among the country's oldest and most forward-looking such events. As this gallery focuses on exhibiting the work of local and international artists who critically test the boundaries of photography and printmaking, its selection of Soldi does not come as a surprise. He uses photography in eloquent and novel ways, as a vehicle to represent his identity, as well as his imagination and memory. Indeed, imagination, identity, and memory are not only Soldi's personal paradigms, but also inflect the notions of the body in all adolescent queer subjectivities.

Soldi was born in Lima in 1987 and began his high school education at an all-male, upper-class Catholic school there. When his father, a renowned professional, was hired by the Organization of

American States, the family emigrated to Washington, D.C. After completing high school, Soldi decided to remain in the United States while the family returned to Peru, and enrolled in the BFA program in Photography & Curatorial Studies at the Maryland Institute College of Art. He did not want to return to Lima and rejoin the patriarchal, upper-class milieu that had so often mocked him for his queer identity. He did not want to return to the stern Catholic city of his childhood, where sexual minorities were frequently assaulted in “playful” activities like the *cargamontón*. In the Peruvian vernacular, a *cargamontón* is a quick-fire physical assault by many against a single person. It is a common “game” among school children, with the victim finding himself under a pile of attackers. Thus, the bodies are in contact. They can feel one another, they twist and intertwine, they touch, and what begins as a spontaneous physical confrontation can turn into desire. It contains the potential to subvert the dominant heteronormative discourse, transforming it into pleasure.

Cargamontón is also the title of Soldi’s exhibition. Here the concept becomes photography, migration, memory, and identity. But in this case, photography is also mediated by social media and its potential for exchanging images and memories. Some time ago, Soldi received a Facebook message from one of his old classmates. This brought back photographic remembrances of his early adolescence. He then searched the Internet for images of *cargamontón* in Lima, showing children in school uniforms that signal economic and social privilege. These upper-class *mestizo* children are sometimes captured laughing, sometimes not; sometimes, they are left on the ground, and teachers must come to rescue them from the shame of their queer condition. One of the eight images in the *Cargamontón* series (2018), from which the exhibition takes its title, depicts precisely *that* child on the ground. *That* child is Soldi’s own memory and reality, as it is for many. The image represents the moment after, the consequences of bullying in a classroom corner. Soldi’s black and white photography underscores heteronormative Lima’s strict binaries. Some are on top, some are below. Some “belong,” due to their sexual identity, others don’t—and suffer the consequences, suffocating under a pile of bodies. Yet, that same pile of bodies is a source of desire and a longing for sexual freedom. It is here that bodies are the closest, it is here that they touch, and Soldi brings this ambiguity to the fore through pixilation. In this way, the pixelated aspect of his images signals both the distance of a childhood memory that reaches us through social media, on the one hand, and the abstraction of a desire that causes collective suffocation, on the other. Pain, desire, and body coexist. As The Print Center curator Ksenia Nouril explains: “For a young, queer man growing up in a conservative, Catholic environment, it was one of the few socially acceptable instances of physical contact.”

“Had I stayed in Peru, what would my life have been like?”, wonders this outstanding young artist in *Imagined Futures*, the exhibition’s second series. Created between 2016 and 2018, it is comprised of twenty-five almost identical photo-booth self-portraits. For Soldi, the question about the imaginary life left behind is a constant for all immigrants, and this, once again, renders his work an exploration not of personal, but of collective memory. In these portraits, Soldi’s eyes are closed. The artist photographing himself is not intent on seeing, but on imagining, and on doing so collectively. Ultimately, this is an exhibition where remembrance is also imagination, and what is imagined has the potential to become real. Photography is here the medium “witnessing,” serv-

ing as “proof” of that intermediate possibility: to imagine from a distance a conservative past where desire was, nevertheless, more than mere prohibition.

FLORENCIA SAN MARTIN

ROLDANILLO / COLOMBIA

Donna Conlon and Jonathan Harker Museo Rayo

There is a type of metaphor by virtue of which small actions come to evoke broader concepts. It works as a suggestion, teasing out relationships between what is seen (or read) and issues that float in the viewer’s consciousness. Donna Conlon (Atlanta, 1966) and Jonathan Harker (Quito, 1975) present at Museo Rayo a series of short videos where concrete poetic gestures hint at complex, problematic matters.

For this exhibition, Miguel González curated a selection of environmental-themed works: *Más me dan* (More I get, 2005), *Estación seca* (Dry Season, 2006), *Brisa de verano* (Summer Breeze, 2007), *El basurero* (The Garbage Dump, 2009), *Bajo la alfombra* (Under the Rug, 2015), and *Voz a la deriva* (The Voice Adrift, 2017). These works also contain, between the lines, a meditation on *scale* and *nothingness*. The household scale of bottles, bags, or a rug suddenly broadens into a universal plane, touching on such subjects as the oceans, the mountains, or all the world’s garbage. This ability to bridge the gap between the particular and the general derives, in part, from the concreteness of the gestures and the length of the videos. These works are closed cycles where the chaotic nature of the flow of objects is always on display.

In *More I get*, for instance, two hands hold a plastic bag containing another bag, which in turn contains another bag, and so on. The bags are unwrapped one by one in what feels like an interminable sequence. In the end, *nothing* is found there except for the containers themselves, like the packaging detritus that remains outside the cycle of consumption and becomes an object only as a function of the objects inside it. That *nothingness* underscores its disposable and polluting nature. In the end, all that is left is a tragic, hollow support for advertising messages.

The issue of *nothingness* is similarly present in *Dry Season* and *The Voice Adrift*. In the former, an outside accumulation of empty

Donna Conlon and Jonathan Harker. *Bajo la alfombra* (Under the Rug), 2015. Video. 2’49”. Photo courtesy of the artists

