

Exhibition November 3, 2021 – March 28, 2022

Sabatini Building, Floor 3

Pedro G. Romero

Versifying Machines



La sevillana (La farsa monea) (The False Coin), 2017. Piece produced for documenta 14

(Freedom of movement) *I often say that I don't know what freedom is, but as in so many other things, my strongest argument is no more than an allegory, that of puppet strings: the more there are, the greater the freedom.*

Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, *Campo de retamas*, 2012–15

Since the mid-1980s, when Pedro G. Romero (b. 1964, Aracena, Huelva) started to work as an artist, his projects have assumed a particular, singular, even eccentric place, although he has not by any means sought to stand alone or follow an individual path. His *modus operandi*—beyond simple labels such as collective, cooperative, and sociable—has consisted of contriving indexes, dispositives, apparatus, in short, machines associated with the field of art.

This exhibition presents a compilation of many of these machines, the models of which are the cyborg, Wolfgang van Kempelen's chess-playing automaton—"The Turk," in which, according to Walter Benjamin, theology was hidden within historical materialism—and, principally, Jorge Meneses's "versifying machine," described by Juan de Mairena in *Coplas mecánicas* (Mechanical Verses), a magnificent explication by Sevillian poet Antonio Machado. This versifying machine is a modern, avant-garde machine, in the tradition of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* and of the experiments and experiences of the Futurists and the Dadaists. Machado links it to a certain popular approach to culture, typical of troubadours, of flamenco, and of the songbook of Manuel Balmaseda, the unschooled, illiterate author who carried in his memory hundreds of flamenco lyrics and made them appear at will using his own mnemonic method.

Thus, since the late 1990s Pedro G. Romero has worked on two of these large apparatus: the Archivo F.X. and the Máquina P.H. Through them, he carries out projects in which he explores historical events, the life and circulation of images, sacramental iconography, the iconoclastic gesture of the twentieth-century artistic avant-gardes and of modern art, flamenco, ideas and imaginaries of popular culture, the economy, cultural policies, forms of urban speculation, etcetera.

The intention is not simply to revisit a series of commonplaces such as Conceptual Art, relational art, and lumpen productivism. It is all of that, but it is also an attempt to break away from the modern art academy, not by excluding it, but by incorporating other idioms: those of critical theory, cultural studies, and flamenco. The works presented here show that there is no natural, original, or national voice, but only ways of speaking, ways of looking, and ways of doing, and



Los trabajadores (The Workers), 2012. "la Caixa" Collection. Contemporary Art

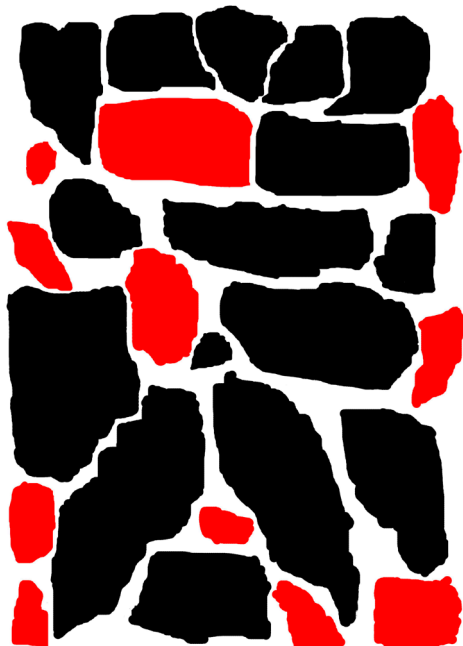
that all these ways are interconnected, entangled, and intertwined.

Versifying Machines is a chronological overview of Pedro G. Romero's work that moves backward from the present—*El Sacco* (2019–21), *The New Babylonians* (2019–21), and *Lo que el exilio nos enseña* (What Exile Teaches Us, 2018–21)—to his first exhibitions of the 1980s—*El almacén de las ideas* (The Storehouse of Ideas, 1987–90), *La sección áurea* (The Golden Section, 1989–92), and *Un mundo r.a.r.o.* (A Strange World, 1990–93). It considers the popular turn in the works from the 1990s, *El tiempo de la bomba* (Time of the Bomb, 1993) and *¿Llegaremos pronto a Sevilla?* (Will We Reach Seville Soon? 1999), and charts a course through twenty years of the Archivo F.X. (2000–2020) on iconoclasm and the image. Also on display are some of the works he made for documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens (2017); the large-scale installation of the Archivo F.X. at the Fundació Antoni

Tàpies in 2006, entitled *The Empty City: Community*; and some of the works that were part of *The Imperative Dream*, curated by Mar Villaespesa in 1990, and *Before and After the Enthusiasm*, curated by José Luis Brea in 1989.

Also included is a project created specifically for the occasion, *Canciones de la guerra social contemporánea* (Songs of the Contemporary Social War), a large installation and scenography conceived as a kind of public square and documentation space. It will host a series of performances, restoring the *détournements* compiled by Alice Becker-Ho and Guy Debord, which Pedro G. Romero has invited several composers and artists to perform.

At the same time, particular attention is given to what Pedro G. Romero calls "The Knee," "The Kneecap," and the "The Patella": activities carried out with communities, collaborations with



Racional/Orgánico (Rational/Organic), 2000

magazines, artist groups, and university institutions, such as his work with the magazine *Arena*, in the collective Juan del Campo, and in *La Situación*, *Carta de Ajuste*, *BNV Producciones*, *Arteleku*, *UNIA arteypensamiento*, *Plataforma de Reflexión de Políticas Culturales* (PRPC). Also, as part of the research of the *Máquina P.H.*, his activities in the *pie.fmc* (*Plataforma Independiente de Estudios Flamencos Modernos y Contemporáneos*), which have allowed him to work on the artistic direction of dancer Israel Galván, and to collaborate with Niño de Elche, Rosalía, Rocío Márquez, Inés Bacán, Tomás de Perrate, and others. It is in these spaces where the works find articulation and scope, works that in this exhibition appear, disappear, and reappear, polyphonically, filling the whole space, in rhythmic cadence. Lastly, there is also an

“exhibition within the exhibition” that in a sense reflects Pedro G. Romero’s work as curator: *Máquina de Goya* (*Goya Machine*). It is a partial presentation of an almost lost generation, that of the nineteenth-century artists (such as Leonardo Alenza, Francisco Lameyer, and Lucas Velázquez) who, in the wake of Goya—especially *Los Caprichos* and *Los Disparates* (*The Follies*)—connected *Conceptismo* with the force of popular culture at the dawn of contemporary Spain.

The whole setup is conceived as a kind of optical theater, in which each work, of a markedly anachronistic nature, unfolds, necessarily, as a gesture, as a moment of the present.

Against the backdrop of Walter Benjamin’s contention that when fascism aestheticizes



El fandango de la bomba/Fandangos de Valverde/Faltan (The Bomb Fandango/Valverde Fandangos/Remaining), 1993–95.
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. Gift of Fundación ARCO, 1996

politics, the response is to politicize art, Pedro G. Romero's work reveals a true struggle between the notion of aesthetics writ large and art that is always approached as a minor art. Art that is—according to the teachings of Ángel González García—above all, the invisible. But the invisible is not ideas, concepts, the spirit, credit, or surplus value. It concerns relationships, ties, magnetic fields that connect—as language does—certain things with other things: human beings, animals, landscapes, journeys, times, spaces, in short, things. Spinoza used to say that an image is only an image if it is connected to other images. These interwoven warps, wefts, lines—like the puppet strings in Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's example at the start of this text—are the strings that move the versifying machine, and this is what we discover in this exhibition.

Related Activities:

Songs of the Contemporary Social War II

November 2, 2021 – February 27, 2022
(consult website)

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