



Arturo Kameya

OPAQUE

SPIRITS

with Claudia Martínez Garay
7 March—26 May 2024

EN



Arturo Kameya. *Untitled*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | London | New York.
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“Why do we pretend
to have a state?”

José Ignacio Cabrujas, 1987



Arturo Kameya. *Rosario*, 2022. Mixed media. Courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | London | New York. photo credit: Gregory Carideo. © Arturo Kameya

The Fish don't know what will happen (but we do):

Interview with Arturo Kameya, feat. Claudia Martínez Garay

Valentijn Byvanck, February 2024

The following interview is the result of three conversations with Arturo Kameya. Two are at his studio in Amsterdam, a room with a small kitchen. Panels in various stages of completion for upcoming shows and fairs lean against the wall. We sit at Arturo's desk where we drink coffee and where he shows me computer renderings for the exhibition at Marres. His partner Claudia Martínez Garay is painting large panels in the adjacent studio. As a featured artist in Arturo's show, Claudia is also present at the third conversation at Banka Studios, a recording facility in Maastricht.

of the things, but it's not going to be fully graspable. The right to be opaque is a right to be different and marks a form of resistance against the homogenous understanding of culture.

Arturo:

Opaque Spirits is a painting that you can breathe in. The painting of spaces, objects, and animals offer a way for me to speak about things that otherwise would be either too dramatic or too romantic to handle. The many references to Peru in these paintings are essential to me. I've lived with all these objects, sounds, figures, and walls. But I don't have to make it important for other people. I am not making a travel brochure or giving a lecture.

A PAINTING YOU CAN BREATHE IN

Arturo:

I am transforming Marres into a hotel. Every room in the hotel represents a debt owed by the state to the people of Peru. The rooms are inhabited by ghosts who have come to collect these debts. The title *Opaque Spirits* suggests that these ghosts are not fully transparent. It stems from a phrase in Édouard Glissant's book *Poetics of Relation* (1990) in which he makes a plea for societies not to be fully understandable by the dominant powers. These powers regulate a form of globalization that demands transparency. But transparency always presupposes a gaze from the center to the periphery, never the other way around.

Claudia:

In Peru, there is a strong sense of religion and spirituality. This informs the way in which the exhibition is created. I think we can explain some

The right to be opaque is a right to be different.

People who live in the so-called peripheral areas of the world don't have much time to think about post-colonial discourse.

solutions. When I first came here six years ago, I heard a lot of talk about decolonization. It was often very descriptive of what it was like to live in a postcolonial country, territory, or culture. I think I heard more conversation about this here than in my home country. I asked around, especially among people in my circle of friends and acquaintances who were from Indonesia. They felt the same: People who live in the so-called peripheral areas of the world don't have much time to think about post-colonial discourse. Most of the time, they cannot afford to be abstract. They understand the things in their daily lives because they use them. That doesn't mean that there is a lack of critical thinking. But it is different, multi-layered.

The other day, I showed you an image of a counterfeit backpack with the video game character Sonic on the front, Harry Potter on the back, then the number 10 (the number of soccer player Messi) and the name of former US president Obama written on the sides. Everything is there. Now imagine the person who is wearing it, a person who likes Obama, Harry Potter, Messi, and Sonic. I mean, there's your postcolonial discourse in the real world. There's no abstraction. It's just there. You have all this multiplicity in one small counterfeit backpack. You can have a lot of analysis and writing, but real life is just like that. Something happens, and the writing follows.

Claudia:

In Peru, most schools use school uniforms to create a level playing field. Yet many people don't have the money to buy a uniform. Poor families can't even afford to pay for an education. They have difficulties growing up in a world where their language is not accepted. This language barrier keeps them isolated in their community.

A COUNTERFEIT BACKPACK

Arturo:

The post-Margaret Thatcher world tells us that there's no alternative to free trade. This is the thing we have to accept and incorporate, otherwise we are left out of the economic system. Cultural capital works the same way. The world is educated in a Eurocentric mold. Peruvians are taught about western culture, about Jesus Christ, great European artists, Monet, Van Gogh, Picasso, just as they are taught about European leaders and politics. We drink from the same source of knowledge that stems from an intellectual extractivism that appropriates and modifies knowledge to consequently present it as the foundation of modern society. And the bottom line is to say, this is civilization and everything else is not.

Academics gain respect by providing an opposing point of view. But they shy away from suggesting

The backpack allows them to craft an identity that's very concrete and very real to them. And it can be read as an expression of identity, resistance, or protest. In the end, it's just what it is.

It is important to realize that the majority of the indigenous population in Peru speaks Quechua, but the government communicates only in Spanish.

A BACKWATER LOCKER ROOM

Arturo:

A lot of the exhibition needs to be decided on-site. That's why we are taking more than five weeks to install it. The 3D file we made is only the beginning. The rest is an organic process. I like visitors to experience all the marks and impressions that we leave in this work, and all the decisions we make, and feel how that relates to them as viewers. A lot of our work in Marres is to create an ambience, to build rooms, to direct the lights, to put a lot of things in, then filter, determine what's going to be in and out, until we find a balance.

Claudia:

Making a big installation like this is very exciting. When you make a sketch for a painting, you have a precise idea of what it is going to look like. Now we have an idea, but only in the making will we know how it will actually work. Arturo made a

plan for a journey through the house, an installation with many objects, which visitors can move around in. He also designed some in-between spaces in which they will be embraced by the sound, music, or just noise. I am going to collaborate with him on this sound part.

Arturo:

The exhibition features straightforward works and complex rooms. The beer fountain is an example of the former. It is basically a painting with a water tap. From the water tap flows a liquid that looks like beer. The liquid cascades down from water pitchers installed on the wall, and the result is a beer fountain. The work is titled *Rosario* (Rosary), a string of beads used by Catholics for repentance. Each bead symbolizes a key moment in the life of Christ. It helps the owner to meditate on Christ's life and to repent for their sins. You can be a non-believer, but that doesn't matter because Peruvians have incorporated a lot of Catholic culture, especially collective guilt. We don't know what we have done wrong, but we are sure that we are guilty. And beer will wash away our sins.

After *Rosario*, visitors will be absorbed into a bathhouse that is also a soup kitchen. The combination is not at all common in Peru, but I wanted to make a communal space, not a spiritual one, more like a backwater locker room with painted silhouettes that are talking to each other. The space will have a line of carved-out figures and perhaps a copy of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* on the wall. Claudia makes the soundtrack, which will be emitted by a series of objects. I am not sure what it is going to be exactly. It could be music, noise, background chatter. I also imagine a radio conversation where you call to request a song and end up discussing your problems with the DJ.

Claudia:

The location is very important. The Marres house is a bit fancy, with its ceiling moldings and sense of abandonment. In each room, something quite familiar is happening, or something that you have somehow experienced before.

Arturo:

The first floor will have an almost empty room with a tacky dancing shelf and some rubble and stuff around it. The shelf is animated and constantly moving. It's a very common Chinese product that can be ordered on Alibaba. I wanted to have this cheap-looking furniture that is trying to get on with life, whatever that is, and with a red light, like in a brothel. Claudia will work on the playlist. I think she is going to select some old salsa songs, perhaps from the Puerto Rican salsa singer Héctor Lavoe. He was part of the famous Fania All-Stars salsa group that released very sad songs.

Claudia:

We discussed the important things for us to talk about right now. And the answer comes in the form of music. In the south, we have some bands who are really anti-imperialist, who express the suffering of people of color. There is a range of moods, but the political tone is quite important for us. From Central America, we are thinking about Rubén Blades, or Buena Vista Social Club. Their songs are important examples of storytelling about everyday life. And visitors experience this while seeing a shelf that is moving to a certain rhythm. What is there to understand? It will resonate differently with each visitor.

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Arturo Kameya. *Untitled*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | London | New York.
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"Fleas dream of buying themselves a dog."

From *The Nobodies* (Los Nadies)
by Eduardo Galeano.

SOURCEBOOK



"Anyone can declare themselves emperor in a desert."

Fernando Belaúnde, President of Peru from 1963–1968 & 1980–1985, upon learning that there were guerrillas in Peru.

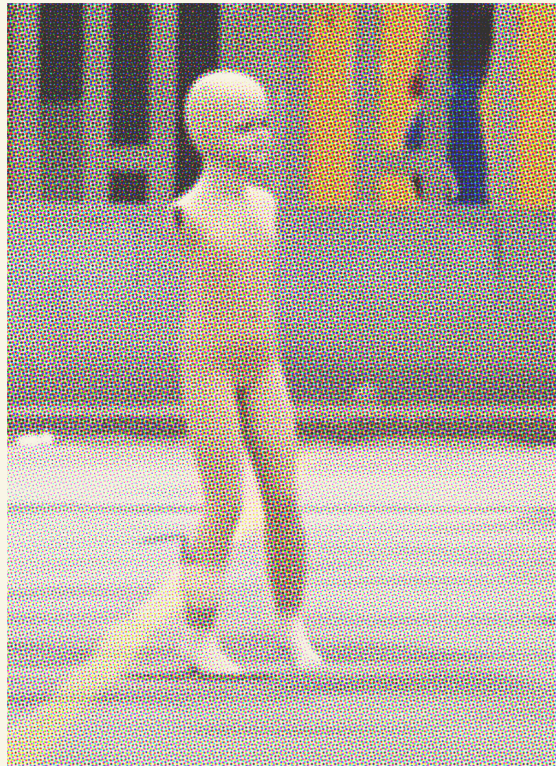


Clash between the police and land traffickers in the outskirts of the city of Lima.



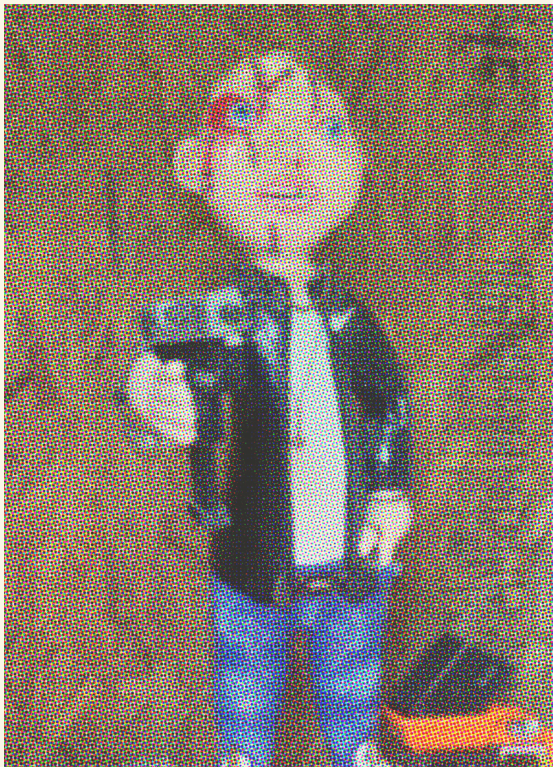


Awareness talks in schools initiated by the Police Explosive Disposal Unit (UDEX), about the irresponsible use of pyrotechnic products, using dolls and enactments of accidents.



"Give my regards to your Mamacita."

Luis Miguel Sánchez Cerros, President of Peru from 1930–1933, sending regards to the queen of England at the end of an official visit by her son, Prince George.



A local gang called *Los Chuckys de la Amistad*, dedicated to car theft, worshipped a demonic doll that protected them when they went out to commit crimes.

The chief of the police division that handled the case stated that the Chucky doll was confiscated and appeared to be made of plaster. He further reported that the thieves

commissioned the doll to be made with precise specifications such as designer clothing, battle wounds, a submachine gun, jewelry, expensive watches, and even a gold tooth.

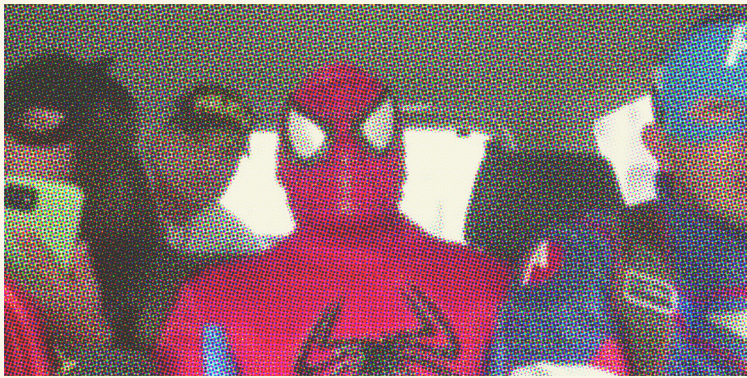


Another gang called *The Cousins of Chucky* was arrested when they tried to rob a drugstore. They were wearing masks from the horror movie *The Nun*.

"The downside of being the President of Peru is that you have to stop living in Paris."

Manuel Prado, President of Peru from 1939–1945 & 1956–1962.





The undercover police division dressed as the *Avengers* in a seize and capture operation of small-scale drug dealers.

The same police division dressed as *The Bride of Chucky*, Jason and Freddy Krueger during Halloween.



Former presidential advisor Vladimiro Montesinos bribing state officials and private sector Tycoons in the

infamous series of wiretappings called *Vladivideos*, which Montesinos taped himself.



Former president Alberto Fujimori sitting next to Montesinos in the same room where the tapes were recorded.

**"For my friends,
everything; for my
enemies, the law."**

Oscar Benavides, President of Peru from 1914-1915 & 1933-1939.



Cocaine brand logos.

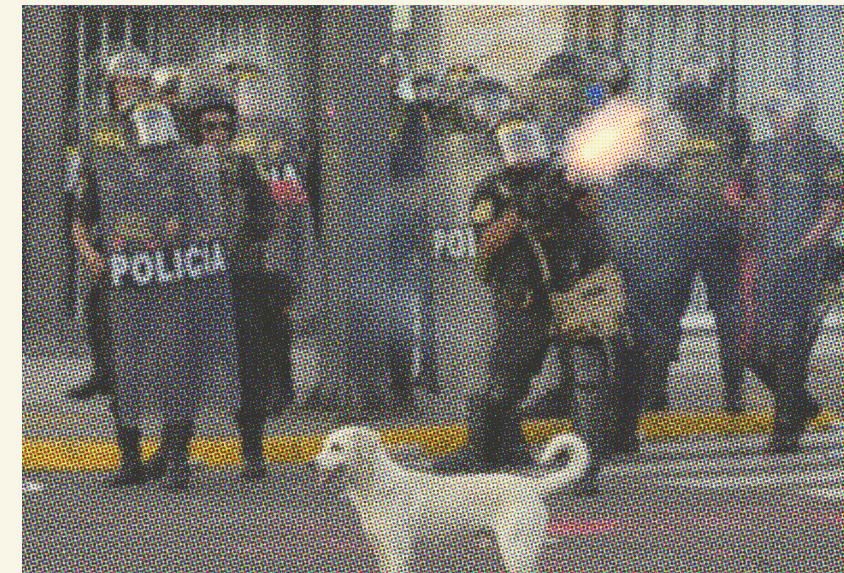


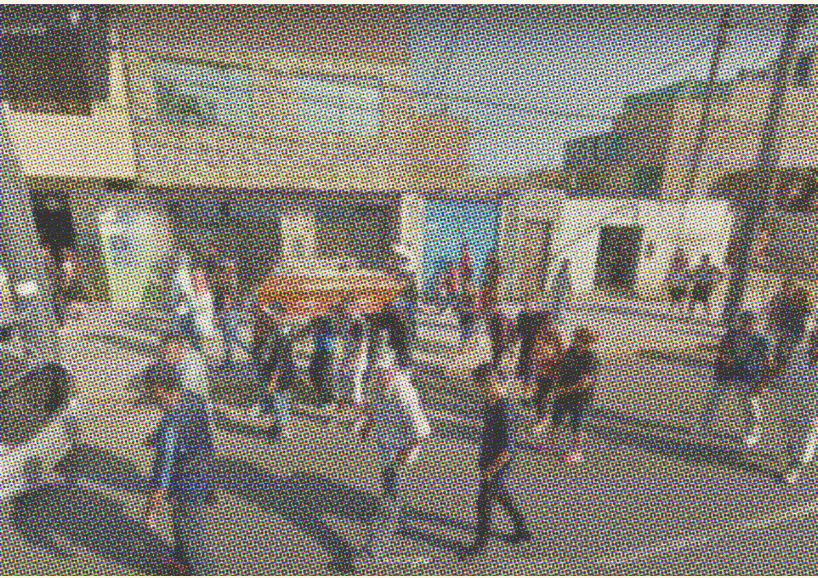


Papier-mâché dolls of president Dina Boluarte, after the killing of 49 civilians during the military repression of the 2022 and 2023 demonstrations against the government.

New Year's Eve dolls of former president Alberto Fujimori and his daughter Keiko, who also ran for president multiple times.

Dolls of politicians and celebrities are burned down during the New Year's celebration.





Google maps images of funerals in Lima.



Fake façade of Telesup University. The owner and his family later joined the government and helped shut down the educational reform programs.



Arturo Kameya. *Untitled*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | London | New York.
© Arturo Kameya



mostly in the Sierra, the mountainous region of Peru, where religion permeates everyday life. We respect practices and traditions that stem from old times, and we even mix Inca traditions with Christian traditions. Everyone has a portrait of Jesus in the house and an image of *the Last Supper* in the dining room. However, especially in the big cities, you will find a disdain for traditional culture and beliefs that have been discredited since colonization. It is important to realize that the majority of the indigenous population in Peru speaks Quechua, but the government communicates only in Spanish. Imagine that you need to fill out documents that are in Spanish while you speak only Quechua. You need to get your ID, which is in Spanish. You need to learn how to sign for your ID. You will use signature only once every five years for the elections. That gives you an idea of the distance between indigenous communities and the government.

Forty years ago, a violent conflict between the government and the revolutionary group Shining Path forced many people to flee from the Sierra to Lima. Here it was dangerous to admit that you came from the mountains because you could easily be labeled a terrorist. Since we wanted to hide where we came from, we became disconnected from our traditions. Now the war is over, there is a desire to embrace these traditions again. My generation can return to their roots and start to once again celebrate the solstice and the Andean New Year.

Arturo:
My grandparents came from Okinawa to Peru 90 years ago. They married within the Japanese population. During the Second World War, Peru had a treaty with the US and deported many Japanese people to the US. Our families tried to hide their Japanese language and culture.

That's why most people from my generation don't speak Japanese. In any case, our culture is a flexible fabric in which everything is blended. Every Japanese family has an altar. When you open it, you find incense and the ashes and names of ancestors in Kanji script. But there is also a picture of Jesus, the Señor de los Milagros, who is the patron saint of residents and immigrants, and whatever local saint or divinity you want.

Claudia:
Arturo and I are very aware of all the problems facing indigenous communities in a country with such great inequality and corruption. It plays an important role in our work. But rather than addressing these subjects in an overtly political way, we like to focus on common situations and practical problems.

**In any case,
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COLOR AND CLASS LINES

Arturo:
The wealth gap in Peru is enormous. The ruling class keeps itself busy by pushing their business projects through the legal system. A 4x4 car is the measure of success. In this sense, we're still very much the backyard of the US. Color and class lines often intersect. If you're white in Peru, you probably have money. The Japanese come in right after. Even if you don't have money, you are perceived to have it. They don't recognize you as a Peruvian, but they don't look down on you. The indigenous people coming from the countryside are viewed as the lowest rank. They speak in their original language and cannot afford a decent education, and as a result will not get proper representation in the government.

Claudia:
I am from an indigenous background and mestizo family whose roots are

THE NEGLIGENT HOTEL MANAGER

Arturo:
The Venezuelan playwright José Ignacio Cabrujas said in an interview that the state in Latin America behaves like a negligent hotel manager. Instead of giving you all the facilities to live comfortably, this manager provides you with everything you cannot do in the hotel. He asked what the point was of having a state, when it is so often only a game of appearances. In this installation for Marres, I have exchanged the word 'appearances' for 'apparitions,' and 'guests' for 'ghosts.' Instead of housing guests, the Marres hotel has lingering ghosts that have come to settle debts. The rooms are about all this unfinished business.

The work *Ghosts are another mouth to feed* shows a typical domestic scene: a hoarder's house. All the houses of the Nikkei (Peruvians of Japanese descent) are like

this. Everything you ever purchased is there, but you cannot find anything. We use our roofs as storage for abandoned stuff, and for hanging the laundry. In my parental house, we also had many cabinets that we used to section off our domain and that left very little living space. In the middle of the hoarder's room in Marres, there's a table with some objects, an ordinary can of tuna, and painted cut-outs of two old ladies stretching. It looks like a very common scene, yet, from a different perspective, the table could also be viewed as a tomb or a Ouija board, and these two figures could be ghosts rising from the soil. The work refers to all these supernatural stories that we watched in the Peruvian media during the 90s and which were manufactured by the government to create smokescreens for what was actually happening.

Claudia:

The scene is characteristic of a Peruvian household: you're waking up in your house, and having breakfast with your family, preparing to go to school or work. There is an ancient altar, passed down from generation to generation within the family, where the pictures of the deceased family members are kept. Next to it is the TV showing tabloid news in the morning, to feed you with memories for the rest of the day. The news always follows the same pattern. First, there is something that is difficult to believe, a supernatural thing. Then there is a murder or rape happening somewhere in Peru. Lastly, there is gossip, like a soccer player having an affair with a celebrity. And then there is also something else happening in the room. It is this banal thing, a can of tuna that is hitting other objects like a glass or dish. You can sense there's something there, that it belongs to this household, this family, but you're not sure about what debt has to be paid, nor what

the unfinished business is of this entity moving stuff around. It's a latent being, something lingering, like a constant feeling. You cannot explain it, but it exists.

You can sense there's something there, that it belongs to this household, this family, but you're not sure about what debt has to be paid.

"There are two kinds of problems in Peru, the kind of problem that cannot be solved, and the kind that solves itself."

A MOTORCYCLE WITHOUT WHEELS

Arturo:

The Peruvian novelist Manuel Scorza describes a historical event that happened 75 years ago in a rural town in Peru. Fifteen farmers formed a union and went to talk to the owner of the plantation to obtain rights and payments. The owner poisoned the farmers, and they all died. The court judged in the subsequent trial that the death was the result of a collective heart attack. Manuel Ugarteche was the president of Peru at that time. He said famously: "There are two kinds of problems in Peru, the kind of problem that cannot be solved, and the kind that solves itself." Ugarteche himself is proof of the fact that Peru might have become politically independent of Spain, but the old political and family hierarchies are still intact. This summarizes the history of Peru after independence.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, violence rates in Peru were very high, mostly due to a bloody clash between the government and the terrorist groups. In the 2000s, the urban elites from Lima and other cities took over. Poverty rates declined, and everybody was happy and became neoliberal very fast. Something that is never mentioned in the electoral campaigns is that Peru also became one of the biggest cocaine exporters in South America. The country is openly corrupt. Integrity is not even a symbolic gesture; nobody cares anymore. If you wish to steal something, then please give something back: a road or a hospital. That's what our current political class preaches: free trade brings riches to everyone. But the people who work the land remain unprotected and poor.

A previous government had invested a lot of money in the film industry, which resulted in a flourishing of high-quality films. When the government was replaced and the money ran out, filmmakers had to work with very small budgets. The films deal with all kinds of subjects and are of very mixed quality. They are not primarily about politics, but subliminally, in small scenes and things you discover in the background, there are all these traces of threat and war. When I asked the directors for permission to use the fragments for a three-channel video on the era (*Punto ciego/Blindspot*), we discovered that most of them had only bootleg copies.

In the exhibition, I put a Yamaha motorcycle with a lot of people on top, but without wheels. I wanted to use this image as the beginning of a route, an invitation to go on this trip together. When you think of a means of transportation in major cities that are not the US: Canada, Europe, Australia, or Japan, the first thing

that comes to mind is this informal way of moving around. The image also offers a metaphor for what happens in the rest of the country. The Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez criticized the banana republics of Latin America for their political instability, economic exploitation, and foreign interference. We're not so poor and dependent anymore, but there is a lot more corruption now than 50 years ago. And when the economy went into decline, we were left with a motor-cycle that cannot travel.

THOSE WHO SCRATCH WHERE IT DOESN'T ITCH

Arturo:
There is a saying in Latin America: "Those who scratch where it doesn't itch," (in Spanish: "Rasca donde no pica"). The phrase stems from a short story from the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, who wrote about a Spanish committee that was trying to explain the Bible to indigenous people from Mesoamerica. The people heard the explanation from the Spaniards, and they said: "The Bible is good, but it scratches where it doesn't itch." The saying also applies to a state that busies itself with distracting people from the fact that it fails to take care of the things the people need. A spectacular example of this is the morning news that treats Peruvians to footage of police training exercises to capture street criminals. The videos are designed to instill trust in the police. The videos depict the police dressed up in various

civilian disguises, including Santa Claus, voluptuous vendors of tamale, and even Marvel heroes like Spider-Man. In the training videos, you see them breaking down doors, arresting people, and so on. The costumes and lighthearted tone of the videos are designed to make people forget the police's murderous reputation in respect of opponents of the regime, members of uncooperative indigenous peoples, and others increasingly often labeled as terrorists.

Claudia:
The situation is sometimes very absurd. Take Susy Díaz, a former celebrity and exotic dancer who became a congresswoman. She was one of the best we had. She promised to give her first paycheck as a congresswoman to the poor. This is not something you would expect in Peru. Usually, members of congress spend a lot of money on having a parking space close to their office, or they pay an assistant to wash their feet, or they spend it on fried chicken. Sometimes, they even take money from their assistants. Such behavior makes for big headlines in the newspapers, but without consequences. Politicians in Peru can be tax evaders, convicted criminals, murderers, rapists. We are used to those things.

Arturo:
The Peruvian artist Juan Javier Salazar, who recently passed away, was a very sharp observer of Peruvian reality. He defined our existence by referring to the fish along the coastline of Peru that swim very happily not knowing that they have already been sold to the fish meal industry. I really like his way of thinking and the fact that his views offer a perspective from which to rewrite Peru's history. That's why I wanted to have these moving fish, not knowing what's going to happen, as an end piece in the exhibition.

Opaque Spirits
is a painting
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**If you wish to
steal something,
then please give
something back: a
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ARTURO KAMEYA
BIOGRAPHY

Bringing together a range of visual cultural languages, the multidisciplinary works of Arturo Kameya (Peru, 1984) connect diverse stories, popular myths, historical events of his native land. He currently lives and works in Amsterdam (NL).

Kameya attended the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru in Lima (PE) and was a resident at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam (NL) from 2019 through 2021. His work was presented at *Memory is an Editing Station*, the 22nd Biennial Sesc_Videobrasil in São Paulo (BR) in 2023; *We, on the Rising Wave*, the Busan Biennale (SK) in 2022; and *Soft Water Hard Stone*, the fifth New Museum Triennial, New York (US) in 2021.

His solo exhibits include, *Los Ovnis*, GRIMM, New York, NY (US); *En esa pulga, se mezcla nuestra sangre / In that flea, our blood mixes*, GRIMM, New York, NY (US); *Drylands*, Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht (NL); *Grandma's Cooking Recipes*, GRIMM, Amsterdam (NL); *Depósito de Sombras*, Alliance Française, Lima (PE); *Allá en el Caserío, Acá en el Matorral* (with Claudia Martínez Garay) Ginsberg Galería, Lima (PE); *Ghosts Don't Care if You Believe in Them*, Hotel Maria Kapel, Hoorn (NL); *Ghost Stories*, Alliance Française, Lima (PE); *Ciencia Ficción*, Wu Gallery, Lima (PE); and *Land at the End of the Sea* (with Claudia Martínez Garay), Galería del Centro Cultural Británico de San Juan de Lurigancho, Lima (PE).

His work is part of many collections including the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection (US), the ING Collection (NL), and the collections of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (US), Museo de Arte de Lima, MALI (PE), and the Saastamoinen Foundation (FI).

Arturo Kameya is represented by GRIMM, Amsterdam | London | New York.

CLAUDIA MARTÍNEZ GARAY
BIOGRAPHY

Claudia Martínez Garay's (Peru, 1983) practice encompasses painting, video, and installation. Her work references Peruvian history and socio-political memory, understanding the diverse Andean cultures through their material and immaterial remains, such as documents, artifacts, music, and testimonies. She studied printmaking at the PUCP (PE) and was a resident at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam (NL) from 2016 to 2017. She works and lives in Amsterdam (NL).

Recent solo exhibitions by Martínez Garay include *Ghost Kingdom*, GRIMM, New York, NY (US, 2022) and *Ten Thousand Things*, Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing (CN, 2020). Her previous group exhibitions include *Echoes of Our Stories*, Quinta do Quetzal, Vidigueira (PT); *Who Tells a Tale Adds a Tail: Latin America and Contemporary Art*, Denver Art Museum, CO (US); *No Linear Fucking Time*, B.A.K., basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht (NL); *Plural Domains*, Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL (US); *1 Million Roses for Angela Davis*, Kunsthalle im Lipsiusbau, Dresden (DE); and *The Faculty of Sensing: Anton Wilhelm Amo*, Kunstverein, Braunschweig and SAVVY Contemporary (DE). Her work was shown at the 21st Contemporary Art Biennial Sesc_Videobrasil, São Paulo (BR); the 16th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul (TR); the 5th Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art, Ekaterinburg (RU); the Aichi Triennial, Aichi (JP); the 12th Shanghai Biennial; and the New Museum Triennial, New York, NY (US).

Martínez Garay's work can be found in the collections of the Denver Art Museum, CO (US); Museum Arnhem (NL); Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing (CN); KADIST Collection, Paris (FR) and San Francisco, CA (US); Museo de Arte de Lima, MALI (PE); AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam (NL); AMC Art Collection, Amsterdam (NL); Fundación Studie e Recherche Benetton, Treviso (IT); Central Reserve Bank of Peru, Lima (PE); Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, FL (US); THE EKARD COLLECTION; KPMG Art Collection, Amsterdam (NL); LAM museum, Lisse (NL); LOOP Collection, MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona (ES); Micromuseo al fondo hay sitio, Lima (PE); and Museu Olho Latino, Atibaia (BR) amongst others.

Claudia Martínez Garay is represented by GRIMM, Amsterdam | London | New York.

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Installation team

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Marres is located in the heart of the old town
of Maastricht. It develops a new vocabulary
for the senses in collaboration with artists,
musicians, designers, and performers.
In addition to bringing a lively program of
exhibitions, presentations and performances,
Marres also offers a large public garden and
a wonderful restaurant.

Marres

House for Contemporary Culture
Capucijnestraat 98
6211 RT Maastricht
+31 (0) 43 327 02 07
info@marres.org
marres.org

Tuesday—Sunday
12—5 PM

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