

Liliana Porter

English



Pérez Art Museum Miami

El hombre con el hacha y otras situaciones breves – Venecia 2017



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Looking carefully at the hundreds of objects and diverse materials that make up Liliana Porter's expansive installation *El hombre con el hacha y otras situaciones breves – Venecia 2017* (The man with the axe and other brief situations – Venice 2017), the viewer will notice several old clocks of varying sizes. These symbols of linear time are shown completely broken apart, their white faces, circular metal casings, and interiors spilling outward in disarray. Central to Porter's practice is an investigation of time. She is specifically interested in how, as time passes, the line between reality and imagination becomes increasingly tenuous, as the current moment mixes with memories from the past that are often exaggerated in scale, fragmented, or broken. Porter is interested in how time becomes recorded not only in memories, but also in objects, images, and literature. The objects she engages and the "brief situations," or small narrative vignettes she creates, seek to demonstrate her investigations. These scenes are staged on top of large white bases whose abstract quality evokes an internal, mental space.

In its scale and complexity, *El hombre con el hacha y otras situaciones breves – Venecia 2017* is one of the artist's most ambitious projects to date. It was presented at the Venice Biennale in 2017 and acquired by PAMM the same year. The piece serves as a form of retrospective, as it contains many of the characters, groupings, or situations that have appeared repeatedly in Porter's works over the last three decades. The installation takes its name from the tiny figure of a man with an axe, shown hacking away at an elongated pile of fragmented objects. The viewer's eye follows this array of broken pieces as they shift dramatically in scale, from dust-size particles, to chips of broken china, to damaged figurines, to larger objects that include plates and chairs, and finally to a full-size broken piano. The man is part of the artist's ongoing *Forced labor* series, scenes of human figures engaged in apparently insurmountable tasks. The installation includes several other



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references from this series, such as a tiny woman weaving a large piece of transparent cloth and several figures attempting to rake large piles of colored sand. Understood metaphorically and existentially, these scenes articulate the daunting and perhaps impossible human task of searching for meaning or fulfillment.

Historical figures and symbols appear throughout the installation. A plastic toy replica of the car in which President John F. Kennedy was assassinated is exhibited, which includes figurines of both the president and first lady. Nearby an old hammer is placed casually on a sickle, tools and symbols of the industrial worker and the peasant farmer used in international Communism and on the flag of the Soviet Union. Elsewhere appears a broken porcelain head of the Chinese Communist leader Mao. Mickey Mouse's bulbous, black shoe can be seen as well. At the back of the installation, by the piano, is a sculptural bust of Napoleon, which is in fact a bottle for liquor. Small toy soldiers from various historical periods materialize throughout the piece. These and other representations of the past emerge haphazardly, their ideologies and historical positions coexisting in the same space.

Several situations quote the artist's *Dialogues* series, in which two unlikely characters face each other, apparently trying to communicate. Here, such duos include a white and tan porcelain dog facing a bird and a wooden penguin (the star of several of the artist's films) facing a small ceramic bust with a missing head. A related disjunctive grouping appears at the edge of one of the white pedestals and includes human figures of various sizes and a small duck, all being led in the same direction by a deer. This configuration recalls the artist's series *To go there*, which hints at the concept of all of Earth's creatures being united in a common destiny, quest, or life trajectory. Other elements that recall previous works include a tiny figure who carries overflowing buckets of white paint



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and a white figure who oozes large amounts of white paint, both demonstrating moments when human contents, such as emotions or remembrances, can no longer be controlled or contained.

A tiny figure carrying a suitcase appears alone, isolated in one section. He stands between two lines that twist behind him across an expansive area, forming a path he has apparently been following. This is "the traveler," another important player who has appeared consistently in many of Porter's prints, paintings, photographs, films, and installations since the 1980s. A classic trope for the beginning of a story and a character filled with mystery and potential longing, the traveler is also often an immigrant, a refugee, someone displaced. Being from one place and constantly remembering another can transform one's understanding of time and reality. Porter's personal narrative has involved several displacements. She moved with her family from Buenos Aires to Mexico City in 1958 for several years when she was a teenager. In 1964 she moved permanently to New York. She has described physically living in one time zone while mentally being engaged in another as an experience that provoked her questioning of linear time and her understanding of the fragility of the assumed divisions among memory, reality, and imagination. In a world where we are increasingly from one place and living in another, and in a city like Miami that is populated with many immigrants and travelers, Porter's philosophical reflections resonate strongly, while they simultaneously and persistently confound.

Tobias Ostrander
Chief Curator

Liliana Porter: El hombre con el hacha y otras situaciones breves – Venecia 2017

June 8, 2018–September 29, 2019

Liliana Porter

b. 1941, Buenos Aires, Argentina; lives in New York

El hombre con el hacha y otras situaciones breves – Venecia 2017 (The man with the axe and other brief situations – Venice 2017), 2014/17

Figurines, objects, and wooden base

Dimensions variable

Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami, museum purchase with funds provided by Jorge M. Pérez

Liliana Porter: El hombre con el hacha y otras situaciones breves – Venecia 2017 is organized by PAMM Chief Curator Tobias Ostrander. This exhibition is presented with funds raised by PAMM's International Women's Committee with additional support from Northwestern Mutual – The South Florida Group. Lead individual support received from Patricia and William Kleh, Ann Blackwell and Cornelius Bond, Gail Meyers and Andy Hall, Bryan Hughes, Darling Lie-Nielsen, and Richard Steiner is also gratefully acknowledged.



Northwestern Mutual

Biography

Liliana Porter studied at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, and the Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City. She has had solo exhibitions at the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah; ARTIUM – Basque Museum Center of Contemporary Art, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain; Espacio Mínimo, Madrid; Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes Emilio Caraffa, Cordoba, Argentina; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Neuquén, Argentina; Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo; Museo de Arte de Zapopan, Guadalajara; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museo Rayo, Roldanillo, Colombia; and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Hunter East Harlem Gallery, New York; Cornell Art Museum, Delray

Beach; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Museo Figari, Montevideo; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; and the Nevada Museum of Art, Reno. Her work belongs to numerous public collections such as the British Museum, London; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana; Museo del Barrio, New York; Museo Tamayo; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Phoenix Art Museum; Tate Modern, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Images

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