

## Lupe Álvarez

**00:02** - Many thanks to José Luis for his presentation, and following along in the decade of the 1990s it's important to mention the creation of **US Apart**, the school that enriched great artists who are in fact are still relevant today. Names such as Corina Briceño, Hayfer Brea, Juan Bolívar, Franklin Sánchez, among others, belonged to this school.

**00:30** - And to continue with our presentations, it's my pleasure to introduce researcher and art critic Lupe Álvarez. **(00:46) LÁ:** Good afternoon to each of you, I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity Sofía has offered me to be here with you, and thanks to Gabriel Pérez Barreiro, to all who work so arduously on such a lovely

**01:00** - project as this, those who make it possible. I'm going to talk to you about one of the most important shows of the decade of the 1990s, which was *Ante América*. Let me warn you that not only did I not see this show, but it was very difficult to obtain, not the images of the show, of the works, which are on the internet, but in spite of the close

**01:30** - collaboration with the critic and curator Jaime Cerón, I could not obtain photos of the show when it was installed. I've done my best to transmit to you all I've thought about and lived in this time. With you I'm now going to think on *Ante América*. When Sofía Hernández invited me to this event with the purpose of reviewing the show *Ante América*, of evaluating it from a historical perspective, I felt a great hesitation.

**02:00** - I never saw that oft-mentioned exhibition in the 90s, the decade that was supposedly destined to expand internationalism. In 1992, the year this project occupied the exhibit halls of the Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango in Bogotá, Cuba was experiencing the most aggressive moment of the Special Period. *Ante América* showed its expansive vocation, mobilizing all geographic, cultural and

**02:30** - identity-related frontiers, in parallel with the encapsulation that brought us eight hours of blackout. You can imagine, then, that as we in the Greater Antilles were drowning, thinking of the terrible circumstances of having water everywhere, the project conceived by Gerardo Mosquera, Carolina Ponce de León and Rachel

**03:00** - Weiss, rose up as a lucid strategy that summarized a host of issues in which, from the inside the complexities of our transcultural itineraries were mapped. *Ante América* abounded in sensitivity to what, from the horizon of cultural and logical discernment, could be considered a process of abstract exchanges. To confront the task of making myself a blind witness

**03:30** - of a visual phenomenon that invoked, above all, experience; to speak of works that I did not see as they were placed, or evaluate the show without having known the plot that gave it discursive weight, these were the conditions that led me to "read" *Ante*

*América* (in the mirror), refracted in a confrontation of ideas. With this premise, I plunged myself into deciphering and decoding at a distance

**04:00** - from the theoretical framework where its theses were anchored. My interpretation goes back to a space, the Havana Biennial, and especially the second edition of this emblematic event. In 1986, the art of Africa, the Middle East, Asia, flooded into Havana, complementing its heterogeneous presence with an outstanding group of

**04:30** - thinkers that offered perspectives from their own art scenes and articulated concepts and methodologies to think about the complexities of societies dealing with ethnic conflicts, deep-rooted traditions, colonial sagas, disparate modernities, all with the measure of the processes of globalization, immersion in techno-culture and all the chance involved in collisions, contingent articulations and

**05:00** - bloody tears. A universe in of multiple unreachable universes appeared there, destabilizing any supposed teleological history inscribed upon a linear and evolving model. For moments, the esthetic-familial patterns evaporated, changing the ingrained criteria of novelty. What was offered by that tremendous mosaic of cultural production, people by fringes reluctant to take on our

**05:30** - Western concept of art, more than offering a panorama of such complex and diverse zones of symbolic production, was to attempt to strengthen a horizon of thought that would attend to the subtleties of such discordant processes, which nevertheless could call themselves, in a certain way, by categories that were then common, such as "third world," "central/peripheral," "one's own/the foreign," and find themselves, above all,

**06:00** - in the debates those categories stimulated despite their binary form and their phenomenological conflictivity. In fact, the third and fourth Havana Biennials shook up the egocentric matrix, placing two of its definitive axes: the weight of a linear paradigm that linked tradition with an atavistic and folklore-heavy past, and the processes of colonization, allowing

**06:30** - those to be probed to show alternatives of resistance. From these dialogs voiced by such heterogeneous voices, which took apart the master keys of the language established in the centers of power, *Ante América* received the discursive books that strengthened its thesis. At the end of the 80s, many of the premises that arbitrated the artistic world were wobbling. Methodological rigidity,

**07:00** - saccharine visions of the arts, stereotypes about popular culture, restrictive definitions of art, and in many contexts, Cuba among others, the restrictions of politics were debated. During these very dates, and with the purpose of the controversial celebration of the fifth century of the discovery of America, a series of international exhibitions about Latin American art

**07:30** - enlivened the polemic. Artists from the 20th century, an exhibition with panoramic pretensions, in the charge of the MoMA, drew critical responses from an influential roster of Latin American intellectuals. The lines of questioning and the representations of Latin American art in the international discourse and the discursive contractions that supported it had their antecedents in other international shows which, for their temporal proximity

**08:00** - and their presence on the battlefield, contributed to the decisive realignment as a complacent, “othered” image of symbolic production. These were the conditions that spurred the aforementioned museologists of *Ante América*. The unfolding of a debate, which located itself in the antipodes of methodological and historiographical bias imposed by the metropolitan hegemony, gained strength and

**08:30** - presence from different stages, channels and media. We found an extensive America that questions administrated geographies and fixed identities; to push for slippage in the sense of what is Latin American, exploring a matrix of common social-historical processes; to inquire into the subjective effects of the place of America on the diagrams of power; to propitiate policies of

**09:00** - identification, of empowerment and of integration beyond naturalized and reductive differences; all these can be considered key points of the statement embodied in this great show. There was a confluence of artists located in Latin America, the Caribbean, Latin Americans exiled in Europe and the United States, African Americans,

**09:30** - Chicanos. These artists, even in their extreme heterogeneity, shared a cultural historic, economic and social community. The presentational strategies used by *Ante América* made way for a great anti-colonialist platform. The hard nuclei of cultural modernity, the linear relationship with time, and the

**10:00** - hierarchies among cultural media with diverse purposes were deemed anachronistic; it exposed a metabolism stripped of the obsession with originality, authenticity and purist decantation, reaffirming the idea that these notions were legacies of colonialism, naturalized by the colonial nature of nation-projects. *Ante América*, with this position, initiated a conceptual purge in

**10:30** - at least two senses. First, a critical look toward the neurosis of identity and its effects on the majority of our cultural properties, a sickness that installed in us a binary model of “one’s own/foreign” that needed to be terminated. It was enough to recall the cultural experience of our region beyond the limits of political administration and

**11:00** - examine notions proposed by the great intellectuals and artists from the dawn of the 20th century, for example, Fernando Ortiz’s transculturation, anthropophagy, syncretism; or to admire definitive metaphorical investments like that of Torres García to

find other routes that could, more than define, urge us to inquire into an unfathomable conflictivity that was constantly

**11:30** - reconfiguring itself. The second point, concomitant with the idea of hybridization, affirmed the intermixing, the mixture not free from friction, the overlapping, the discontinuity, amid processes like globalization, displacement, porous borders, and the power of techno cultures. This anchoring

**12:00** - was seen in the affirmations of artists participating in the show, such as José Bedia and Carlos Capelán, when they pointed out how naturally they lived different cultural experiences. A good part of the proposals represented in the show were congenial to these estimations. (Sorry, why haven't any slides been put up? Excuse the interruption, I was told that the slides would be managed from there. What happened?)

**12:30** - (What's going on? I agreed with Liliana that they would change the slides from there but they aren't appearing, and I'm on 31. I was watching and thought they must be up there, but no, sorry)(**12:53**) In fact, in his presentation, Gerardo Mosquera invokes Nelly Richard citing the characterization that this

**13:00** - author makes of Latin America as a "zone of experiences", whether of marginalization, dependence, the subaltern, decentralization (Let's go slowly, no rush, I don't know if I was mistaken, someone made a mistake but I was told the slides would be operated for me.)

**13:30** Well, let's see, I'm going to just review, are the slides being changed for me or do I need to do it? Bring up image 31. Good, Ileana, are you here? Do you have a copy of the document? Give it to me.)

**14:00** - (S: I'm going to change the slides. I'll bring up image 31 and I'll operate them. Now, Rafael, just bring up Lupe's image 31 and we'll take it from there, I'll tell you when with our radios. Everything is marked in the document.)

**14:34** - Well, I'd like to pause a moment here because this is interesting, the proliferation of the so-called figure concepts within the discourse of art about Latin America. There is a tradition, in this debate there was a very important turning point, which was the dialog among theorists of Latin American thought who sought alternative ways of thinking

**15:00** - that confronted the problem of colonial practices and the discourse of decolonization, and the discourses of the post-colonial theorists, basically Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai, Geeta Kapur, and it's interesting, this fusion that was very interesting to the thinking that built *Ante América*.

**15:30** – Aligning, if I may, with what Nelly Richard identifies as a new sensibility, we may go back to the pertinence of the term "landscapes" used by Alfonso del Toro to shade the

subtleties of processes of hybridization, naming these as nomadic semiotic entities that incessantly rectify and reinvent themselves, having effects that are

**16:00**- territorial, psychological, corporal, (Are you going to change the images. It's number 31. Yes, they are all numbered, each slide, the number of slides is marked...)

**16:32** - (Forgive me, this can happen any time. It's an occupational hazard. Is it ready?...)

**17:04** - (Now?...) (**17:15**) Well, I was referring, I was basically referring to a, when I was referring to the term of the figure concepts, it is interesting because there has been a constant allusion to the

**17:30** – relationship that existed for example in the constructive matrix of Caribbean cultural thought, Mosquera spoke often at this time, with great pertinacity, about the relationship there had been with what could be applied to thought about the third world in general, at that time the third world was still a very active category, in '92, for example, the digressions made by

**18:00** - cultural-logical thought about the paradigm of the Caribbean, about the matrix of the Caribbean. About the idea that this discontinuity that is perceived in a kind of bridge that never becomes reality. It's a very beautiful concept from the metaphorical point of view, and that evidently proliferates to characterize a series of cultures that could not grab hold of the kind of systematics built by, for example, the Western matrix of cultural-logical thought.

**18:30** – And that nurtured much of this kind of thinking. These dialogs were very productive. I, in this case I can say it because I lived it, it was perhaps one of the most enriching exchanges that could have happened; while they are looking for the slide I want to give a tip to students and those interested, the Havana Biennial has fortunately published a book that's

**19:00** - called *Bienal para leer*, the majority of these debates took place within the Havana Biennial, at that time we didn't have computers, we didn't—and even up to now don't—have internet access, and as a result these texts were all very loosely recorded or gathered. We would have these debates and it was all kind of in the air, perhaps someone typed them up. I was referring to this one, I was just now on that

**19:30** - slide, Alfonso del Toro because he discusses this concept of “landscape,” the concept of landscapes that you all have there, and that ponders fracture, discontinuity, decentralization, and all these kinds of problematics that were so common at the time. When he says this, and speaks of the impact it has on the

**20:00** - body, on the territory, in a series of aspects that not only influence from a real point of view, but penetrate the idea of subjectivity. Here you are seeing this work by

María Teresa Hincapié who speaks precisely about the body-territory relationship that this level of materiality gives, and gives in a very important way. So, I say, again aligning with what Nelly Richard

**20:30** - identifies as “new sensibility,” we would allow ourselves the term of “landscapes.” I must point out that the discourses about *mestizaje* and hybridity to explain our entrenched cultural weavings set off an alert that *Ante América* does not avoid. Both run the risk of implying that many conflicts of representation are resolved in a fallacious discourse of integration. In fact, Mosquera

**21:00** - has been talking about this constantly. In the show’s works, the mixtures and semiotic overlays that it exhibits don’t disguise what’s there. Sometimes they are proposed as dominant codes; I’m going to go back a little so that you all can see a few of the characteristics. Pay attention, in this same show, when I say that sometimes they are offered as dominant codes and sometimes

**21:30** - as forming a species, this work by Antonio Caro that is so lovely, that portrays the indigenous leader Quintín Lame, or these works by Jimmie Durham or Luis Cruz Azaceta on the subject of AIDS, or Camnitzer speaking about the problem of torture and reconverting the language of ascetic conceptualism in an extremely raw language from the point of view of the phenomena it expresses. Or the Caribbeans who have all their faculties for mythologizing

**22:00** - elevated to the cube, who speak with and invent their own gods with their own religions. In other words, the show *Ante América* permitted, in a common matrix, so that you all can see the images that should have been shown before, in this marasmus in which it’s precisely the idea of the Caribbean, the Caribbean, the English-speaking Caribbean, the French-speaking Caribbean, the insular Caribbean, the Caribbean of those with

**22:30** - European passports, I mean, this is the idea, this is the idea they have, that our towns have and that can find communion in common matrices, the same for the work of Everald Brown, with the work of Camnitzer, with the work of Luis Cruz Azaceta. Now I’ll continue with my reflection. With its

**23:00** - strategy, *Ante América* escorted critical performance out of the studio of hybridization processes. With its will to contribute to the making visible of this imagined south it spliced with this political division of those debates. Within this complex panorama, what is proposed is the idea of a Latin American art that finds in the contradiction of

**23:30** - un-identity, in the impossibility of finding one’s self, the option of understanding one’s self. The show emphasized the imaginary condition of an ambiguous cultural identity, sometimes strategic, other times poetic, but with a great urgency to take up the

reins of its way of thinking of itself. The ways of doing it were diverse and are worth citing, in every case.

**24:00** - I'll point out a few. The show insisted on highlighting the modes of living where forms of logic outside of logocentrism subsist. Let's go to this slide so that we can see a little of this phenomenon. Gerardo Mosquera has emphasized the conservation of magical-mythological ways of thought

**24:30** - that coexist with the modern conscience without contradiction, finding in that peculiarity the power of mythologizing that we see germinate in many contemporary poetics. The poetics of, for example, Carlos Capelán or, emblematically, Juan Francisco Elso, who manages to reconvert mythological traditions

**25:00** - into tremendously contemporary meanings, or Ana Mendieta. These proposals, as we see, have nothing to do with the preconfigured stereotypes of the mythical and the magical and they inhabit multiple methodologies and languages that don't come from aestheticization; they are articulated from the generative strength of belief and the extension of contemporaneity

**25:30** - from its poetic body. This vision gathered in a great potential for resistance in its breaking of the confinement of the traditions of the past, anthropologies, and folklore. Components of tradition could be seen in all the active forces that incorporated their senses into new and contemporary configurations. As Indian theorist Geeta Kappor would point out, a tradition

**26:00** - in use. *Ante América* came on the scene in a moment of a certain euphoria in anti-hegemonic cultural discourses. The prolix discussion regarding the postmodern condition gave *carte blanche* to all kinds of rhetorical contaminations and strategies. The appropriation and the revitalization of the old hierarchies within cultural media are some of the most relevant.

**26:30** - This work by Chagoya is absolutely pertinent in this case. The idea of a kind of battle with spaces in confrontation that don't manage to define their field and that are constantly defining themselves in tension is very important in this sense, or at least I see it that way. A thick file of rationalizations was created, which Nelly Richard identified as the crisis of the originals and the revenge of

**27:00** - the copy. To take advantage of the decrepit narratives of illustration and direct the critical gaze toward our own essentialisms, they constructed codes in the positions of many artists. There is an expansion of consciousness that in our cultures we have a simmering pot of integrative operations for constructions and linguistic play. The idea that a

**27:30** - Latin American postmodernism *avant la lettre* animated important forums, and the spread of texts by Mijaíl Bajtín, favored readings of artistic production that came from a dialogic focus, intertextuality and plurilinguism. The show constituted a

**28:00** - lecture to demonstrate why all these assessments fit together; nevertheless, the insertion of Latin America in the postmodern debate was neither tacit nor complacent. The focus, centered on power relations, the mechanisms of legitimacy and the contexts that arbitrated the significations of artistic processes, signaled the existing disparity in the devices of cultural circulation.

**28:30** - It was a key moment to reflect on how to enter into relationships among countries of the south, not only to define the imagination but to enter into south-south relationships, and to have them pay attention to the international circuit and articulate reconfigurations of the local concerned with having control over the final contexts of the proposals. The task required

**29:00** - facing the institutional apparatus that converts difference into “normal”, that makes it an instrument to serve the reestablishment of a centrality that adapts itself to new coordinates. Mosquera, Richard, I mean Nelly Richard, Luis Camnitzer have gathered much of the thought on this point. To think of this kind of links brings up the *a priori* of sketching the swaying notion of the south without reducing it to a particular mode,

**29:30** - easily generalized, of living the subaltern condition. It convened these voices to learn the subtleties of their life experiences, their place to speak before the danger of modernist totalization. The postmodern cliché of Latin America as kingdom of total heterogeneity. The wide tessitura of artistic practices, from their sensitive densities, had much to show,

**30:00** - and it took the lead over the integrating strategies of politics. A deep scrutiny of these strategies, which figures such as Ticio Escobar contributed to, brought a productive concept of situated difference closer to our conditions. This notion, just as it's defined by Arjun Appadurai, activates significations always in relation to a

**30:30** - location that shows a reluctant response to any unifying plan. Lastly, it's interesting how *Ante América* profiles that particular physiognomy. It not only managed to offer an image of a wide theoretical horizon, it also captured the particularity of the cultural texts that could

**31:00** - fits its vision. I think Nelly Richard articulated this in a brilliant way, she said: “The rhythm of the ‘South’ should fill the cultural texts of the Latin American periphery with roughness and dissonance, so that some refracted trace—negativity, excess, residues,

**31:30** - impurity—opposes the relativist discourse of cultural assimilation.” Many thanks.