Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols

September 16–December 30, 2022

Carlos Motta and Simon(e) Jaikiriuma Paetau, Mourning Stage, 2020/2022 (still). HD video with color and sound, 16 min. Image courtesy of the artists and P.P.O.W Gallery, New York. Supported by the Wexner Center for the Arts and the Goethe-Institut Bogotá. Based on a live performance commissioned by 11 Berlin Biennale. [A person is viewed from the shoulders up against a dark background. Layered atop their face is a drawing inspired by historical depictions of the devil.]
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## GLOSSARY OF SELECT WORKS

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This learning guide is intended for all ages. It’s also meant for all learners, whether you have seen the exhibition in person yet or not.

Links throughout the guide are always **bolded** and **underlined**. **Clicking them will send you to a new browser window, where you can learn more about themes, stories, and works in the show.**

This exhibition and its learning guide contain nudity, and deal with subjects of sexuality. Some works also touch on themes of violence and trauma. One video work, *Corpo Fechado (The Devil’s Work)*, 2018, contains a scene of a sharp object piercing skin and producing blood (at timestamp 8:45).

This learning guide covers only highlights from the exhibition and is not a comprehensive survey of all works. To see all the works in *Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols*, make sure to stop by the Wex before it closes on December 30, 2022.

Keep up with the Wexner Center for the Arts here:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Twitter](#)

If you post about the exhibition or this learning guide, make sure to use #WexArts so we’ll see your content!

Finally, please take [this survey](#) to share your thoughts on this guide!
YOUR MONSTERS, OUR IDOLS

Your Monsters, Our Idols foregrounds Carlos Motta’s longstanding dedication to equity, self-determination, and representation for marginalized people. This exhibition examines how histories are constructed and who is acknowledged. A selection of Motta’s works addressing colonialism’s legacy, queer activism, and radical otherness are featured. A recipient of the Wexner Center Artist Residency Award in Visual Arts, Carlos Motta explores the implications and stakes of renaming Columbus, Ohio, a city named for Italian navigator Christopher Columbus. Conversations with activists, scholars, and artists guided the creation of a new work—The Columbus Assembly. [1]

CARLOS MOTTA

Carlos Motta was born in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1978 and currently resides in New York. Through visibility and self representation, Motta’s multidisciplinary approach documents the social and political efforts of sexual, gender, and ethnic minority communities to challenge dominant and normative narratives. Motta, a historian and archivist of untold stories, is committed to conducting in depth research on the struggles of postcolonial subjects and societies. His work takes the form of video, photography, installation, sculpture, drawing, web based projects, performances, and symposia. Much of his body of work is accessible online at https://carlosmotta.com. [2]
BIPOC (pronounced “bye-pock”): “Black, Indigenous, People of Color.” While POC or People of Color is also used, BIPOC specifically emphasizes and centers Black and Indigenous identities. Learn more here about the term BIPOC, the history of the term and its variations. [3][4][5]

Colonization: The invasion, dispossession, and subjection of a people is known as colonization. A large portion of the indigenous occupants’ lands are taken as a result of such an incursion. The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is inherently unequal, favoring the colonizer at the expense of the colonized. [6]

Decolonization: Decolonization is the process of actively resisting colonial powers. It is the returning and transferring of political, economic, educational, and cultural independence and power to a colonized country’s Indigenous culture. Read more about decolonization in Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s essay “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” [6]

Gender Identity: Gender identity and gender self determination is the agency for one to recognize and identify their correct gender. [7]

LGBTQIA+: An abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Two Spirit, Intersex, Asexual. The plus sign at the end recognizes the multitude of identities and acknowledge others not listed. [3][4][8]

LGBTQ2SIA+: An extension of LGBTQIA+, the abbreviation includes 2S for Two Spirit or 2 Spirit. It is a Native American term that has various meanings for different tribes; learn more about the term here. [9]
Monstrosity: The term “monstrosity” is often associated with things or people that are perceived as abnormal or unknown. Based on this, power, especially who has power, is organized and enacted in systems. [10]

Queer: “I am referring to a fluid, sensitive and generous understanding of sex and gender—one that is not defined by rigidly constructed categories of identity.”

—Carlos Motta [11]

The Q is also seen in LGBTQIA+; it can mean queer or questioning. Some people identify as queer because it implies fluidity and/or because, while they are not heterosexual and/or cisgender, they do not feel a strong connection to a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. [3][4] Learn more here about the history of the term.

Representation and Visibility: The ways that various cultural identities, gender, race, ethnicity, and social classes, are portrayed. It also means how communities and experiences are portrayed from a specific ideological or cultural standpoint. Representation and visibility can expand our understanding of reality. Some activists, scholars, and communities explore what invisibility means and the intentionality behind remaining invisible. [12]

Self determination: The right, power, and ability for individuals to make independent decisions regarding themselves. The control of how one is perceived and represented on their own terms. This is also regarding not just representation but also economic, ecological, and political agency. [13][7]

*The concepts and definitions presented here are not limited to this document. We recognize that many terms are not included in this list and that their meanings and definitions are continuously evolving.
As part of *Corpo Fechado (The Devil’s Work)*, 2018, the whip from the film was cast in bronze and molded so that the actions appeared frozen in time. The use of the whip is reversed, much like in the film, as José Francisco Pereira seizes hold of his own power. These punishment instruments are reclaimed, approaching close to BDSM practices where pain and pleasure coincide and power and submission are nothing more than consensual.

*Corpo Fechado (The Devil’s Work)*, 2018 portrays the story of José Francisco Pereira, a man who was abducted in the 18th century and sold into slavery.

Watch *Corpo Fechado (The Devil’s Work)*, 2018, performed by Paulo Pascoal, [here](#) or by clicking the image on the left.

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Motta’s work often interacts with time; he reaches through the centuries to highlight figures from the past and links contemporary identities to queer stories from long ago.

“Is there not an echo of those who have been silenced in the voices you hear today?”—Walter Benjamin [14]

Motta also experiments with how time affects him, the artist; how it changes him now and will eventually bring death to his body. He has several works called *Self-Portrait with Death*. Two of them are in this show: *Self-Portrait with Death #1* (1996) and *Self-Portrait with Death* (2019). In the first, Motta is 18 years old; in the second, he is 41. What do the differences between these two photographs tell you?

These self portraits join a long tradition of memento mori art, a phrase in Latin which means “remember you must die.” [15] The most traditional form of memento mori image is a portrait with a skull, though they may contain decaying flowers and fruits, flies, and timepieces. Take a look at some memento mori pieces here. [16] What are some differences between these and Motta’s? Which one reminds you most of his portraits, and why?
What does it mean to label ourselves? What does it mean when others label us? A vital aspect of LGBTQIA+ presence in history are the different words used to describe queer people. Sometimes these labels came from inside the community, but many did not. *We The Enemy* explores these terms.

**SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!)** is the moniker used by Motta, Arthur Peetz, Carlos Maria Romero, and other collaborators to create performances, videos, and a manifesto. **Watch* We The Enemy (Performed by Despina Zacharopoulou) (2019) by SPIT!* here or by clicking the image below.

"DYKES" - an often derogatory term for women who exhibit masculine traits. In the Carol Newhouse exhibition, also at the Wex, you'll notice that this slur was reclaimed by lesbian communities as a proud self label.


"THE FREAKS" - remember the title of the exhibition, "Your Monsters, Our Idols." What's the difference between "monster" and "freak?"

"...ARE AND WILL ALWAYS BE THE ENEMY." - *We The Enemy* is also the title of the distorted devil sculptures, explored on page 15. Why do you think those sculptures and this video share the same title?

Manifestos announce the introduction of a new vision, goal, or undertaking. They critique the current situation while announcing its end and the start of a new movement. Manifestos integrate a direct and assertive social critique with a strong and motivating call to action. Check out *The SPIT! Manifesto Reader* here.
"The Shape of Freedom is a chronology compiling the history of the pink triangle and other emblems of the movements for homosexual rights in Europe and the United States. Important events in the history of homosexual activism are included, with an emphasis on the pink triangle as a symbol of sexual liberation." [17]

Click here to view the chronology in *Shape of Freedom* produced from different shows.

Take 5-10 minutes to read through the chronology. What is something that you learned? What does "freedom is a collective process" mean? What is the power in reclaiming, such as the Pink Triangle?

Carlos Motta uses timelines in different parts of the show (*Legacy* and *We Got Each Other's Back*). Why do you think Carlos utilizes timelines?
We Who Feel Differently (2012) is a database of fifty interviews with queer academics, activists, and researchers; a journal on contemporary queer issues, a theme book, and an exhibition.

Interviewees discuss "defying assimilation." Who says LGBTQIA+ people want to be the "same" as cis- and straight people? Instead they embrace difference as a form of radical identity making.

Watch all the interviews, read the journal and the theme book here.

This project was compiled in 2012. Today, we’re experiencing a rise in antiLGBTQIA+ State legislation. Many of these laws affect young people and what’s permitted to be taught in schools.

- How does Motta’s work connect to these recent laws?
- What did you learn about sexuality and gender in school? What did you learn on your own or from other sources?
Untitled Self-Portrait (1998/2016) is a series of photographs of Carlos Motta performing the fluidity and self exploration of identity. In posing as different characters, his body, sex, and gender are used as props in situations entirely altered in a representation of sexual otherness, expressing the flexibility of identity and the politics of difference. [19]

Performativity of Gender:
Gender performativity is a concept used to describe the manner in which gender norms are established, enforced, and contested, as defined by Judith Butler. She contends that gender at birth is not a factor in determining behavior. People instead learn specific behaviors to fit into society, so gender is a concept that is performed. [20]

Explore the series of photographs.

Look at how Carlos Motta poses his body in each photo. How does Motta stage the body as a form of an archive?

As Motta performed the fluidity of the body, conduct your own performances or poses. What do you intend them to say?
IMPARTING A HISTORY

In *Legacy* (2019), Carlos Motta wears a dental gag while attempting to repeat a spoken timeline of HIV/AIDS from 1908 to 2019 as told by NPR broadcaster Ari Shapiro.

*Watch the video here.* What do you feel when you watch it?

*Read the full timeline here.*

"Unable to speak clearly, grappling with remembering the lines, and in pain, the artist gradually and visibly exhausts himself with the burdens of this history." [2]

Learn more and hear stories of those affected by HIV/AIDS:

- Project: *THE VOID* (2020), Carlos Motta
- Story Archives: National AIDS Memorial
- Website: Theodore (Ted) Kurr
- Documentary: *Last Men Standing* (2016)

It's literally difficult for Motta to tell the history of AIDS, and for us, the viewers, to understand it. This gap in communication echoes history; during the initial rise of AIDS in the early 1980s, the federal U.S. government refused to publicly acknowledge the disease or substantially fund epidemic research. It wasn’t until 1985, four years into the public health crisis, that Ronald Reagan first addressed AIDS publicly. [21]

- Did you learn about AIDS or the crisis of the 1980s-1990s in school? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Motta chose a dental gag? What effects does it have?
- Why create art that is uncomfortable?
**ENEMY, MONSTER, DEVIL**

*We The Enemy* (2019) is comprised of 41 small bronze sculptures based on imagery of the devil throughout history. The figures display grotesqueness, suggest sexual perversion, and defy respectability. For example, one figure’s jaw is unhinged in a massive scream; another has three massive penises dragging below its feet.

When you picture the Devil, what do they look like? Where did you learn that imagery? Is the Devil always perceived as male?

*Mourning Stage* (2020/2022) is a performance which references drawings of the 41 devils from *We The Enemy*. Performer Simon(e) Jaikiriuma Paetau responds to the drawings using her body and exaggerated facial expressions to convey strong emotions like anguish and confusion. This performance was reiterated in 2022.

- **You can watch the 2020 video here.** Choose a two minute section to focus on. What are some of the emotions the performer goes through as you watch?

- **Mourning Stage**, the *We The Enemy* statues, and *We The Enemy* the video all deal with the same subject matter; they share images and titles. What do the different mediums accomplish? What can statues, performances, and videos do differently for the viewer?
We Got Each Other’s Back (2020) features a series of collaborations with queer artists and activists. This show features chapter 1 with artist Julio Salgado, who coordinated the “I am Undocuqueer!” project. [2] Click here to learn more about Julio Salgado.

Watch the videos and read the timeline.

Listening to Salgado, what connections do you make between DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), belonging, and "being a good citizen?"

Click here to see more chapters from this series.

Salgado refers to himself as an "artivist," a combination of the words artist and activist. When combining words like artivist or undocqueer, what affect does it have?

Listen.
Reflect.
Ask questions.
Engage in dialogue.

Reflection Questions
- What is the potential of art to affect change?
- What is the importance of storytelling and narrative sharing?
- What does it mean to be listening?
- Why is intersectionality important?

Intersectionality:
Conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is the awareness that we hold several different social positions (race, gender, ability, socioeconomic status, etc.) at once and that these positions interact in intricate ways that must be investigated and understood. [3][4][22][23]

Undocuqueer (undocumented + queer):
Queer artists and activists in the United States who are openly undocumented migrants and actively producing work to denounce the historical and present day immigration policies in this country. [24]
In *The Columbus Assembly* (2022), Motta’s residency work examines the implications of renaming Columbus, Ohio. The work is an 8 channel sound installation based on discussions with activists, scholars, and artists in reflection about what is at stake and the impact. *Pause, listen, and reflect.*

A statue of Christopher Columbus in front of City Hall in Columbus, Ohio. Image courtesy of Seth Herald/AFP via Getty Images. From *Columbus, Ohio, Takes Down Statue Of Christopher Columbus*, July 1, 2020, NPR. [People protest in front of a statue of Christopher Columbus outside the Columbus, OH statehouse.]

**A monument to Columbus** stood outside of the Ohio Statehouse for 65 years, until it was taken down in the summer of 2020. [25] Columbus City Council is currently debating what to do with the monument, which has been kept in storage for two years. [26] What do you think should be done with the monument?

**Find a zine about the commemoration of Columbus across the US**, made by MIT’s *Data + Feminism Lab.*

Reflect on these questions from *The Columbus Assembly* (2022)

- I would further ask; how can we tell new stories for the city of Columbus?
- How can we create new narratives with different visions of the future, locally?
- How can we deconstruct and dismantle to allow for something new to emerge in this city?

What is the difference between a "name" and a "figure?" What impact do they carry, if any?

Why do you think the artist chooses to place COLUMBUS on the floor?

What is the significance of the quote on the wall and the name *BELOVED?*
USE YOUR VOICE

There are four platforms in the exhibition, recreated from Motta’s 2013 symposium, *Gender Talents: A Special Address*.

"The participants were invited to deliver short manifestos — a public declaration that desires and calls to action...The form of the manifesto was chosen to convey a sense of urgency and encourage a (speech) act of performance." [14]

For this exhibition, the platforms will be used by presenters and performers, but they’re also there for visitors—a public platform where you can be heard. What do you want to speak on? Here are some ideas:

- Get more information about Columbus and commemoration here. With that and *The Columbus Assembly* (2022) in mind, do you think Columbus should be renamed?
- What’s the difference between commemoration through a name and commemoration through a monument or statue?
- How much does gender play into identity? How often do you think of it?

Below, you can use the space to write or type notes on your subject before you speak at the platform:

Organize Your Thoughts:
REFERENCES

REFERENCES


