



Wilson Díaz
(con la asesoría de Future Farmers)
Cuarentena
técnica mixta
2008

Close of Quarantine in
la Vitrina at art foundation,
Lugar a dudas in Cali,
Colombia



Window of Quarantine in la
Vitrina at art foundation,
Lugar a dudas in Cali, Colombia
Coca Plants



View of Gallery from the street

Failure to communicate clearly
or
clearly failing to communicate

- A story about art, text and the Movement
of the Liberation of the Coca Plant

Amy Franceschini

In his criticisms of some of his contemporaries, a recurrent theme was their failure to protest against the world they lived in.

Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism... Animal Farm was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole.

George Orwell and C.M. Woodhouse, Introduction, Animal Farm

*

In an attempt to eradicate illicit crops, the Colombian government is spraying the wide spectrum herbicide, Roundup Ultra, which contaminates the ground, air, water, food, and all surrounding flora and fauna. This so called 'war against drugs', led from North America, has made an explosive military, injustice and situations of isolation possible, fostering the present desperate and criminal fight against drugs. Taking these situations as a starting point, artists Wilson Díaz (Cali, Colombia) and Amy Franceschini (San Francisco, United States) have created The Movement of the Liberation of the Coca Plant.

Since August 2008, Amy and Wilson have been using text and image as a primary means to communicate the various political, social, historical and economic powers at play surrounding the coca plant. The exchange began with an almost anonymous email Amy received from Wilson, written in Spanish, and then translated into English with the help of an online translation program.

email correspondence from Colombian artist, Wilson Diaz to U.S. artist Amy Franceschini:

Translated by Babelfish, July 28, 2008:

Dear Amy,

I am very happy to be in touch with you to begin what I believe it will be a fruitful encounter. It has been very important to know through Veronica Wiman the projects of the Futurefarmers which I find marvelous and I feel inspired to develop my personal work related to plants, politics, the house/home and the city.

I guess Verónica told you about a work I will carry out very soon in la Vitrina in an art foundation called Lugar a dudas, it is a closed space of approximately 3 x 3 square meters and I will place 5 plants of coca each one of approximately 1 and a half meters tall and about 4 years old.

These plants have 3 "illnesses" or bugs, some are the so called "floury cochineals" which are located on the part of behind of the leaves and they cover the leaves with a kind of white flour. another plague is known in Colombia as "ash" which covers the leaves with a dark layer making them look like if they were dirty. the other illness is some kind of stains or points which make the leaves bleach and give them the appearance of having an irregular dotted on the leaves. These 3 plagues are in the plants but they don't invade them in their entirety. I'm afraid that during the 15 days of the exhibition the plants will be "attacked" in a more aggressive way by these plagues, because factors like the wind or the summer sun are not going to be present. This whole situation will be a kind of a metaphor about the situation of the plants of coca and nature and the war against the plants of coca started by the government. This work is titled Quarantine.

I need your advice for this work, I would like to kindly request guide from you on how to illuminate the place, and how to treat or cure these plants, if it's possible with homemade and organic remedies, and on that what you consider relevant for the project. I'm very thankful for your important help.

Amy, you will appear in the exhibition as my advisers, if that is ok for you. I think that this will be a starting point for very important future collaborations. I'm looking forwards to knowing what you think about my project.

I will be waiting for your reply

Kisses

Wilson Diaz

*

In a brief pause while waiting for a train in Antwerp, Amy put down George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (she was re-reading it after 20 years), to check her email. The above email

was received by a confused, but curious reader. In the short time before her train arrived she composed a fairy story as her answer to Wilson's query.

*

email correspondence from U.S. artist, Amy Franceschini to Colombian Artist Wilson Diaz:

July 29, 2008:

Hello Wilson,

First, Thank you for taking the time to write about your project and include us as advisors. I love this position. Especially, since I am an "amateur" who looks to others for advice. I will be back to you with some ideas from experts, but for now I send you my "amateur" thoughts:

If I were to write a small fairy story about this situation of the sick coca plants,

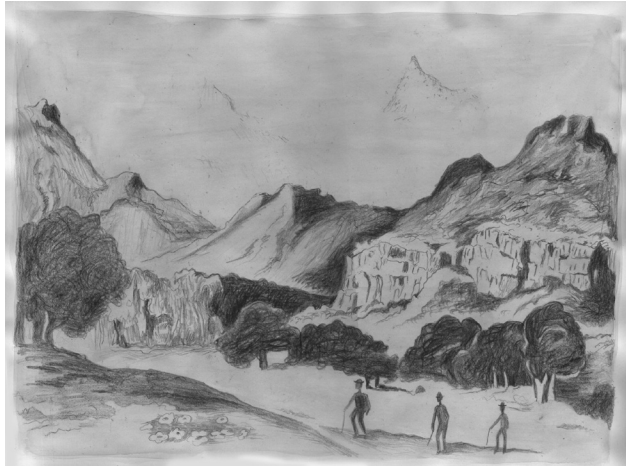
I might send three blind mice doctors from the United States to tend to your plants.

It seems like

this could be a good starting point. The U.S. is deeply involved in your country via the Coca plant. I do not know as much as I wish to know about these issues, and like many foreign policy involvements by U.S., we choose to turn our eyes to other things and allow the media to construct stories to mask the atrocities we commit abroad. Thus, the blind mice serve as a metaphor for these closed eyes created by media, politicians, individuals...

The email continued with three fantastical remedies that Amy sent to Wilson. She was a bit afraid that he would be offended or not respond. But the reply was welcomed by Wilson, rejoined, and the fairy story developed over several emails. Poor online translation services propagated misunderstandings that illuminated unintended paths in the story, making for a joyous adventure for the two artists.

After some months of correspondence, Wilson traveled from Colombia to Amy Franceschini's home in San Francisco to illustrate this fairy story together. But conversation was limited. Amy spoke little Spanish and Wilson little English, so they used drawing as their primary means of communication. This new illustrated language was infectious. An explosion of epiphanies: drawings, masks and props poured forth onto the tables in Amy's home. They called upon a translator to transmit this visual language into their native tongues only to find out they were not exactly building the same narrative. But this miscommunication did not concern them. It only made the story more complex and interesting, like that of the coca plant. Together with curator and poet Renny Pritikin, the artists compiled their text and drawings into a small book.



LIBERATION OF THE COCA PLANT IN THREE MOVEMENTS

by Wilson Diaz,
Amy Franceschini &
Renny Pritikin, 2009

Three Blind Mice
Avacado seed pigment
and charcoal of coca
plant on paper

MOVEMENT I:

Found Diary: Fragments from Spain's Golden Age

Felipe II

1556

The Spain I have today inherited is a land of poverty, dust and leftover fragments of Islam. May God grant me the strength, I will build the world's greatest Christian empire.

1564

God gave me the wealth of Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela and Colombia and in return I am teaching our language and our religion to the natives. We are building a New Granada on the principle of free trade, which is the path to enrichment for all nations.

1570

For two years, since 1567, the priests had their Council of Lima and finally decided that coca was "useless, pernicious, and leads to superstition since it is a talisman of the devil". I have written a new decree that the use of coca should be tolerated among the Indians, but urge the priests to be constantly vigilant to prevent its use in superstitious practices of witchcraft.

1578

Word has come from Rome: "...for punishment does not take place primarily and per se for the correction and good of the person punished, but for the public good in order that others may become terrified and weaned away from the evils they would commit". I must initiate a throne-sponsored terror campaign against Jews, Moors, and Protestants who only pretend to convert...We will burn their books as well as their bodies.

1580

Auto da fe: here is the ritual for carrying out these acts of faith.

(1) Solemn Procession (2) Costume: We have the prisoner wear a yellow "San Benito" penitential garment and wear a 3 foot long pointed coroza cap – both painted with effigies, the flames of hell and devils. (3) Garroting for last minute repentance (4) Burning for the Unrepentant

1581

I have given orders that we export Auto da fe to Peru, to help with converting the Indians. The logo of the

Spanish Inquisition depicts a cross, a sword and a coca plant representing God, might and industry. We must burn out all heretical practices and attempts to deceive us with false conversions to the Church. We will have a Narco Inquisition as well.

1554

My new wife Mary [sections missing] ...Catholic England...again.

Mary I

1554

The poets have made up a rhyme that I had people's eyes gouged out, that I turned these three stubborn Protestants into three blind mice. I've never done such a thing. And they called me a farmer's wife... because my husband, Philip, and I have combined our estates and they are so vast... Is it an insult to be an industrial 'farmer'? I think that they are jealous. One does not have to be down on hands and knees in the dirt to be a farmer. We can declare from London and Madrid what should be grown, here or in the New World, how it is to be used and distributed, now that the thrones of England and Spain jointly hold the land.

1556

I am the Queen, and I am resolved that the people will share my husband's and my faith. Ridley, Latimer and Cranmer, and only around 300 others in all, had to be put to the stake. They will arrive in hell, I'm sure, still searching for Luther to save them.

Elizabeth I

1554

When I turned twenty last week, I snuck into my sister Queen Mary's room. To me the Catholics have always been a mystery, a blood cult, blood and death. And there were her walls, covered with crucifixes, Christ in agony, pictures of suffering martyrs. And piled a foot deep on her night table was the biggest stash of cocaine I've ever seen. That's what feeds her religious frenzy. Her husband, Philip, is supporting Spain, the largest Empire in the world, by importing every ounce of gold, silver and coke that he can squeeze out of Colombia.* The richer he and Mary became, the more they worship the Catholic Church and the more they pursue the Inquisition, fueled by the new sacrament: mass ingestion of coke. *Abraham Cowley,

[Later addition in a different handwriting]

A Legend of Coca, 1662

Nor coca only useful art at Home,
A famous Merchandize thou art become...

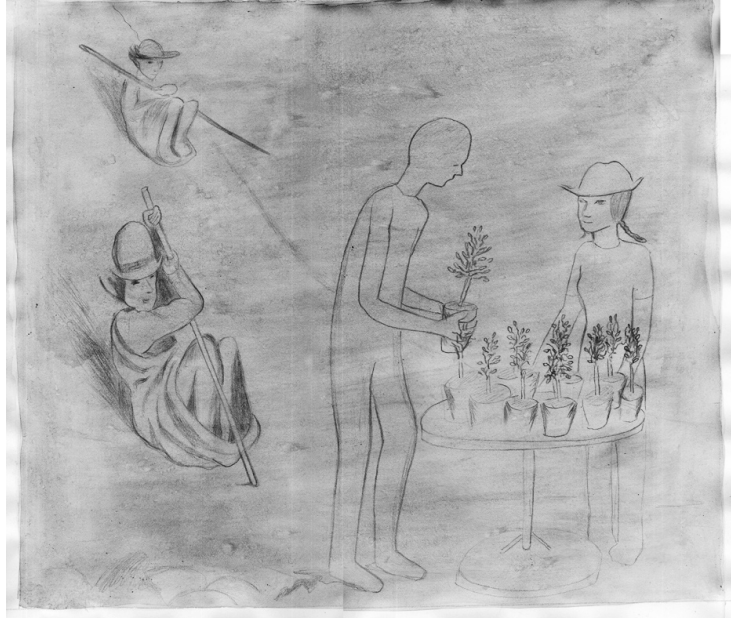
1558

Mary has died a miserable overdose victim, choking on vomit and Latin. I will be Queen.

1588

Mary is dead for thirty years and still Philip is elaborating his fantasy of restoring England to the Pope and eliminating us as his only rival. Spies tell me he will send the world's largest navy, the Armada, to destroy me and England, but his drug-addled plans will drown in the Channel. That's why I will never, ever, touch cocaine.

MOVEMENT II: Botany



The Gatherer's, coca charcoal on paper

Excerpt from Official Report by Blind Botanist

on:

The First Illness of Coca 2009

On arrival in Colombia I discovered the epidemic the campesinos call floury cochineals rampant among the coca plants in this region. Though this disease has only been identified in the current decade, it has already developed a rich mythology; that the effect of man-made construction on the planet has caused an infinitesimal wobble in the earth's rotation, to which this plant is highly vulnerable, resulting in this white residue on the bottom of the coca leaf. There is no truth to the claim that an excellent bread can be made from this 'flour', but we have had some initial remarkable success, using it as a sunscreen. My preliminary research indicates that the plant is attempting to counteract global warming by creating its own micro climate; the white material is a form of self-manufactured frost that lowers the temperature of the plant. This is not a disease then so much as a self-medicating defensive measure. I have found that if the plant is placed on a slowly revolving, glass-topped table (one degree rotation per day, i.e. one revolution per year) it allows the plant to reach internal climatic stasis and return to excellent health.

Excerpt from Official Report by Blind Journalist

on:

The Second Illness of Coca 2009

I was led, blindfolded, (doubly blind) to a field on which coca has grown for as long as anyone can remember. All the plants are now suffering from ash plague; in some ways this is the opposite of floury cochineals, in that rather than white bottoms, the plant's leaves have dark, ashy tops. While no cure has been found, there is one fortunate use of this ash: it makes a lovely and highly functional ink. What I am told is that anyone who reads notes written with this ink becomes addicted to understanding the truth; therefore of course, it can only be manufactured in the smallest conceivable quantities, and held under the strict control of Colombia's poet laureate. She has refused all offers from American journalists to discuss the story, unless we agree to file our reports using this ink. She will only discuss what she calls the deindustrialization and demilitarization of the plant.

Excerpt from Official Report by Blind Tourist

on:

The Third Illness of Coca 2009

I have discovered, while hiking with a guide, whole meadows of coca growing in the mountains, upon which sit the moth *Eloria Noyesi*. These moths have evolved to migrate from Tierra del Fuego to Nicaragua each year, and stop in Colombia to rest and absorb nutrients and energy from the leaves of the coca plant. This system has been in place for millennia, but the local people are concerned because the plants are now staining with the near-photographic shadows of the moths. These spotted leaves are a message, they say, from the plants, not unlike the images of Madonnas found in smoky and ephemeral walls from time to time. While Madonnas are reminders of the need for faith, the spotted leaves are ostensibly warnings of global environmental fragility.

MOVEMENT III: Fate

Coca Speaks for Itself

I am the Job of plants, I give and I give and receive nothing, but God's punishment in return. Make a little poultice (acullico), tuck me into your cheek, I will snuggle in there like a man on a couch watching television, and soon you are mildly stimulated. I immodestly perhaps think this is not a bad gift to humanity: a brief respite from fatigue, hunger, and thirst. Make a nice cuppa tea. How about my sweet little decorative shrubs with red berries in the city? I didn't ask to become industrialized flora. I feel like the uncle of an infamous criminal, cocaine is a distant relative who's embarrassed the whole family. I got along wonderfully for two thousand years with the Incas and Quechuas, then the Kogi, Arhuaco and Wiwa, and so many other native people. Coca is the social glue for weddings, for ayni, help, or hirings. I was in Hueca Prieta in 2500 BC. I worked with the fortune tellers (yatiri), the magicians (pacos), and the doctors (callawayá). I was traded in New Granada equally with silver and gold; in Potosi, which was as big as Paris. In the Sixteenth century, the silver miners were paid in coca. In the 1700s, I went to Paris and met with Linnaeus. Through the Decree of August 4, 1940, coca was declared a basic article, and its sale was mandatory in mining and railroad companies. I am hand-in-glove part of the history of this region and its commerce.

The Activist's Plan

Seeds are time capsules, veritable libraries on the history of beans, corns, papaya, lulo, mora, granadillas, curuba, pepino dulce, tomate, papayuela, maracuya, guanabana, mamoncillo, guama, aguacate, chirimoya, borojo, mamey, caimo, feijoa, guavas, pitahaya, and... coca. We can have seed libraries and plantings in the urban milieu, and a return to the notion of farmer as a place, deeply committed to a knowledge of the soil, weather, water and local needs. I dream of a blurring of the distinctions between agriculture, activism and art... A movement so integrated into its field, that it is invisible, a refreshing breeze...

Notes from Amy and Wilson:

Since September 2008, we have continued our story and research into the powers at play around the conservation and perpetuity of the coca plant. Currently, we are developing a sketch for a short theatre play, accompanying songs and soundscape. (see lyrics below).

Very special thanks to Veronica Wiman, curator, for introducing us, Aaron Terry, translator, Mika Hannula for the invitation to contribute to Art Text, Anthony Marcellini assembling and editing the presentation at the Art Text Conference



LYRICS FOR THE MOVEMENT OF
THE LIBERATION OF THE COCA
PLANT

7" 2009

SOUTH: (side)

TODO LO DEL POBRE
ALL OF THE POOR PEOPLE ARE STOLEN
(2:48)

All of the poor people are stolen
Everybody knows this fable and they sing it
they do their best to follow the rhythm
without thinking much of what they say
like Vicky Dávila
The three blind mice
suffering without realizing
in front of the audience
May they be given a jail for the set
it is a jail for the town
in front of the audience
they manage the business from there... the ink business
They charge a vaccine in the henhouse
they go through the hole
They kill thirty cats to escape
the price is always the same
given for free and with a little extra
The cheap things come out expensive
although these three mice came out winning

NORTH (side)

SEMI 2: Soundscape from Indigenous Rights
(5:33)

On October 13, 2008, twelve thousand indigenous Colombians marched onto the Pan-American Highway in Cauca and refused to lift their blockade until their demands for land, liberty, and life were met by the State. "In the movies of today that we call news, we are shown that the bad guys are Indians and the good guys are cowboys," said Jorge Caballero a representative of Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CIRC). "Uribe is shown as the good cowboy, and the rest of us are just the bad Indians". Since 2005, indigenous communities have engaged in a civil resistance and land recuperation project that they call "Liberar la Madre Tierra" (Liberate Mother Earth) to reclaim and recuperate the traditional lands that have slowly been taken from them since the time of the Spanish conquistadores.

"President Uribe's Democratic Security Policy, financed by (the U.S.- backed) Plan Colombia, is meant to open the door for the Free Trade Agreement. The new norms in the trade agreement give our water and land away to multinational corporations and directly go against the territorial and cultural rights of indigenous people, as well as against the rights of the civil sector. Our people have to be displaced from our land before the multinationals can exploit it."

-Quilcue, CIRC