



Curatorial project

# SABEL GAVALDON

## UN MUSEU DEL GEST

27/11 – 19/01

Artists: Erick Beltrán, Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Mark Leckey, Jaume 'Mal' Ferrete Vazquez & R. Marcos Mota, Karen Mirza & Brad Butler, Ultra-red. Sabel Gavaldon (b. 1985, Barcelona) is a researcher and independent curator.

Gesture remains beyond the grasp of historians. Elusive by nature, the domain of gesture is often overlooked as a minor subject. While everyone would probably agree that bodies 'speak'—and many will be quick to point out that some bodies *speak differently*—little attention is paid to the political histories and cultural struggles that traverse the different languages of gesture, style and bodily attitudes. The artists in this exhibition excavate just a handful of these unseen histories, each of them proposing radically diverse genealogies of gesture. But one might say that their works are informed by at least one common, inalienable principle: that the meaning of gestures is, and should remain, always in dispute.

'A Museum of Gesture' brings together a constellation of works by artists and collectives who examine gesture as a space of resistance, engaging with the transformative grammars and the expressive codes invented by political minorities, subcultures and subordinate groups. The exhibition departs from an understanding of gesture as an enactment of cultural inscription in the body. Here, however, the accent is not on gesture as visible expression of a given identity, but rather on the potential of minoritarian practices and emergent political subjects to invent new bodies and to produce unexpected orchestrations of gesture, capable of offending the silent majority and posing a challenge to the normative world.

The title of the exhibition refers to a project in the first decades of the twentieth century in France which sought to establish a Museum of Gesture. Halfway between science and propaganda, this now-forgotten museum (one of the first institutions ever devoted to collecting films and sound recordings) evolved into an ethnographic archive, taking part in the Colonial Exposition of 1931. In dialogue with the works of contemporary artists, 'A Museum of Gesture' presents a display of archival materials reflecting on the impact of the moving image on the scientific representation of gesture, as well as its relation to the colonial economies of the nineteenth century. This archival display revolves around the films and writings of Félix Regnault, a physiologist and pioneering ethnographer who is, arguably, a crucial figure in understanding the biopolitics of modernity, as it epitomises the incorporation of the human body into the scientific discourses that had developed over the course of a century.

Against this background, the artists in the exhibition present, as it were, their own museums of gesture, making

space for bodies and practices that resist being delineated, that no longer fit in confined categories or established typologies. Beyond identity politics, these works encourage us to take control of those techniques used to produce sexual, racial and class difference that have been so central to power since the nineteenth century, and ask us to question the definitions of the body—both individual and collective— inherited from modernity.

## EVENTS

**Guided Tour**

Thursday 28 November, 6:30 pm. La Capella

Guided tour of the exhibition 'A Museum of Gesture' with curator Sabel Gavaldon, in conversation with the artists Jaume 'Mal' Ferrete Vazquez & R. Marcos Mota.

**Vogue'analysis workshop lead by Michael Roberson**  
**'Ballroom has something to say about being human and the struggle for freedom'**

Thursday 5 December, 4:00 – 7:00 pm. Capella MACBA

Michael Roberson is a Ballroom icon, queer theologian and public health activist from New York City. This workshop will draw on the theories and radical practices of African-American feminists and Womanist theologians, in order to collectively analyse the body techniques and performative strategies that allow the House/Ballroom culture, originated in Harlem, New York, to confront the AIDS crisis and to dismantle the configurations of oppression formed when racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of discrimination intersect.

**Acts of enunciation of the Oral Museum of the Revolution**

Saturday 7 December, 7:00 pm. Capella MACBA

Michael Roberson, participant in the exhibition 'A Museum of Gesture', takes part in the public programme 'Oral Museum of the Revolution', organised by PEI. This session at Capella MACBA will bring together the performative contributions of a multiplicity of agents focusing on the question of how to make audible and present in the museum and the city the languages of social transformation invented by racial, gender, sexual, bodily, functional and cognitive diverse minorities.

*The participation of Michael Roberson is the result of the collaboration between the curatorial project 'A Museum of Gesture' and the programme 'Oral Museum of the Revolution', organised by the students from MACBA's Independent Study Programme and Beatriz Preciado.*

