

FORMATOCOMODO

José Carlos Martinat

Sueño Bolivariano, Preludio I

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Bolívar's Dream and Nightmare, Octavio Zaya

BOLIVARIAN DREAM is a progressive, ongoing project that, according to its author—the Peruvian artist José Carlos Martinat—will follow the route traced by the “Liberator of the Americas” Simón Bolívar during his campaigns of independence (1813-1824). What is presented now is only a first installment of the project and includes Peru and Venezuela among the six nations of Bolívar's independence movement, which also comprise Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama (the latter joined voluntarily and peacefully in Bolívar's project of Gran Colombia while the final great battles were being fought in South America). JC Martinat's wish is “to also work in countries where the Bolivarian breezes have reached: Cuba, Haiti, Chile, and Argentina, with leaders who have upheld Bolivarianism.”*

The project's overall aim is to “extract” political slogans and graffiti from the walls of major Latin American cities, “capturing the sentiments both of those who are in and with the government, and of those who yearn for power.”* These street extractions seek to establish a visual X-ray—specifically, a high-contrast image of political discourse supposedly free of institutional mediation or interests—of the six Latin

American countries mentioned above today. Through this “archaeological, anthropological, and sociological record, BOLIVARIAN DREAM wants to take the pulse”* of the complex and crisis-ridden realities that oscillate between facts and fictions, hopes and despair, ideological slogans and popular demands.

For this first partial presentation in Madrid, in addition to some of the extractions already carried out in Peru and Venezuela—including images of Bolívar, Fujimori, and Chávez's eyes—Martinat includes an installation that complements these images: a series of thermal printers connected to a computer with software that searches for interrelated information on the web about the selected countries—in this case, Venezuela and Peru. The responses are printed on papers that scatter and mix in the space. The artist presented this same type of technological installation in *Environments of Stereo Reality*, a performative work that was part of *Next Stop*, an exhibition of Peruvian artists organized for Alcalá 31 in Madrid in 2017. The contrast between political expression in the streets and technological mediation via the internet (with biased algorithms, fake news, and commercial manipulation) at the very least reflects the realities of dominant discourses and marginal expressions, and surely also reveals the general mismatch between global and local interests.

In Latin America, the slogans and announcements of organizations such as unions, professional associations, and citizens—as well as pro- and anti-government political propaganda—have been a fundamental form of social and political expression on city walls, becoming an extension of popular and institutional voices in public spaces (today, social media walls also serve this role). In response to this phenomenon, José Carlos Martinat has developed a body of work that appropriates these political manifestations through techniques of extraction, archiving, and critical recontextualization. Far from passively reproducing these urban manifestations, Martinat turns them into tools for examining mechanisms of power, collective memory, and the tensions between the institutional and the marginal, continuing his reflection on themes related to politics, urbanism, memory, and popular visual culture.

Marinat developed a specific technique to physically remove layers of posters, graffiti, and mural paintings from the walls of Lima and other cities, transferring them to canvas or portable structures. This process preserves not only the aesthetics of urban political expressions, but also their texture, deterioration, and the marks of time. This appropriation in Martinat's work is not a simple reproduction, but a critical operation that pushes the boundaries between public and private, legitimate and subversive. The act of transferring a fleeting political message into the art space is not innocent: it implies a transformation of the original meaning, while preserving its historical and visual weight. Through it, Martinat proposes a reflection on the city's visual languages, power, and collective memory. As Liernur points out, "the street and its surfaces are not neutral, but spaces contested by different memories and powers."

This operation by Martinat can be understood as an act of urban archaeology. Instead of creating

new images, the artist excavates the textual and visual strata of the city to rescue traces of discourses constantly subjected to whitewashing, censorship, or erasure. The political messages and propaganda of the streets, often considered marginal or temporary, are re-signified in his works as both document and symptom. In this way, Martinat activates an archival mechanism that circulates messages that power would prefer to forget or suppress. Moreover, his work raises a profound critique of the relationships between the popular and the institutional, the spontaneous and the regulated, the ephemeral and the permanent. By decontextualizing a protest graffiti or propaganda poster and relocating it into the space of galleries and museums, Martinat questions the boundaries of artistic legitimacy and highlights how certain visual discourses only gain symbolic value once co-opted by art institutions. His work thus exposes how easily the languages of resistance can be absorbed by the cultural market, neutralizing their original potential.

Marinat's appropriation of these discourses and images is also rooted in a specifically Latin American context, where the wall has a key political function: it is the prime medium for popular expression, social denunciation, and collective memory. In countries like Peru and Venezuela, marked by decades of political violence, inequality, and territorial conflict, walls inform, shout, and protest. By recording and re-appropriating these mural voices, Martinat preserves them and subjects them to new critical readings.

Meanwhile, Bolívar's dream—to unite all of South America's former Spanish colonies into a single large and powerful nation, a confederation, Gran Colombia, which in essence would have been a continental Latin American power comparable to the United States—not only failed. Bolívar's misfortune was that before dying he witnessed his dream collapse. The reasons are many, and this is a topic for

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another occasion, but his disillusionment is reflected in some of his last words: "I have plowed the sea and sown the wind." Nevertheless, although his dream of continental political union did not come true, his legacy as a liberator is unquestionable, even if some authors question his alliances with elites and the fact that Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and mestizos remained subordinated after independence. In any case, his vision of Latin American integration—however false it may seem—remains an ideal and a point of reference to this day.

In contrast to that dream of unity and freedom, of stability and strength, of integration and cooperation, the reality that Martinat engages with is instead characterized by a crisis of representation and widespread institutional distrust, political personalization and caudillismo, weak party systems, territorial and social divisions, populism as a mode of political communication, judicialization and use of the state apparatus as a political weapon, continuous or recurring social mobilization, economic crises and social inequalities, the destabilizing impact of U.S. support or sanctions, the instrumentalization of the "Venezuela model" as a constant specter in political debates, and a political language of permanent confrontation.

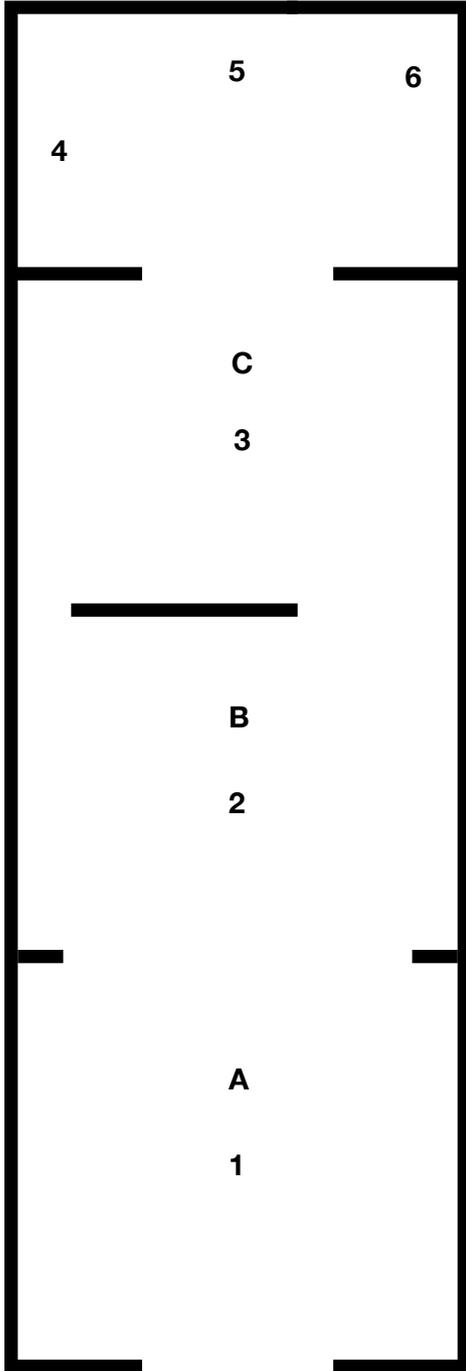
Faced with this situation, I fear that José Carlos Martinat's ongoing project will show us above all BOLÍVAR'S NIGHTMARE.

José Carlos Martinat (Lima, Peru, 1974) lives and works between Madrid and Lima. He is a multidisciplinary artist who explores the intersection between the real and the virtual. His work, based on architecture and memory, employs multimedia installations and assemblages to question context.

His work has been exhibited in institutions in Latin America, Europe and the United States such as: Mercosur Biennial (Brazil), Puerto Rico Polygraphic Triennial, Havana Biennial (Cuba), Eva+A Nord Ireland Biennial (Ireland), Nord Holland Biennial (Netherlands, with Marjolijn Dijkman), Shanghai Biennial (China), Carrillo Gil (Mexico), Saatchi Gallery (London), Tate Modern (London), Museo Marco de Vigo (Spain), IFA (Germany), La Laboral (Spain), Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI, Peru), Pinacoteca (Sao Paulo), WWVF (Netherlands) and Bogotá Biennial 2025 (Colombia).

It is also part of collections such as: Museum of Modern Art (MOMA, New York), TATE Modern (London), Saatchi Gallery (London); Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Lima Art Museum (MALI, Peru) and Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires (MALBA, Argentina).

* Asterisks throughout the text indicate statements by the artist.



1. Bolivar #1

2017

Wall extraction

190 x 115 cm

2. Alberto Fujimori

2021

Wall extraction

170 x 130 cm

3. Ojos de Chavez

2017

Wall extraction

89 x 230 cm

4. Keiko Fujimori

2013

Wall extraction

120 x 77 cm

5. El Odio

2017

Wall extraction

155 x 173 cm

6. Clap

2017

Wall extraction

38 x 48 cm

A, B, C. Sin título

2017-2025

Thermal printer with interrelated search algorithm for: A - Bolívar and Bolivarianism, B - Venezuela, C - Peru

Variable dimensions

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