

Elga Wimmer PCC

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EVERYTHING IS ART, EVERYTHING IS POLITICS

(AI WEIWEI)

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Curated by Elga Wimmer (Independent curator at Elga Wimmer PCC, NY)
and Berta Sichel (Independent curator at Bureau Phi, Madrid, Spain)

When thinking about art and politics, one of the most influential and celebrated postwar German artists, Joseph Beuys, inevitably springs to mind. With his message of the *revolutionary potential in art* and the *social sculpture*, Beuys made clear that he wanted to bring art into politics, not the other way around. Serious, yet playful, his “Boxing Match for Direct Democracy” is a powerfully symbolic performance piece.

Artists in all aspects of the visual arts often depict the scurrilous, bizarre and surreal aspects of politics. In cinema, a telling example would be the filmmaker Mel Brooks, an American contemporary of Beuys, who pushed the envelope in parodying the Nazi Regime as a burlesque Broadway Comedy.

Utilizing humor in political critique has long been an effective tool for artists. Nevertheless, they risk being attacked and or rejected, when touching that third rail of politics and social critique. Each one of the artists chosen for this show has gone through that experience. In this exhibition, Julius Deutschbauer (Austria), Gala Knoerr (Spain), Liliana Porter (Argentina), Carolee Schneemann (US), Federico Solmi (Italy, US), Marina Vargas (Spain), Wolf Vostell (Germany/Spain) and Rodney Zelenka (Panama), address different social and political issues through their art.

Visual art, as in music and writing, when of a high caliber, is timeless, and that can be said of Carolee Schneemann’s work. In “Oil of Path and Five Vesper” the artist references a devastating oil spill from the 1990’s. Such global environmental

disasters have occurred with disturbing regularity over the decades since; some 137 oil spills worldwide. If artists do not call attention to and thereby keep alive environmental awareness, all of the pledges made by governments and citizens will be forgotten until the next disaster strikes, and every day will be Groundhog Day.

“Vesper” has been the *star cat* in many works by Schneemann, such as in “Infinity Kisses” which draws on Egyptian mythology; the kiss by a lion /cat of eternal life. Now with both Vesper and the artist gone, the work has attained eternal status, combining the political and the private, the public and the intimate, the absurdity of the news/ fake news, with the poetic and the reclusive.

Julius Deutschbauer’s “Gesamtwerk” deals with politics in and around art. With 200 posters over 27 years, the artist uses a technique of *rip and paste* collages, as in “Europe, your dead have nothing to laugh at” (2017). The artist, in all of the posters the protagonist, holds Herman Schuerrer’s book of that title (1971). At the bottom of the poster the title of a series reads “Antirassismusvergnuegungspark “ (Anti-racism Amusement Park). The poster connects to a performance under the same title in German and English. The German text is read aloud by the artist, followed by the English translation read live by a second performer. Julius Deutschbauer created the museum library for the *unread* book in 1997. He is a performance artist, painter, and filmmaker. Recently he received a prize for culture by the Austrian county of Kärnten, which he proceeded to eat at the ceremony, after dipping it in beer. Deutschbauer examines social and political issues through posters for the public, with Interactive performances, and the humor of a *Commedia dell’ arte* character.

In a similar vein, another artist featured in this show, Federico Solmi,

was banned from the art fair in Bologna for daring to portray the fictional Pope Urban the LXX in his work “The Evil Empire.” His Pope embraces the darkest tendencies of the 21st Century, indulging all of his vices and impulses to no end. There is some hope for the viewer, however, as he is *punished* and sent for repentance to what looks like Dante’s Inferno. Of course, in Italy, the Pope is still untouchable, even in art. Solmi’s perfect drawings depict despots and tyrants (see “The Loving Despots”), from past and present, as comic figures, akin to merry-go-round cartoonish characters in a comedy of the absurd. Much like Francisco de Goya, the cartoonish and exaggerated depiction of the social and political agenda is presented in perfectly executed drawings and paintings, adding more recently *video paintings* (as “*The Machiavellian Ones*”). Both artists, in their own way, employ extreme satire to critique the corruption of figures of power across cultural, financial, governmental and religious institutions. Solmi’s satirical aesthetic portrays a dystopian vision of our present-day society.

Rodney Zelenka’s stark and masterful depiction of the human body, reminiscent in certain visual aspects and subject matter of Leon Golub’s brutal paintings, which like him, depict the everyday man in violent situations. Zelenka (of European descent, working and living in Panama) presents the man from the street,

addressing the homeless issue, in all its agony, but with great dignity. This is apparent in the work “Dos Grados más allá de la Locura” (Two Degrees beyond Madness) 1997. A man (a homeless, indigenous black man) sits in a makeshift shelter in a sea of starry images that look eerily like today’s thorny depiction of the coronavirus. He seems to be in a state beyond madness, wearing no clothes and sitting trapped inside a dark tunnel. Part of a series of paintings on the homeless issue, this work in particular symbolizes the time Zelenka lived through a horrendous military dictatorship in Panama (1968 – 1989). His figurative paintings are comprised of the allegorical with a timeless touch – from Renaissance to contemporary art – pointing out the seemingly never ending suppression of the lower class man/ woman in the course of history, regardless of promised political changes.

The dawn of the Internet age coincided with the coming of age of the millennial generation, conditioning our personal communication mechanisms and language with which we navigate multiple realities. The Internet has intensely permeated all aspects of our daily lives, and through widespread adoption of online social networking we have inadvertently been commoditized through the data we generate. Consequently, we observe the creation of reactionary socio-political movements birthed from the immediacy of a tweet or images that go viral. Both the Internet and social media, and the algorithm that transforms our online experience into an anesthetic monologue, offer a false sense of collectivity, generating cracks in the status quo of our *real* lives. One’s frustration and helplessness is now a very powerful weapon. Gala Knoerr’s “Alternative Facts I & II” explores through humor, how we can generate reflections that look at the associative nature within consumer culture, the capitalization of social movements and the representation of diversity in the media across the political spectrum with the language of the Internet.

There is a popular app that purports to teach kids how to draw, whereby a sweet voice guides them through a ten-minute tutorial, explaining, for example, that “a line has many directions” and how “a line is not to be repeated one on the top of the other, as it cannot move left or right.” This goes against the tendency of children to draw with repetitive, circular motions without thinking of the infinite directions a line can take. Before the kids could even pick up a pack of colored pencils and go wild, this disembodied voice tells them what a line *cannot do*. This is a precursor. Eventually Facebook will tell them what they *cannot post*, and YouTube will tell them what they *cannot share*. Ultimately, of course, they will learn by rote *what not to think*.

On the first page of the website belonging to Argentinean-born, New York based Liliana Porter, we find a collection of small drawings, some of which evoke that soothing voice of the tutor: “A line has many directions.” Porter depicts a drawing collaged with a small photograph of a man who seems to have gotten stuck at the end of his lines (*The Traveler*, 1999) and is looking for

what remains in the space — a space formed by the ruled page of an old exercise book, its lines now faded by time.

This drawing with its minimalist marks and diminutive personage is like the essence of how the spectator should move closer in order to reach the center of an installation, opening one's eyes to the possibilities of the line drawn by a free hand. Yet since he is the one who draws these lines, he must look in many directions to locate the multiplicity of possible directions to pursue, as when a traveler links the disparate routes of a journey.

Marina Vargas, born 1980 in Granada, is one of the most powerful and promising artists of her generation, a proverbial *force of nature*. For Vargas, drawing serves as underpinning to all of the disciplines she works in — sculpture, installation, painting, photography and performance. Her work often references the Christian and Baroque substrata of her native Andalusia, as well as the processes of syncretism that, either from the religion or from the arts, have put different cultures in contact, regardless of geographical and historical distances.

Metaphorically, drawing these distant ends, serving as an epistemological mechanism to delve into the knowledge of human nature. But more specifically, drawing is both the point of departure and the final step in the creative process. (Source reference: “The Drawing of the Life to Come” by Afonso Molina).

Finally, there is Wolf Vostell who commemorates pivotal life experiences from a personal narrative, in an offbeat photo collage. Born in Germany, Vostell spent much of this life in Extremadura — on the border with Portugal, where the famous *pata negra* (blackfoot) pigs roam the holm oak forests, eating the acorns that sustain their flesh. In one erotic spectacle, we see a woman dressed as a bull confronting death (*or* women are dressed as bulls confronting death). Vostell is in his element here — an often bizarre, whimsical body of work.

The artists presented in “Everything is Art, Everything is Politics” explore the heightened power of art, when it informs and shapes political change, rather than the other way around. The crucial difference here cannot be overstated. It is a kind of *Poetic Terrorism* (Hakim Bey) that causes onlookers to stop in their tracks and widen their horizon. According to the originator of the expression *PT*: “If it does not change someone's life, (aside from the artist) it fails.”

Elga Wimmer, curator,

Berta Sichel, curator

September 2020



Antirassismusvergütungsparkpark, Julius Deutschbauer, 2017, collage, 84 cm x 59.4 cm



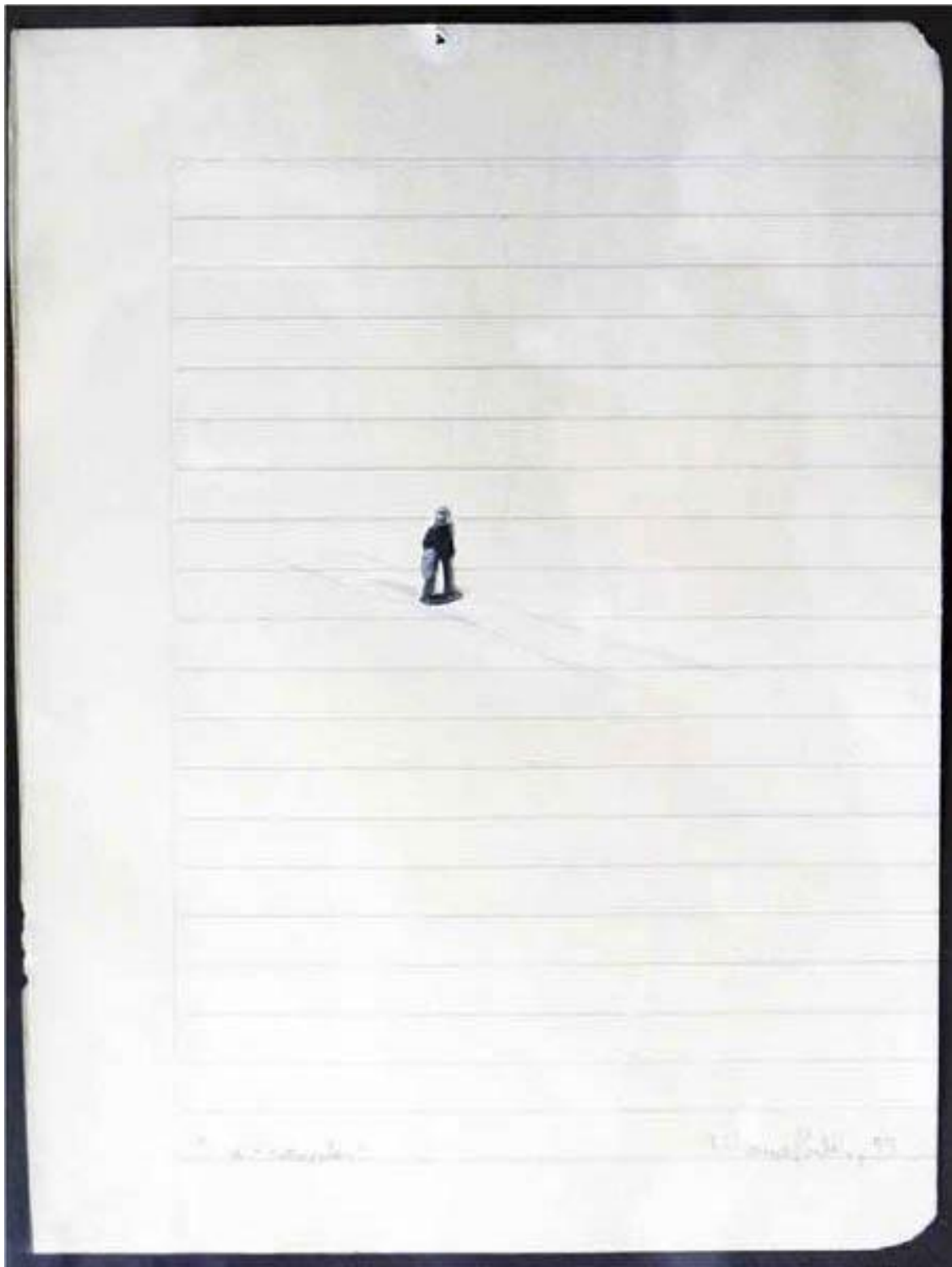
Antirassismusvergnügungspark, Julius Deutschbauer, 2017, collage, 84 cm x 59.4 cm



Alternative Facts I, Gala Knoerr, 2019, oil and sharpie on canvas, 92 cm x 73 cm



Alternative Facts II, Gala Knoerr, 2019, oil and sharpie on canvas, 92 cm x 73 cm



The Traveler, Lilian Porter, 1999, collage and drawing over notebook paper, 21 cm x 15.5 cm,

signed, titled, and dated by the artist



Paths of Oil + 5 Vespers, Carolee Schneemann, 1999, collage and C-print on Arches paper, 100 x 150 cm,

signed, titled, and dated by the artist



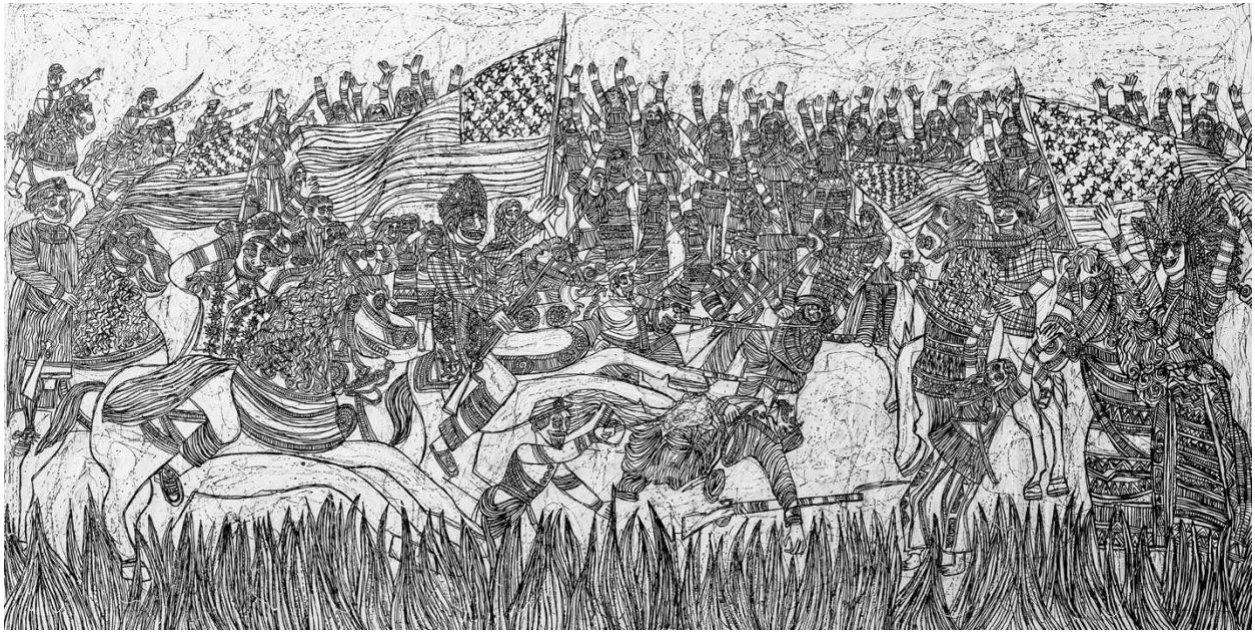
Detail *Paths of Oil + 5 Vespers*, Carolee Schneemann, 1999, collage and C-print on Arches paper, 100 x 150 cm,

signed, titled, and dated by the artist



The Loving Despots, Federico Solmi, 2019, acrylic and ink on wood panel, 83.75 cm x 105.6 cm x 5 cm,

courtesy Luis de Jesus, LA

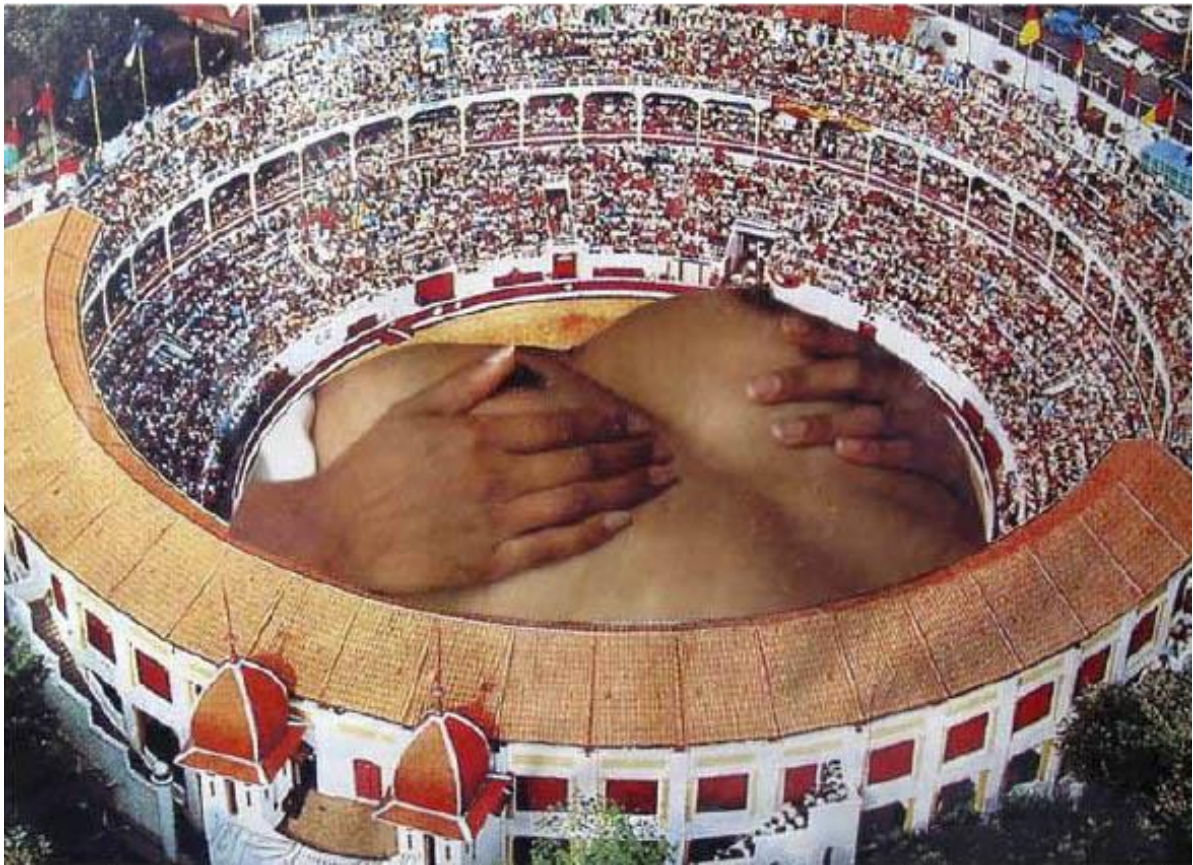


The Grand Encounter, Federico Solmi, 2019, acrylic and ink on wood panel, 60 cm x 120 cm x 2.5 cm,

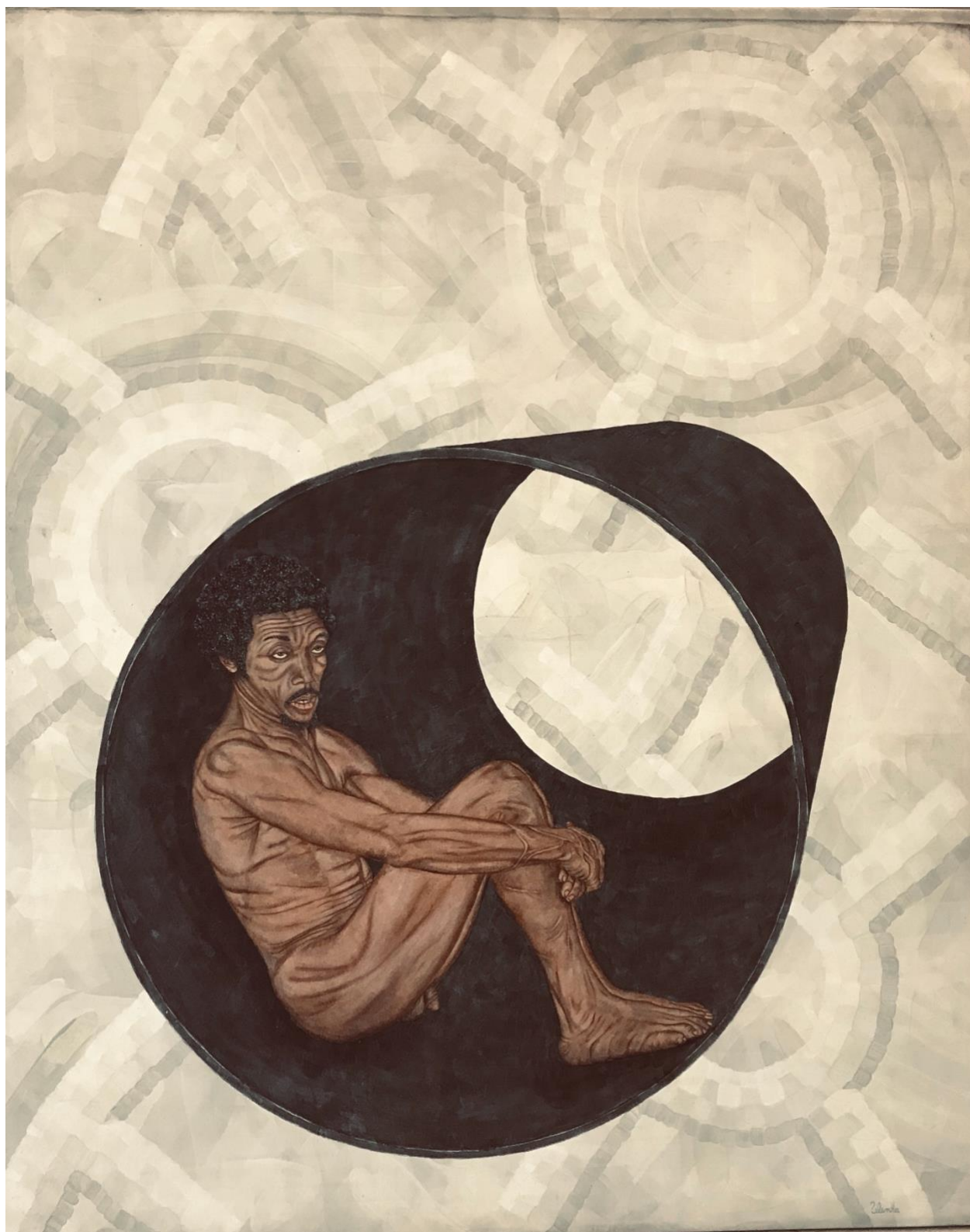
courtesy Luis de Jesus, LA



Diez de Espadas. Tarot Cards, Marina Vargas, 2016, mixed technique on wood, 205 cm x 122 cm



Untitled, Wolf Vostell, 1998, photograph collage, 17.5 cm x 24 cm



Dos Grados Más Allá de la Locura, Rodney Zelenka, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 122 cm x 154 cm



Manhole, Rodney Zelenka, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 128 cm x 98 cm,

signed in front and back by the artist