

# Reading Rämistrasse #65: Mateo Chacon-Pino on Camp Fires at Last Tango, Tanzhaus Zürich & Shedhalle

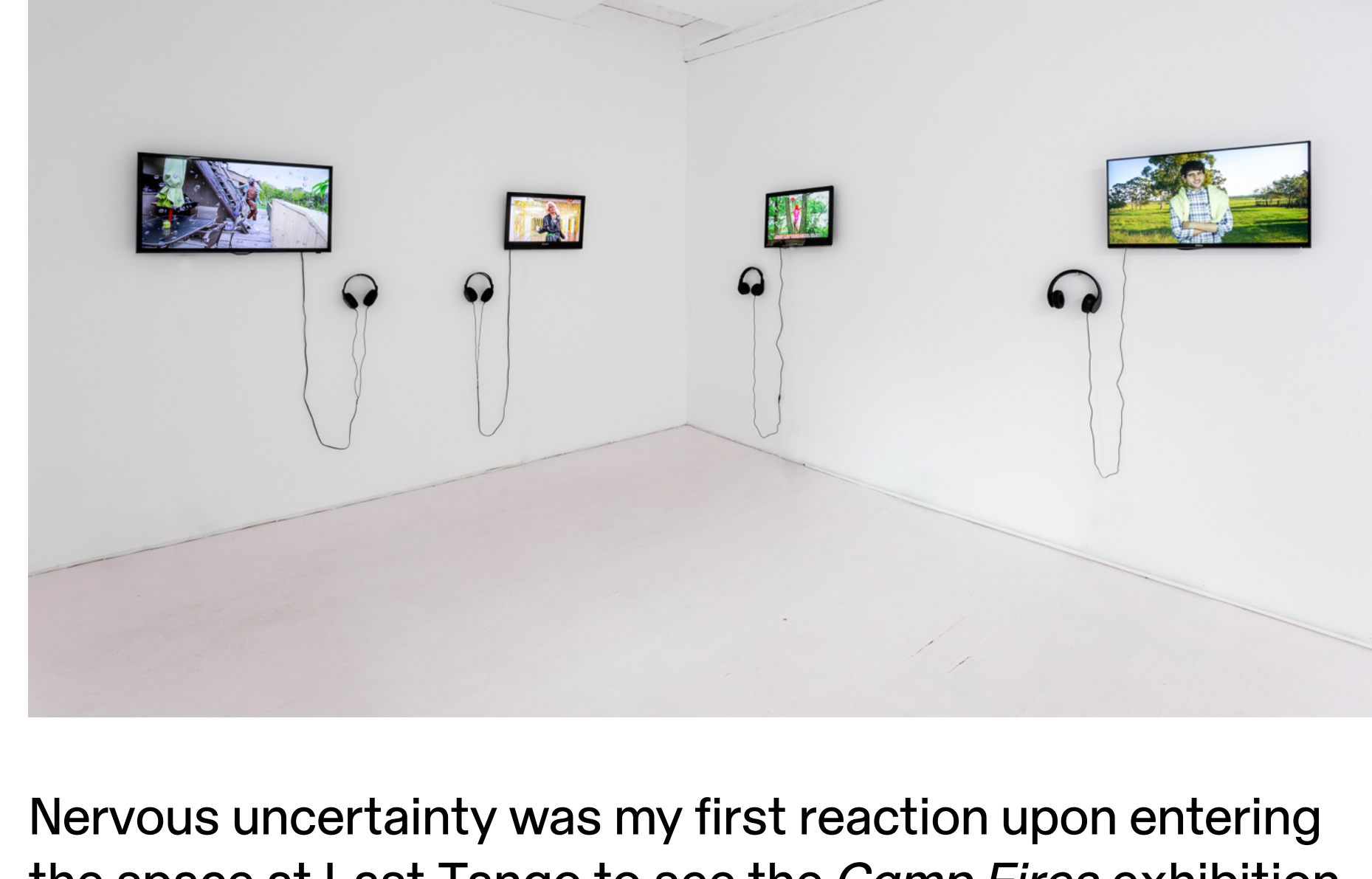
08.10.2021

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Have you ever paid attention to what makes an exhibition an exhibition? Often, exhibitions seem to be little more than a coincidental gathering of similar artworks within the same space, more McGuffin than discursive engine. An installation in the centre, paintings and drawings on the wall, a performance during the opening, a video hidden in the backroom, and, if they dare to, some archival material laid out in a vitrine are sufficient for someone to call themselves a curator. Which is fine, it might be enough to develop a career in galleries and off-spaces. And it gives you another reason to get out of your sweatpants, dress up and parade into another performative gathering of the «scene», be seen and call it labour.

But a rewarding exhibition is one that demands and guides your attention, one that won't accept your «neutrality» or «professionalism» as excuses to not take a political position. It may make you feel uncomfortable, take you out of your comfort zone and confront you with your own hidden darkness. And like a lover it rewards your vulnerability with its own cracks and imperfections as a tender gesture. Real love is never love at first sight, it starts as a disturbance in our lives and expectations, maybe even a nuisance.



Nervous uncertainty was my first reaction upon entering the space at Last Tango to see the *Camp Fires* exhibition curated by Simon Würsten Marin and Violeta Mansilla. Rows of screens hang from the walls, almost like a classical painting gallery. I took a step back and asked myself whether I really wanted to see the full exhibition or even write this review: one screen usually means some 20 to 30 minutes of watching, two are already a lot, but 15? Of course, I could have taken a quick look at 8 or 9 videos, left after half an hour and claimed later I had seen the exhibition. But it would have been a failure on my part to fall back into performative patterns of gallery visits and I would have walked the walk of shame of leaving an unseen exhibition behind. To dismiss one video is to dismiss the whole show. And this is why I call *Camp Fires* a great exhibition: even when I was confused by something, as I was by the sudden lightness of House of Ladosha's video between strong statements and conceptual pieces, I felt that skipping the work was not an option. The exhibition, naturally, exhibits itself and not commensurable with writing. In that sense, what you are reading is not a description of *Camp Fires* but rather an invitation to visit. Even as an incomplete picture of the show, it is only conceivable because I gave the exhibition what it asked for: attention and my time.



*Camp Fires* spans three institutions in a rare collaboration between Zurich art organisations: Last Tango, Tanzhaus and Shedhalle. The larger part of the exhibition takes place within Last Tango, where the exhibition opens with the video *faceshopping* (2018) by the artist SOPHIE. The grizzling bass from this opener fills the exhibition and makes clear that this exhibition came together in memoriam of the transformative artist.



With a focus on the body as the exhibition of queer identity this exhibition aims to open a space for a camp community. It is loosely organised in topics with the first room dedicated to the private and personal. Videoworks by Florencia Rodríguez Giles, Emilio Bianchic, Signe Pierce & Alli Coates as well as Fatima Al Qadiri & Khalid Al Gharaballi address the way the presentation of one's own identity is both private and political. Bianchic, for example, teaches in *Gender Conscious Free Nail Art Tutorial* (2014) ways to paint your own fingernails to represent colourful political and personal statements. In *Mendeel um A7mad (N x I x S x M)* (2012) Al Qadiri & Al Gharaballi offer a humorous imagination of Chai Dhaha in which male actors play the women of more or less devout Muslim orthodoxies who discuss body modification, the sexuality of youth as well as gender issues. A second section of the exhibition gives room to look at parties as places for expression and community building. Here the curators consciously took a loose approach to what they deemed *art* and included video trailers for the queer party series KUNT from the early 2010s by Lukas Beyeler. Similarly, the video *House of Ladosha: Feeling the Fantasy* (2018) by House of Ladosha does not convey to established concepts of video art but rather follows a family gathering of the House of Ladosha on Fire Island, where the members celebrate the safe space to present themselves and interact as they like. Despite its conceptual lightness, it is one of the more outstanding videos and sparks pure joie de vivre.

A bridge between various cultures is drawn by works by Club Ate (Bhenji Ra & Justin Shoulder) in the ground floor of Last Tango as well as Tianzhuo Chen and Javier Ocampo at Tanzhaus. With *Ex Nilalang (From Creature - From Creation)* (2017) Club ATe give a rendition of the Filipino myth of Maganda and Malakas, the first humans, devoid of gender or identity. Without a deep understanding of Filipino culture it is near impossible to understand each reference, thus this piece stands less for any kind of representation but rather as a statement of an *is*, a confrontation with difference and the awareness of the other as someone to relate to. In *G.H.O.S.T.* (2017) Chen intertwines imageries of Asian mysticism from Hinduism to Buddhism. In this rave-culture inspired interpretation the bodies in the video twist and stutter as they transform between ecstatic moments. The appropriation of a foreign culture offers an easy target for ill-mannered accusations of exoticism, but Tianzhuo forces us to look carefully at the honest curiosity and misunderstanding that may take place in transcultural conversations. Ocampo then adorns in *La Xoloescuintla* (2018) their own body and that of a Xoloitzcuintlis - a revered dog breed from pre-Hispanic times - with white pearls. With this highlighting of extremities and equalizing jewellery Ocampo both compares and merges the animal and human body to be represented both as valuable and adorable. This is emphasised by the tender gesture of holding each other without restraint. Considering the colonial history of modern-day Mexico, the artist's place of birth, the video becomes an argument for reconciliation between a post-colonial experience and a pre-colonial past.



With over 30 participating authorships spread across spaces - Last Tango, Tanzhaus and Shedhalle - and time - screenings, performances and panels until mid-October - *Camp Fires* truly aims to incorporate more than one understanding of queerness and presents works stemming from a broad variety of contexts: Latin America, party and ballroom, pop, YouTube. Instead of either neglecting or overburdening the audience by ceding any responsibility to interpret the exhibit, this show is authoritative and formative. It does not demand the visitors make like untouched tourists but rather mediates the experiences, thoughts, feelings, at times biography of the authors involved. This means that at times you might be surprised by the different characteristics of the works, sometimes light and festive, sometimes comedic and trashy, sometimes shocking and serious. Not every work may be expected or even favoured within this show. And this is how *Camp Fires* exhibits its own vulnerability, the making of the show itself and its awareness of its own incommensurability. In the end nothing can replace the show; you better stop reading and go pay a visit.

Camp Fires: The Body as a Queer Stage  
02.09.21 - 23.10.21

Fatima Al Qadiri & Khalid Al Gharaballi, James Bantone, Básica TV, Lukas Beyeler, Emilio Bianchic, Lex Brown, Cibelle Cavalli Bastos, Tianzhuo Chen, Jes Fan, House of Ladosha, Ivy Monteiro, Javier Ocampo, Tyler Matthew Oyer, Signe Pierce & Alli Coates, Bhenji Ra & Justin Shoulder, Florencia Rodríguez Giles, Jacolby Satterwhite, SOPHIE and more

Curated by Simon W Marin and Violeta Mansilla, hosted and co-Produced by Last Tango, co-hosted by Tanzhaus Zürich and Shedhalle

Last Tango, Sihlquai 274, 8005, Zürich; Tanzhaus Zürich, Wasserwerkstrasse 127a, 8037 Zürich; Shedhalle, Seestrasse 395, 8038 Zurich.

Images: Florencia Rodríguez Giles, *La fuerza que contiene una forma*, video still, 2017. Courtesy the artist.; CAMP FIRES, exhibition view, Last Tango, Zurich, 2021. Photo: Kilian Bannwart. Courtesy Last Tango, Zurich; Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue (Jade Edition)*, 2018. Exhibition view, CAMP FIRES, Last Tango, Zurich, 2021. Photo: Max Ehrengreber. © Jacolby Satterwhite. Courtesy of the artist, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, and Last Tango, Zurich; *Fatima Al Qadiri & Khalid Al Gharaballi, Mendeel Um A7mad (N x I x S x M)*, video still, 2012. Courtesy the artists; Javier Ocampo, *La Xoloescuintla*, video still, 2018. Courtesy the artist.

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