

Spike Island

PRESS RELEASE

OFELIA RODRÍGUEZ

TALKING IN DREAMS

Saturday 30 September 2023 to Sunday 14 January 2024



Spike Island presents a major monographic exhibition by Colombian artist Ofelia Rodríguez (1946–2023). This extensive exhibition brings together a selection of paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures made over the past five decades.

Influenced by memories of her native Barranquilla, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, Rodríguez combines found objects and images rich in symbolism to construct humorous yet critical works that examine cultural identity and gender stereotypes.

After studying painting at Yale University in New Haven in the early 1970s, Rodríguez moved to Paris to study etching at Atelier 17 and eventually settled in London in 1984. Working in her East London studio, she developed highly personal work inspired by her childhood memories and populated by tropical motifs. In her paintings, caimans, iguanas and lizards are suspended on colourful flat surfaces alongside representations of cacti and bodily fragments such as hands, wounded hearts and photocopies of mechanically altered ears. Describing Colombia's influence on her work, Rodríguez recalls: 'There is that sense of unreality... a feeling of being on the edge of the world, at its margin... a feeling of floating, of being suspended in mid-air – a dreamlike state – which is inevitably in my work.'

An avid collector of objects she found in street markets in Colombia and Mexico, Rodríguez incorporated all kinds of findings into her



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work, from carved, painted and moulded masks, to devotional images, horns and plastic toys. Sometimes she would place an object on the canvas and paint or spray around it, as in *Paisaje flotando con cuernos* (1993) where two mounted horns are stuck to the centre of the canvas and framed by a deep blue rectangle surrounded by floating hands and plastic bottle teats.

In the late 1970s, after moving to Paris, Rodríguez began to arrange these objects in what she called 'Magic Boxes': small wooden boxes with doors, that she painted with brilliant colours and then placed objects inside, like a relic or a fetish. By combining seemingly disconnected objects, Rodríguez would create striking and often surreal compositions, as in works such as *Caja mágica con elefante bajo las estrellas protegido por un corazón* (1993-98), where the figure of an elephant stands inside a bright yellow wooden box surrounded by metal studs. The box is crowned by two horns at the top and decorated with an embroidered heart at the back.

Rodríguez's appropriation of mass-produced objects, readymade materials and sentimental mementoes explores the crossovers between the exotic and the popular, casting an analytical eye on her background. In this exhibition, Rodríguez's idiosyncratic visual vocabulary builds a strong characterisation of her Latin American roots, exploiting the clichés that have defined her native Barranquilla: the sensual colours, tropical motifs, and the many myths and legends that populate the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

Image: Ofelia Rodríguez, *Paisaje flotando con cuernos (Floating Landscape with Horns)* (1993). Mixed media on canvas, 170 X 210 cm. Courtesy the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogota

– Ends –

For further information and high-resolution images please contact Niquita Munowenyu, Communications Manager at Spike Island on niquita.munowenyu@spikeisland.org.uk / +44 117 929 2266.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

- **OFELIA RODRÍGUEZ**
Ofelia Rodríguez (1946–2023) studied at the Escuela de Bellas Artes, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, and later at Yale University, New Haven and the Pratt Graphic Art Center, New York. In 1978–80, she travelled to Paris, where she studied at Atelier 17 and exhibited her first assemblages and 'magic boxes'. She settled in London in 1984. She has exhibited her work at venues such as The Queens Museum of Art, New York, USA (1988); the 5th Havana Biennale, Cuba (1995); Museo de Arte Moderno 'La Tertulia', Cali, Colombia (1995); MAMBO, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Colombia (2008); MOLAA, Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, California (2011, 2017 and 2021); and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá, Colombia (2017). Her work is held in



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collections such as ESCALA, Essex Collection of Art from Latin America, The University of Essex and MOLAA, Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, California.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- **ABOUT SPIKE ISLAND**
Spike Island supports, produces and presents contemporary art and culture across an 80,000 square foot former industrial building in Bristol. Its diverse artistic programme includes free major exhibitions, events and engagement activities taking place on-site and online. Championing outstanding work by emerging and underrepresented local, national and international artists, the programme enhances access to contemporary art for audiences from all backgrounds.

Alongside its public offer, Spike Island directly supports artists through new commissions, over 70 subsidised studios, and sector-leading artist development opportunities that widen access to its programme and facilities. Its Exhibition Services business supports the bespoke production and installation of artists' film and video throughout the UK and internationally. Spike Island is home to a dynamic community of hundreds of artists and creative businesses, working in flexible, affordable workspaces, alongside UWE Bristol's Fine Art department, Spike Print Studio, and café bar Emmeline.
www.spikeisland.org.uk

- Ofelia's exhibition at Spike Island is part of the West of England Visual Arts Alliance programme, supported by Arts Council England.

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