

ALBERTO BARAYA & DANIELLE RIEDE

EXPEDITION BOGOTÁ-INDIANAPOLIS:

An examination
of the aesthetics
of a place
and its plants



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EXEMPLAR HERBARIO
RECOLECTOR Danielle Riede, Alberto Baraya
LUGAR Colombia, Bogotá
FECHA 2011
"Com Fakes"



Fripe corn cobs, physiocal, poli estuar - native color, natural corn leaf "Made in China"
flying corn, mag. silk from 3x1. - reality and fantasy mag.



For *Expedition Bogotá-Indianapolis* at the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, artists Alberto Baraya and Danielle Riede explored the environmental and cultural landscape of central Indiana through photography, video, sculpture, and installations of found objects. Baraya, a conceptual artist based in Bogotá, Columbia, was visiting Indiana for the first time during the implementation of the exhibition. Riede, a native of Virginia who has lived in Indianapolis for four years while teaching at Herron School of Art and Design, acted as his guide and cultural interpreter. This body of work grew out of Baraya's initial impressions and Riede's long-term understanding of the Indiana landscape, residents, and public spaces such as museums, stores, and state parks. The artists adopted the methods of discovery, collection, and categorization used by early explorers in the Americas. Through these actions, the artists were better able to understand the particularities of their surroundings.

The two artists first met in Venice in 2009. Baraya was there creating the site-specific work *Expedición Venecia* for a group exhibition in the Latin American pavilion, and was in a trinket shop in search of crystal flowers when the two crossed paths. They soon recognized the similarities in their practices and the potential for collaboration. Riede was awarded a grant which enabled the artists to embark upon the new body of work featured in *Expedition Bogotá-Indianapolis*.

The artists wanted to explore the potential of objects found in their respective environments as diagnostic tools, using cultural relics like artificial plants and ornamental fruit, vases, and display cases to understand, in their words, "the aesthetics of a place and its plants." After departing Venice, they continued their conversation via email while Riede scoured Indianapolis for materials. Baraya visited Indianapolis for two weeks before the exhibition opened in October, 2011. During that time the artists captured photographs and video throughout the area, then assembled and installed their findings for the exhibition. The resulting works are a direct reaction to Indianapolis as the artists saw it, and contain a dialogue between the oppositions of natural and artificial, permanent and ephemeral, intuition and scientific methods, local and global.

Collecting, categorizing, and displaying found materials is a longstanding activity central to both artists' practices. For the most part, Baraya's works are part of a series titled *Herbarium of Artificial Plants, 2001–ongoing*, each component of which is comprised of a systematically dissected and labeled fake plant acquired by the artist. Drawing

COVER:
Indiana Fakes/Falsos de Indiana (Detail).

THIS PAGE:
A Pumpkin Football (The Bulldogs)/Una calabaza para futbol (Detail).

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from the practices of 18th and 19th century European explorers in the Americas, Baraya pockets these “specimens” from the decorations of waiting rooms, homes, or restaurants without permission. Most often, Baraya’s plants are affixed to paper, their individual parts labeled in pencil and preserved in austere wooden frames, referring to the antiquated form of a herbarium of real vegetation. Baraya states, “By picking up some plastic flowers on the street, I behave like the scientists that Western education expects us to become. By changing the goals of this simple task I resist this ‘destiny’. In that moment all assumptions are put into question, even History.”¹ In 2004 Baraya retraced the steps of botanists for his project *Expedición Putumayo*, for which he sought out artificial plants as evidence of globalism—or “the laws of decoration,” as Baraya calls it—in even the remotest areas of the Amazon, evidencing that “...even the most ‘natural’ places need to be ornamented by any means.”² The results of these pilgrimages are often contextualized on maps in the gallery space, and in this way all of Baraya’s bodies of work within the *Herbarium* series become “expeditions.”

Riede’s past work consists mainly of temporary site-specific “room paintings,” for which Riede collected castoff fragments of paint from other artists, bits of resin, and other ephemera and affixed them to the gallery wall with glue. Instead of creating her own markings, Riede carefully harvested the stray brushstrokes of others from their canvases or palettes, using them to create unique compositions in reaction to gallery spaces. Riede earned a BA from the University of Virginia before moving to Italy, where she took drawing classes. She then studied under Daniel Buren while attending the Art Academy of Düsseldorf, Germany. Riede returned to the U.S. and earned an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2005. The artist started collecting paint in 2003 when she stumbled upon a bridge with layers of peeling paint. But it wasn’t until Düsseldorf that her interest in this medium took the form of her signature room paintings. She began visiting studios of fellow painters, seeking remnants of dried paint as donations, which she meticulously catalogued.³ Her early installations, with names like *Düsseldorf Reds* or *Cools—Mexico—Düsseldorf*, are imbued with Riede’s personal history and associations with the places in which the fragments were collected. As Riede states, these works are a “...beautiful and eccentric record of my excursions and meetings with other painters.”⁴ Later, in order to be able to collect more broadly Riede allowed herself the freedom to no longer label each scrap of paint.⁵ Her installations became less conceptually tied to the place where they were collected, and the fragments became anthropomorphized in works with titles such as *300 Clouds Go Passing By* or *Runaway*.

Indiana Fakes/Falsos de Indiana is the largest work included in *Expedition Bogotá-Indianapolis*, and consists of an expansive grouping of Riede’s collected artificial flowers, wreaths and ornamental fruit affixed directly to the gallery’s wall or arranged in a wood and glass display case. Some of the vegetation appears deceptively real, others are extravagantly ornamental or comically oversized. Overall, the arrangement appears more intuitive than systematic, and recalls Riede’s past room paintings. But

THIS PAGE:
Indiana Fakes/Falsos de Indiana (Detail).
Two Triangular Casket Flag Containers/
Dos contenedores triangulares para bandera
funeraria.

RIGHT PAGE:
Indiana Fakes/Falsos de Indiana.



¹ José Roca, “Alberto Baraya.” *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 108, Jun-Aug, 2007. Accessed online http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/focus_alberto_baraya/

² Ibid.

³ Jean Robertson, “The Elusive Presence of Danielle Riede.” *Danielle Riede: 2003-2008* (self published).

⁴ Riede, *Paint Chip Dreams*. Master’s thesis (Virginia Commonwealth University: 2005) p. 1.

⁵ Jean Robertson, “The Elusive Presence of Danielle Riede.” *Danielle Riede: 2003-2008* (self published).



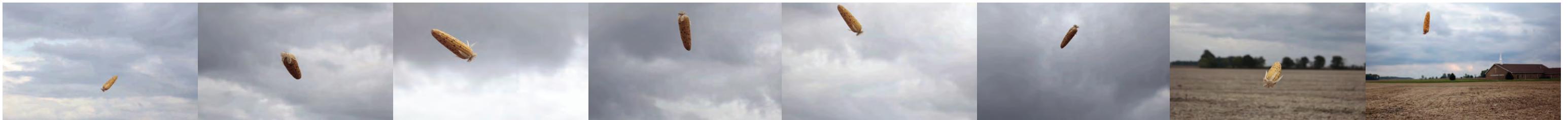
the intuitive collection and installation of the individual components is undermined by a small paper tag hanging from each of the decorations. Branded on one side with a rubber stamp insignia designed by the artists and portraying a pile of corn and the humorous invented phrase “Expedition Cornfakes”, the reverse contains information about the “recollection” of the object—where, when, and who “discovered” the item.

The artists are intrigued by the associations a viewer may have with these lowbrow objects. When searching for the flowers in secondhand stores, Riede stated, “The flowers are arranged according to color and put in old vases, etc. Sometimes they are just cast aside in giant junk piles, especially if they are not in pristine condition. I am interested in public reaction to and use of the artificial plants.”⁶ The irony of these botanical specimens is that they’re not an individual output of nature (as is real vegetation), but mass-produced in China. However, many of the objects have been altered by their original owners—one is wrapped in a bow of billowy pink gauze, another “planted” in a disposable plastic cup. Through these processes, the widely produced objects become embedded with sentimentality and are relics of a childhood, wedding, or deceased relative that someone chose to cast aside. The unknown personal narratives these pieces contain is of interest to Riede, and parallels her thoughts of her room paintings. Riede stated of her donated paint fragments that she was “...interested in the idea of work generated by a community.”⁷

Nearby, *Two Triangular Casket Flag Containers/Dos contenedores triangulares para bandera funeraria* is installed. For this work, the artists visited an Indianapolis branch of the chain craft store Hobby Lobby. There they purchased

⁶ Riede in an email to Baraya, July 7, 2011.

⁷ Riede, *Paint Chip Dreams*. Master’s thesis (Virginia Commonwealth University: 2005) p. 4.



THIS PAGE:
Flying Corn/Maiz volante (Video).
Tricky Tropical Forests (A Hero's Stage)/Bosques tropicales engañosos (Escenariode heroes).

RIGHT PAGE:
A Flying Peony/Una Peonia Voladora (Video).
Two Inches on a Sunflower/Dos pulgadas en Girasol (Video).
Auctioneer (Video).



triangular casket flag holders as well as fake autumn produce indigenous to Indiana—such as ears of corn and a small pumpkin—which were incorporated into this and other artworks. Attached to the wall, one flag container remains empty except for its original packaging of a paper printed to look like the star-spangled corner of the American flag. On the front, a price tag sticker from Hobby Lobby contains information about where the container was purchased, along with the inventory code and place of manufacture (China). The sticker ironically portrays the same information as Baraya's and Riede's own handmade tags on *Indiana Fakes*, but also belies the proliferation of Western capitalism since the industrial revolution—a container to memorialize those fallen in wars abroad, made in China, and shipped to the U.S. for purchase. The other flag container is filled with an arrangement of artificial husks of corn. Indiana is known for being part of the “breadbasket of America,” and the rural landscape is characterized by seemingly never-ending rows of the crop.

Despite never having been the site of armed conflict, the landscape in and around Indianapolis is rife with reminders of war. Downtown, an aggressively neoclassical building based on the ancient Greek Mausoleum of Halicarnassus was erected after WWI. This building dominates an entire city block, and is home to the Indiana World War Memorial Military Museum. Baraya visited the museum and pocketed some samples of fake bamboo from a diorama about U.S. combatants in Vietnam. The resulting work, *Tricky Tropical Forests (A Hero's Stage)/Bosques tropicales engañosos (Escenariode heroes)*, is consistent with Baraya's *Herbarium* methodology—the artist pinned the specimen to paper and labeled each component, complete with photographs of the display from where it was taken for the piece. This work draws connections between the history of colonialism Baraya's work destabilizes, and the U.S. Military's invasive policies of past and present. *Tricky Tropical Forests* also unveils the many interpretive and illusory tactics used in museums to tell a one-sided story about an actual and highly politicized event.



The work *Tree Video/Video de árbol* was filmed in another central Indiana landscape altered by a distant war, Fort Benjamin Harrison, and is a subtle acknowledgment of humans' manipulation of the environment. The densely wooded setting in the video appears to be untouched wilderness. However, this grove of walnut trees was planted because their straightness made them ideal for manufacturing rifles. For *Tree Video* the camera remains stationary, capturing the trunks of the mature trees and ambient sounds of the forest. The tree's tall, straight trunks create a regular and predictable pattern in the landscape. Within this pattern, it's easy to identify one small tree near the left side of the video's frame. Slowly, we recognize Riede wearing green and crouched behind the small tree—she appears to be carefully planting the sapling. Near the end of the short video, Riede reveals the artificiality of her endeavor by picking up the potted tree (the ease of her movements indicates that the tree is not heavy and must not be real). Riede walks off screen with the decoration—which is also on display as a part of the exhibition—and the loop starts again. Through email correspondence the artists discussed the types of places they'd like to visit when Baraya arrived in Indianapolis. When Riede suggested remote areas like Fort Harrison, Baraya responded enthusiastically, "I'm thinking on the possibilities of bringing some special fake flora to one of those parks, based on the idea that any traveler had an influence on the landscape he/she crosses..."⁸ *Tree Video* cleverly illustrates how nature is manipulated to

THIS PAGE:
Tree Video/Video de árbol (Video).
Fake Corn of Indiana/Maíz falso de Indiana.

RIGHT PAGE:
A Pumpkin Football (The Bulldogs)/Una calabaza para futbol (Detail).

⁸ Baraya in an email to Riede, July 6, 2011.



suit the desires of the humans who inhabit it.

Also filmed in this grove of trees is *Two Inches on a Sunflower/Dos pulgadas en Girasol*. Riede holds a large sunflower by the stem, so that it's pointing towards the sky. At first she is nearly imperceptible, but her figure is revealed as she slowly makes her way across the screen from right to left. Clips of Riede are interspersed with close-ups of an inchworm navigating the flower's leaves and petals—it's obvious from these shots that the flower is fake, but it's a poetic reflection of humans' tendency to idealize nature, in decorations indoors as well as the "natural" spaces outdoors. Baraya's and Riede's preoccupations with the landscape of Indiana brings to mind the late 19th and early 20th century painters known as the Hoosier Group, whose most well-known member is T.C. Steele. His landscapes depict idyllic rural scenes of farms and meadows painted *en plein air* throughout the state.

The photographs comprising *Fake Corn of Indiana/Maíz falso de Indiana* also poetically explore how we adapt our surroundings to suit our needs. Riede states, "In the 1600s, Indiana was lush. Approximately 85% of it was covered with dense forests of giant hardwoods and the Kanawakee Marsh spotted the state with nearly two million acres of wetlands."⁹ Today, large-scale corporate farming operations have filled much of the landscape with corn or soy fields, rendering the landscape completely different from its state hundreds of years ago. The *Fake Corn* photographs feature Riede in flat corn fields holding an absurdly large artificial ear of corn purchased

⁹ *Expedition Bogotá–Indianapolis*, Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art. <http://www.indymoca.org/2011/09/expedition-bogota-indianapolis/>



THIS PAGE:
Fallen Forest Undergrowth/ Sustratos boscosos caídos.

RIGHT PAGE:
Climbing Fakes/ Trepadores falsos (Peace Rose).
Fallen Forest Undergrowth/ Sustratos boscosos caídos (Detail).
Climbing Fakes/ Trepadores falsos (Red Rose Mutant).

from Hobby Lobby. The fake corn with its idealized proportions is even more ironic when juxtaposed with ears of actual corn, even if those—too—are modified, although genetically. The fake corn is on display within the grouping of photographs documenting Riede's action in corn fields and has been slightly dismantled and labeled like *Tricky Tropical Forests*.

A Pumpkin Football (The Bulldogs)/ Una calabaza para futbol is one of two works in the exhibition that are portraits of people the artists encountered while traveling throughout the area. The Bulldogs are the mascot of Brownsburg High School, located in a suburb west of Indianapolis. For this work, Baraya and Riede attended and photographed the school's homecoming football game. The photographs of football players, fans, and the homecoming court all surreally contain a miniature fake pumpkin, which is on display in a glass vitrine like a prize game-winning ball. This disruption of our expectations echoes the artists' interventions in the "natural" environment of Fort Benjamin Harrison. Through these actions—a fake tree being carried through the woods, a homecoming queen holding a plastic pumpkin—we begin to question the integrity of our environment. As Baraya and Riede expose, whether considering a forest



or a vase of artificial flowers, our surroundings are the way they are because we made them so.

The works *Fallen Forest Undergrowth/ Sustratos boscosos caídos* and *Climbing Fakes/ Falsos trepadores* portray Riede's genuine appreciation for her accumulated artificial flowers through formal interventions and manipulations of their petals and stems. *Fallen Forest Undergrowth* consists of a multicolored pool of flower petals arranged on the gallery floor. The softness of the material and placement on the floor recalls one of Robert Morris's felt scatter pieces of the late 60s, but—as with Riede's room paintings—these individual pieces are thoughtfully arranged. As art historian Jean

Robertson stated, "In her process Riede at first appears systematic, sorting her collection and initially designing an installation within parameters that seem driven by geometric logic. She borrows from the vocabulary and tactics of minimalism and post minimalism—repetition, geometric arrangements, rows, grids. But her approach is not at all calculated. As she works she allows herself to improvise and be intuitive, without totally abandoning a sense of order. No installation is entirely systematic or entirely impulsive."¹⁰ The work *Climbing Fakes* is of the same post minimal thread, and is comprised of beautiful reliefs of altered fake flowers, taken apart and reassembled with delicate stitches. One component of this work is comprised of the petals of a disassembled rose that have been reattached end-to-end in soft, vertical rows, bringing to mind the organic seriality of Eva Hesse.

As a whole, *Expedition Bogotá-Indianapolis* poetically describes Indianapolis as the artists experienced it.

The works speak of a specific time and place, but tell a story common most anywhere. No matter where we go—to a city in the Midwest or a remote village in the Amazon—our experiences are shaped by standardizations of products across a global marketplace. By highlighting things we don't often consider, like our reciprocal relationships with our surroundings or the everyday objects we choose to purchase or cast aside, Baraya and Riede have provided a comprehensive social and geographic Hoosier landscape.

¹⁰. Jean Robertson, "The Elusive Presence of Danielle Riede." *Danielle Riede: 2003-2008* (self published).

