



***MalpasO: A Collaborative Investigation***  
**by Alejandro Almanza Pereda, Birgit Rathsmann and Rick Karr**

*The Clemente, Abrazo Interno Gallery, 2nd Floor, 3:30 - 7 pm daily and by appt.  
107 Suffolk Street, New York, NY 10002*

**Exhibition Dates: Mar 9 - Apr 13, 2019**  
**Opening Reception March 9, 4 -7 pm**

The Clemente Soto Veléz Cultural and Educational Center is proud to present *MalpasO*, the inaugural collaboration between artists Alejandro Almanza Pereda, Birgit Rathsmann and Rick Karr. The exhibition focuses on the artists' dialogue with an historic river valley in Chiapas, Mexico that's now submerged beneath the waters of a reservoir behind a dam -- a fluid locus where the quest for autonomy struggles to overcome thwarted beliefs.

The artists have long shared a fascination with water as a medium uniquely suited to upending assumptions small and large, a potent metaphor for knowledge that remains in a fluid state and never hardens into the kind of certainty that gives rise to rigid ideology.

The exhibition is organized around the metaphor of a small museum that documents the artists' subjective experience of the landscape surrounding the MalpasO Reservoir in western Chiapas. The show investigates the historical layers of violence foisted onto this landscape as a consequence of colonialism, religion, and "progress".

Almanza encases in concrete a landscape painting of the Templo Quechula -- a church built by Spanish missionaries in the early 1500s that's now mostly submerged beneath the reservoir -- jutting up above the surface of the water. The piece interrogates the cyclical fight between humans attempting to encase nature and nature pushing back against the container. Rathsmann's video installation combines underwater footage of the Templo with animation, diving into the ways in which water creates shapes and spaces and defines the uncontainable, the virtually immaterial, the unbreathable. Karr's deeply-researched manufactured objects and narrative texts bring to life historic moments and characters whose preconceived notions did not survive their encounters with the reality of the MalpasO region. All three artists collaborated on cast-glass sculptures commemorating the flooding of the valley -- and the heroic efforts to document traces of ancient human settlement there before the waters began to rise.

The works explore the ways in which water obliterates the past (more than 100 archaeological sites are forever lost to science beneath the reservoir), powers the present (as the water races through the turbines of the Malpas Dam), and provides for the future (irrigating crops downriver). They explore Malpas -- the bad passage.

For more than three thousand years, the valleys of the Grijalva and La Venta rivers near the rapids at Malpas have been home to the Olmec -- the parent civilization of Mesoamerica -- and their descendants the Zoque. They built temples, ball courts, sweat baths, and urban centers. By the time the Spaniards built the Templo Quechula and a nearby monastery as bases from which to proselytize, most of the ancient sites had been reclaimed by the jungle.

In the 1960s, Mexico's national electric utility began tearing into the hillsides around Malpas to build the dam. The thought of losing scores of archaeological sites beneath the waters of the expansive reservoir was too much to bear for a team of archaeologists. They spent six months racing through the region. They identified more than 100 sites (including the Templo Quechula), and conducted extensive excavations at the largest and most promising. The scientists stayed until the floodwaters rose to the hubcaps of their jeeps, fleeing alongside a few stubborn farmers who'd worked their small plantations of cacao and coffee until the waters made it impossible.

Those stories form the basis of this ongoing, multidisciplinary collaboration between Guadalajara-based Almanza and Brooklyn-based Rathsmann and Karr. In May of 2018, they traveled to Chiapas to conduct research and collect video and still images, including extensive underwater footage of the Templo Quechula. Their exhibition at The Clemente is an early dispatch from that fieldwork -- a first-blush report and an outline for continuing research.

On 23 March 2017 at 3PM: Screening and fundraising party: **A Gente Rio** by Carolina Caycedo

On 8 April 2017 at 7PM: Performance by Rick Karr



***This program is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.***