

Catalina Schliebener Muñoz
Buenos Vecinos

05.19.24 – 01.19.25

Accessible exhibition wall text and labels

Catalina Schliebener Muñoz

Buenos Vecinos

In *Buenos Vecinos*, which translates to “good neighbors,” Catalina Schliebener Muñoz confronts the impact of two Walt Disney animated films: *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *Los Tres Caballeros* (1944). Both films emerged from Disney’s state-sponsored research trips to South and Central American nations as part of The Good Neighbor Policy, which sought to discourage Nazi influence and improve the United States’ public image in Latin America following its numerous military invasions throughout the early 20th century. Disney and his team of artists toured Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, and Mexico to generate visual motifs and storylines for recognizable characters like Donald Duck and Goofy, as well to create new characters, songs, and dances based on local customs and archetypes.

Schliebener Muñoz examines how these films functioned as a form of soft power, enlisting children's media towards the economic and geopolitical interests of the United States. Through installation, collage, sculpture, and murals, the artist subverts reductive and exoticized representations of Latin American cultures in the films to center its secondary characters and rebellious underdogs. Schliebener Muñoz also contends with Disney's depictions of gender, sexuality, race, and Indigeneity by appropriating and fragmenting the films' imagery to create critical narratives of resistance. Acknowledging the capacity of stories to shape value systems, the exhibition employs mirroring, queer coding, ambiguity, and humor to challenge the imposed boundaries between the real and fictional, natural and synthetic, spectacular and grotesque.

As World War II gave way to the Cold War, the United States abandoned Pan-American unity to

support coups and dictatorships in many of the countries depicted in Disney's films. Schliebener Muñoz incorporates archival materials that address the aftermath of The Good Neighbor Policy, U.S. interventionism, and imperialist ideology through the history of the Queens Museum's site. This building hosted the former United Nations, where decisions ranged from the 1947 partition of Palestine to the creation of UNICEF, and is also located on the grounds of the 1964–1965 New York World's Fair where Disney premiered the "it's a small world" attraction. For Schliebener Muñoz, this context becomes integral to understanding the legacy of Disney's films alongside hostile foreign policies, and how the imagination of children became a vehicle for the projection of American innocence and exceptionalism on the global stage.

Catalina Schliebener Muñoz: Buenos Vecinos was organized by Lindsey Berfond, Assistant Curator and Studio Program Manager.

Audio descriptions narrated by Lindsey Berfond, Assistant Curator and Studio Program Manager, can be found on the Queens Museum Digital Guide, available for free on the Bloomberg Connects App.

This exhibition was produced in cooperation with the Queens Museum team: Massimo Avanzato, Hayley Blackstone, Sarah Cho, Gianina Enriquez, Catherine Grau, Mayisha Hassan, Lauren Haynes, Hitomi Iwasaki, Adrienne Koteen, Lynn Maliszewski, Gabriela Peralta, Aaron Strauss, Heryte T. Tequame, and Tiffany Tong; Queens Museum fabricators and preparators: Keith O. Anderson, Max Bell, Noemi Bilger, Jackson Denahy, Brittany Hayden, Magnus Gitt Henderson, Natalya Kornblum Laudi, Clare Koury, Martin Kramer, Samantha Lasko, Juyon Lee, and Mallie Sanford; and EcoManagement LLC: Dilan Cheavacchi, Nolan Dolaher, Mark Power, and Chad Stayrook. Catalina Schliebener Muñoz wishes to thank Camila Schliebener Muñoz, Nicolás Cuello, Carlos Mendoza, Familia González, Carola Ángulo, JD Pluecker, Avram Finkelstein, Thea Quiray Tagle,

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Walt Disney Studios

est. Los Angeles, CA, 1923

Original production cel featuring animation frame
from *Los Tres Caballeros*, 1944

Ink and paint on celluloid acetate with color
reproduction background

Courtesy the artist



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Catalina Schliebener Muñoz

b. Santiago, Chile, 1980

Buenos Vecinos, 2023-24

Plywood and drywall stage flat, painted mural, acrylic, paper collage, silicone, cochineal pigment, print ephemera, single-channel looping video clip, and naturally dyed wool textile handwoven in the workshop of Casa González by Silvia Pérez Ruiz, Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca, Mexico, with audio track
Courtesy the artist

Mural production: Jamie La Jones

On the front of this double-sided installation, Schliebener Muñoz presents the theatrical opening scene from the 1944 Disney film *Los Tres Caballeros* as a life-size hand painted mural with acrylic ribbons that echoes the oversized scale of the mysterious gift box which appears in the animation. The travelogue stars Donald Duck, whose birthday package – signed from his friends in Latin America – unleashes an explosion of magical gifts, cultures,

music, and stories with anthropomorphic bird characters like Panchito Pistoles and José Carioca who bring him on a journey that includes stops in Uruguay, Mexico, and Brazil. While this fictional gift gestures to diplomacy and friendly relations between North and South America during The Good Neighbor Policy, the backside of the installation reveals a more complex reality.



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Courtesy the artist

In this collage installation, Schliebener Muñoz extracts, obscures, and reorients imagery from *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *Los Tres Caballeros* (1944) together with brochures from the Latin American pavilions in the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair, as well as merchandise and storybooks from the 1964–1965 Fair. These elements appear to spread like a virus or fungi, exposing the ominous forces of colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism behind the wartime propaganda films. The cryptic

tension is punctuated by a moment of resistance: a looping video clip from *Saludos Amigos*, where Donald Duck encounters an Indigenous mother carrying her child in the Lake Titicaca region between Bolivia and Peru. Donald – as a bumbling tourist wearing a colonizer’s pith helmet – attempts to photograph the child, who beats Donald to the punch by snapping a photo of him first. Schliebener Muñoz centers the film’s mischievous children who return or redirect the North American gaze to position Donald, an often angry and frustrated character associated with the U.S. military, as the butt of their own jokes.



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Catalina Schliebener Muñoz

b. Santiago, Chile, 1980

Imbunche, 2024

Pedro, 2024

Pla+, resin, lacquer, cochineal pigment

Courtesy the artist

Fabrication: Cristobal Cea, Martín Peña, Sofia de Grenade, André Magaña, and Liz Hopkins

Schliebener Muñoz's sculptures portray Pedro el Avioncito – a little Chilean airplane from *Saludos Amigos* – and The Flying Gauchito with his winged donkey from *Los Tres Caballeros*. Standing at children's height, these young figures duplicate and shapeshift into multi-headed creatures.

Transformed, the sensitive and freethinking characters exist as their many layered selves outside of oversimplified, marginalizing, or hypermasculine stereotypes. Each sculpture's toy-like finish conceals the boundaries between human and animal, animate and inanimate. Their

bright pink color appears artificial, but includes a natural dye derived from cochineal, a tiny insect native to Mexico's highlands and the Andean mountains. Cochineal was a lucrative export for Spanish colonizers who exploited the knowledge of Indigenous communities in what is known as Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Oaxaca. By utilizing the pigment, Schliebener Muñoz reasserts one of the countless forms of Indigenous connection to the lands in Central and South America systematically affected by colonial erasure and foreign intervention. Imbunche, showing intertwined versions of the gauchito and donkey, is aptly titled after a hybrid human-monster in Mapuche Chilote mythology often called upon to deliver revenge.



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Catalina Schliebener Muñoz

b. Santiago, Chile, 1980

Aves Raras, 2024

Vinyl and paint

Courtesy the artist

Aves Raras, or “strange birds,” is a pair of large-scale murals on the interior and exterior sides of this gallery wall. In *Los Tres Caballeros*, the sequence *Aves Raras* introduces exotic and fanciful birds from different South American countries that are described as “paradise” or faraway lands to be visited through the eyes of a North American.

Schliebener Muñoz questions how these narratives focused on anthropomorphic birds are a form of othering and caricature. However, the fantastical can also be a metaphor for challenging the binary constructions of gender and sexuality, where *raras* may be alternatively translated to mean rare, weird, eccentric, or queer.



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Catalina Schliebener Muñoz

b. Santiago, Chile, 1980

Aves Raras, 2024

Vinyl, paint, leather and stone hunting bolas
(boleadoras)

Courtesy the artist

Appropriating illustrations from *The Flying Gauchito* in *Los Tres Caballeros* and its unfinished sequel *The Laughing Gauchito*, the artist employs mirror symmetry to draw attention to overlooked moments and to disrupt repressive hierarchies. In the story, a young Uruguayan gaucho discovers a flying donkey while hunting Andean condors. He attempts to capture the unusual winged creature in the hopes of becoming rich, but the donkey repeatedly liberates itself from the trap. Later, the pair develop a tender friendship and collaboration, entering and winning a horse race before flying off together. Schliebener Muñoz renders these two characters in doubles and triples, where the fluid outlines of their interspecies

forms are entangled with gauchito's dangling hunting boleadoras that spill out from the wall. The artist's composition moves away from coherence and linear readings towards presenting unruly moments of discomfort, confrontation, violence, release, and humor. Disrupting the social norms enforced in the gauchito's coming-of-age tale, Schliebener Muñoz interrogates the machismo and anti-establishment attitude of gaucho culture to blur the lines between what is considered ethical and subversive, childish and mature, subject and object.



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Catalina Schliebener Muñoz

b. Santiago, Chile, 1980

Aves Raras series #1-4, 2024–ongoing
Children's book illustrations and acrylic
Courtesy the artist

Behind each peephole are illustrations from *Pedro el Avioncito de los Andes*, the Disney children's book based on a segment from *Saludos Amigos*. The story follows a little airplane whose father flies the mail carrier route over the Andean mountains between Chile and Argentina. When his father becomes sick, Pedro steps in for his first big flight over the treacherous mountains. Pedro miraculously triumphs despite several close calls and returns to Chile with the mail, only to find that he's risked his safety for a single postcard. Schliebener Muñoz reframes this storyline using black acrylic, revealing select moments and divorcing them from a context that is made opaque. These interventions direct the eye towards the power structures that perpetuate a

false construction of North American neutrality
when representing Latin American identities in
children's media.



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