

Murray Guy

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Art in America

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"PATRICIA ESQUIVIAS"

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By Brian Boucher



still from *Natures at the Hand*, 2006-10, video, approx. 4 minutes; at Murray Guy.

The two videos in Patricia Esquivias's recent show effectively combine oblique storytelling and a taste for the absurd. The young Venezuelan-born artist lives and works in Madrid and Guadalajara, and the videos touch on the Old and New Worlds with indirect commentary on colonial history.

The comic 4-minute *Natures at the Hand* (2006-10) begins in darkness, with a series of hands lighting matches to illuminate matchbook covers that are adorned with fauna ranging from cute kittens to galloping stallions - a deadpan pageant of creatures great and small. In the video's second segment, an unseen hand displays photographs of European gardens featuring elaborate topiary; these are yanked away to reveal footage of shaped shrubbery - smiley faces, animals, geometric shapes - along Guadalajara roadsides, complete with incidental soundtrack of passing traffic. If the New World's efforts are considerably humbler, they're also pretty delightful. In the final segment, the artist, seen from behind, faces a wall of windows that look onto a city at dusk. Over and over, she throws a ball so that it hits the glass just where the setting sun appears - momentarily obscuring the heavenly orb with an earthly one. In each sequence, the artist's hand serves as a point of contact with some image of nature. We see the natural world only in secondhand representations and in semidarkness, in highly manicured forms, or on its way out of sight.

In the *Folklore* series of videos (2005-10), an offscreen Esquivias presents eccentric lectures on Spanish history in a halting but endearing monotone. This show included the latest. The 11-minute *Folklore III* opens on a rocky spot overlooking the ocean, which Esquivias identifies as "one of the world's Land's Ends". She explains a "right to fly", supposedly granted by a mad queen, that allows homeowners here to expand their houses outward as they grow in height, resulting in inverted pyramids; later, a hand comes into view and draws such a house, whose expansion, the artist explains, speaks of hope. At one point, she bizarrely introduces a new

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section of the video by saying, "This part should be in a different voice". The point of view shifts to that of a passenger in a moving car as the artist narrates, "I come from the place that is the new version of this one". The car travels through a seaside town and climbs to an outlook point, where, she says, she found among the souvenir vendors' offerings a model Aztec pyramid. She interprets it as an indication that the connection between old and new is strong.

The press release helpfully explains that *Folklore III* relates to Galicia, Spain, and Nueva Galicia, Mexico - the former a coastal region with a city called Finisterre (Land's End), the latter a colony renamed in honor of the former by the 16th-century Spanish Queen Juana la Loca (Joanna the Mad). Without this information, the rambling talk would have been pretty obscure, but that very sense of mystery, along with the work's intimate tone and Esquivias's likable quirkiness, made the show all the more intriguing.