

Murray Guy

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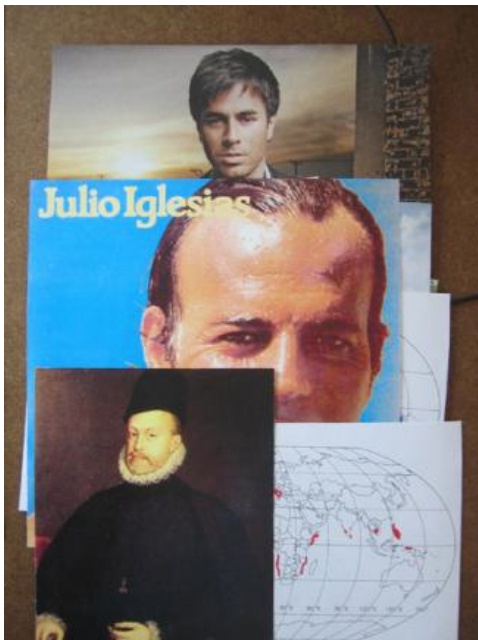
# Art in America

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“A History of Coincidences”

Murray Guy

by Aimee Walleston



A historical narrative is only as compelling, and as credible, as its author. But when the credibility and accuracy of a given history take a backseat to playful but solipsistic self-interest, a new and intriguing form of fact-based, self-critical fiction is born. The work of Venezuelan-born Spanish artist Patricia Esquivias is a jaunt through the mind of an artist whose video pieces explore historical theories sieved through an idiosyncratic, hilarious and highly subjective belief system. If the cliché from Marx that history repeats tragedy as farce rings ever more true, it seems Esquivias has hit on an appealing middle ground.

In 2008, Esquivias exhibited two video pieces at Murray Guy in New York, both of which featured lecture-style narration over a charming, clunky, magazine clipping-based Power point-esque presentation of historical and pop culture still images. With, *Folklore II* (2006, pictured left as a still, courtesy Murray Guy), Esquivias told the economic history of Spain through a comparison Spain's King Philip II and the Spanish singer Julio Iglesias, and their inverse relationships to the sun. Under the reign of King Philip II, Spain developed a huge empire. "Spain was [known as] 'the empire where the sun never set,' and had colonies all over the world. But Spain was obsessed with Catholic ideals, and eventually lost its fortune," condenses the artist. In comparison, the very, very tan Julio Iglesias, "represents a point where Spain started selling itself, and building a better economy through tourism. [Both Spain and Iglesias] were selling an image that was sunny and friendly. Instead of the sun draining the economy, it was building it back up."

Since Maya Deren pioneered narrative storytelling in avant-garde film, the structure of narration has been infinitely complicated. "We tell ourselves stories in order to live," Joan Didion famously wrote, and Esquivias' practice complicates this assertion further by illustrating just how important our own personal ideologies become when trying to make sense

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of a world filled with coincidence. Last year, Esquivias's *The Future Was When?* (2009) was featured in the New Museum's "Younger Than Jesus" generational. This video sought, in part, to explore the untold histories of the New York and Madrid subway systems through comparisons the artist made between her own life history and that of Susan Brown, an artist who restores the New York City subway's mosaics. (This piece is again currently on view in the exhibition "Nachleben" at the Goethe Institut Wyoming Building in New York). By analyzing, and therefore uniting, '80s gentrification in both New York and Madrid, and further aligning this with the personal biographies of herself and Brown, Esquivias builds upon her presumed thesis that the world continually reimagines itself by locating similarities hidden in its differences.

As she juxtaposes unexplored parallels across registers of taste, Esquivias is joined by Norwegian artist Lars Laumann, whose 2006 film *Morrissey Foretelling the Death of Princess Diana* also depicts a speculative narrative wherein coincidences are exalted. While Laumann discovered his quixotic Morrissey/Diana theoretical system on the Internet, and Esquivias more often creates hers on her own personal theories of concurrence, both artists utilize a combination of montaged archival images and voiceover narration to highlight the intensive research and dedication given to histories that fall outside the confines of authoritative historicity.

A new film, *Folklore III* (2010), will be exhibited at Murray Guy with an older work called *Natures at the Hand* (2006), in a show that opens Saturday. With her new *Folklore*, Esquivias has again created a compelling set of parallels. In the work, the artist combines "ambient" video footage of the regions of Galicia, Spain and Nueva Galicia, Mexico with a voiceover narration that tells the story of both regions, focusing on the sixteenth century Spanish Queen Juana La Loca, the legendary "crazy queen" who named Nueva Galicia in honor of its Spanish namesake. According to Esquivias, the piece explores how "The destiny of a place can be imparted. By having its name given to it by a crazy queen, [Nueva Galicia's] future had already been influenced by history." Looking at once forward and backward, Esquivias finds, in the many abbreviations, discursions and heresies that define all acts of storytelling, the straight story.