

# SI

Swiss Institute /  
Contemporary Art

## ARTFORUM

Artforum Berlin  
Michele Faguet  
*Karen Lamassonne: Ruido / Noise*  
May 2023



Karen Lamassonne, *La venida de la ceiba* (The Coming of the Ceiba), 1989, acrylic on paper, 29 1/8 x 41 3/4". From the series "Homenaje a Cali" (Homage to Cali), 1989.

**Karen Lamassonne**

KW INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

38 St. Marks Pl  
New York, NY 10003

info@swissinstitute.net  
swissinstitute.net

Tel +1 212 925 2035  
Fax +1 212 925 2040

“A mundane diary of sorts,” according to the artist, Karen Lamassonne’s prolific output over many decades has documented her quotidian surroundings in the different places that have marked her nomadic life trajectory. In this second iteration of the traveling exhibition “Ruido / Noise”—which opened at the Swiss Institute in New York and will travel to Medellín, Colombia—images of intimate domestic spaces alternate with urban landscapes inhabited by fragmented, eroticized bodies that playfully illustrate second-wave feminism’s vindication of female sexual desire. Among the Colombian American artist’s early productions is the watercolor series “*Baños*” (Bathrooms), 1978–81, of anonymized self-portraits—a work censored when it was first exhibited in Colombia, maybe because of its desublimated view of the female body. Another watercolor, *Biblioteca, rue des Vinaigriers* (Library, rue des Vinaigriers), 1978, shows a towering naked woman perusing her book collection in a crowded Vuillardesque interior; while *Petit déjeuner* (Breakfast), 1978, is a photograph of the artist smoking a cigarette, her bare torso covered only by two melon rinds left over from that morning’s breakfast. A later series of paintings, “*Homenaje a Cali*” (Homage to Cali), 1989, pictures giant grayscale couples in amorous poses, set against campy colorful cityscapes—a reference to both the 1958 cult film *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* and the clandestine rendezvous the artist observed while living in that Colombian city.

Cali figures large in Lamassonne’s production. She lived there in the late 1970s and, together with her then-partner and lifelong friend, iconic Colombian filmmaker Luis Ospina, formed part of the Cali Group of filmmakers, writers, and artists seminal to the development of the unique film culture of the city, later dubbed “Caliwood.” Given her already cinematic approach to drawing, through the rendering of point-of-view angles, Lamassonne seamlessly moved into film production as an art director, film editor, and actor. Most notably, she elaborated the storyboard for Ospina’s 1982 *Pura sangre* (Pure Blood), a horror movie with lushly saturated images and a B-movie aesthetic, which allegorized the violence and class conflict endemic to Colombian society. Both the film and storyboard feature prominently in the exhibition, complemented by a public screening of *Kalt in Kolumbien* (Cold in Colombia), 1984, a meandering homoerotic German Colombian thriller set in the decrepit landscape of pregentrified Cartagena and featuring Marcel Odenbach, Gary Indiana, and Lamassonne herself. The pieces the artist produced concurrently to her film projects reflect their influence, especially the 1982 series “*Veinticuatro cuadros por segundo*” (Twenty-Four Frames per Second): sequences of drawn images appropriated from the male canon of contemporary Colombian painting. For instance, *a Botero* (To Botero) shows a balloon-like girl floating up to the ceiling, while *a Morales* (To Morales) wryly references the contorted positions of painter Darío Morales’s model, his wife, by having her awkwardly fall out of her static pose onto the ground. Resembling noir film stills, the photographic series “*Sueños húmedos*” (Wet Dreams), 1987, pictures legs and arms cropped and scribbled with crayon in scenes that eerily oscillate between eroticism and violence.

The most recent works in the show are collages from 2020, made with postcards Lamassonne had received over the years. *Chupasangre* (Bloodsucker), shows Richard Nixon adorned with fangs and a black cape on one card sent by a high school friend around the time of Watergate. In *Medusa*, whimsical serpentine forms spiral from a reproduction of a Rubens painting of the Gorgon, mailed from Vienna by Colombian curator Miguel González, one of Lamassonne's earliest supporters. The basis of *These Boots* is a card from Ospina in Paris, lamenting her absence as he edited *Agarrando pueblo* (The Vampires of Poverty), 1978—the film for which he is perhaps best known. That year was a notable moment in Lamassonne's career, too, as she was preparing a series of watercolors (two of them displayed at KW) for her first exhibition in Berlin. Her return to the city forty-five years later marks a renewed interest, both in Colombia and abroad, in an idiosyncratic practice that could be fiercely solitary but also collaborative, its interdisciplinarity and nuanced cultural references evading facile historical narratives.

— Michele Faguet