

# Writing Sample #1

## **Article Title: Cali Performance Art Festival**

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## **English Translation by Gabriel Duque**

The nineteen-nineties found Colombian artists in the midst of uneasiness caused by the armed conflict product of the drug trafficking of the eighties, insurgent groups and state terrorism. The lack of opportunities in the local art scene was just the least of the internal problems. In this scenario, the artist's body is constituted as a unique heritage of itself and a place of socio-political expression. Denunciation, protest, irony and the absolute conscience of the corporal matter, came to nourish the plastic arts in Colombia. Performance art as an immediate and economic expression gained strength within local contexts and opened a path within national art, creating and managing its own spaces of recognition in the absence of the same, within the country's artistic and cultural institutions. Thus, in 1997, the Helena Producciones Collective gave birth to the Performance Festival of Cali, which today is in its sixth edition. In these ten years, the festival has brought together some of the most important performance artists in the country, and a few international ones as well, serving as a space for debate and the meeting of theories and artists around Action Art in Colombia.

The applied study of six of these encounters allows the observation of characteristics, ways of doing, matters and recurrent materials in the Art of Action in Colombia, thus such forceful and ephemeral matters as feces, body fluids, dirt, fat, ashes or cocaine, and materials as threatening as sharp cutters and sharp blades can be identified. All of these materials, related to the Colombian conflict, allude without much metaphor to the vulnerability of the immersed bodies immersed, by transgressing the limits of pain, disgust, horror or ecstasy. So for example we have seen: // 1 Inhalation of cocaine as a defiant act, transgressing the limits of pleasure and ecstasy. These works evidence the pleasure caused by the transgression of the limits prior to death; that primary pleasure, comparable to that of orgasm, the product of getting close to death and returning unharmed from its territory. Physical pleasure and fear are shown face to face in the work of some artists, where the abject is recognized and feared and felt in the mucous membranes, producing stimulating sensations in the body. Leonardo Herrera's action, for example, consisted of writing using 40 grams of cocaine, the name of six performers who in the history of art have taken their bodies to the limit. In public, in an act without control he inhales the names of Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Matthew Barney, Allan Kaprow, Jodorowsky and Mongue.

// 2 Packaging the body in plastic bags and displaying it as meat. Since 1990 we have seen performances in Colombia where the body is packaged in plastic bags with different variations and reflections that directly allude to physical aggressions in which the body is a victim, but that begin to point out the carnality of the human body and of a country as a new philosophical paradigm. The condensation of body fluids is evident inside the packaging, causing vapors that also show the flesh of the artists, tired, battered, consumable, vulnerable, transgressing the philosophical limits of a body with a soul, and approaching the image of a body seen without it, without god, without name, without law. In 1998 María José Arjona presented at the II Performance Festival of Cali, *Alimento*, a performance where her naked body is packed in plastic, and served on a table, breathing through a plastic tube for an hour before the eyes of the spectators. She goes from feeding to offering herself as food, presenting herself to the, remaining immobile and vulnerable to the other.

// 3 Mutilation with political intentions, as an act transgressing the limits of pain. Pain and ecstasy are the opposite sides of the same coin, Eros and Thanatos, the twin brothers, face to face in the limit prior to the pleasure of death. The victory of returning alive, although incomplete or deteriorated, gives us a pleasure that often crosses the limits of pain without shame nor fear. The French artist Pierre Pinoncelli arrived in Colombia with the intention of mediating with the FARC, (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) the release of the former presidential candidate of Colombian-French nationality Ingrid Betancourt, that has her kidnapped until today. After not being able to achieve anything with the group, he decides to mutilate the little finger of his left hand. The artist appears in the courtyard of the La Tertulia Museum in Cali, dressed in different mortuary masks that are slowly removed, and with signs on his clothes that say Ingrid Betancourt, or peace in Colombia. He then releases a pigeon and enters the museum with an ax and he proceeds to sever the little finger on his left hand against a wooden trunk. With the blood from his recently mutilated finger, the artist writes the initials FARC on the wall of the museum. Then he tries to swallow his finger but vomits it, picking it up from the ground and depositing it in a jar while saying the following words: I came to free Ingrid and since I could not, I made this record of the massacres, mutilations and barbarism of this country. Then he falls to the floor, howling with pain and puts on a wolf mask and is removed from the room after fainting. In a later interview, the artist said: "For Ingrid I still have nine, without counting the toes" The two phalanges of his finger are part of the private collection of the La Tertulia Museum in Cali. // 4 Deposition or dirtying as abject acts, transgressing of the limits of disgust. Perhaps through the concept of abjection it is possible to reflect on many of the performances presented in the Cali Performance Art Festival. Abjection is a place where we can situate those strange feelings that seem to attack us from the outside, come towards us, and from the inside call to be expelled, to escape and meet the abyss. That limit where opposites attract and repel, where pleasure and fear are contained, what we permanently discard to be able to continue living (Julia Kristeva, *The powers of perversion*).

Our fear of ruin and our ruinous nature, our disgust with the matter we deposit, the dirt or grease and our permanent pleasurable contact with them; the natural betrayal, to the hygienic proposal

of modernity. In front of the public of the Festival, the artist Fernando Pertuz defecated on a plate and urinated in a glass, then sat down to eat his own fecal matter accompanied by bread and pass it slowly with swallows of his urine. In the words of the artist: ... "Indifference is a wake-up call from man to man, it is an alarm to a community that lost respect, pity, that we see people eating shit without doing anything and whose sensations became crystallized due to lack of hope "... Or the artist Rosenberg Sandoval, dressed in white, entering the room of the La Tertulia museum in Cali, carrying a homeless man on his shoulder from his place in the streets, and with the filth of the homeless man draws a line in the wall and scribble some strokes on a wooden platform that is on the floor. In the words of the artist: ... "Simply performance as a dirty draft of anonymous actions, made with an anonymous being in a private space. Or also the corporal action, supplanting a living burial, with an epitaph drawn to the dirt, a kind of uncivil discorporization "...