

Playing with Lyz Parayzo

1. *Playing*; a strategy or a plan of action;
2. *Playing against*; to compete against someone or something;
3. *Playing like*; pretending to be someone or a type of person;
4. *Playing along*; simulating cooperation;

The various senses of the term playing, as the act of participating in a game, provide an entry point into the work, research and political activism of multidisciplinary artist Lyz Parayzo. Since 2015, she has drawn on both her dissident body and Latin American art history to frame the art world's power dynamics and historical exclusion, which she navigates through play.

Born in a working-class community in Rio de Janeiro, Parayzo formally started her artistic practice while studying and working as an educator at Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage (School of Visual Arts of Parque Lage), an experience that provided a first-hand account of the engines of the art system. When she decided to enter the art world, she adopted the nom de guerre Lyz Parayzo, derived from the Portuguese word for paradise. With this new nom de guerre, she entered the art world as if ready for war.

Inspired by a book she read on the guerrilla tactics proposed by Brazilian artists to break through the censorship imposed by the military dictatorship of the 1970s, Parayzo began her practice with confrontational actions that interfered exhibitions and mobilized the public through shock. After a period of *playing against* the exclusionary policies of the art world by unofficially participating in a series of exhibitions through performance, disruptive actions, and distribution of flyers and fanzines, she realized that thriving in the art system would require learning how to *play along with it*.

Brazilian art history not only inspired Parayzo's early works but continued to be a site of tension. She was aiming to produce at the intersection between creating a practice of referentiality and finding ways to exceed it. By situating her sculptural production in dialogue with 1960s Concrete, Neo-Concrete, and Kinetic Art, tendencies considered the pillars of international Latin American art, she has ingeniously deployed a Trojan horse strategy to hack the system. On the one hand, her maneuvering provided the proper grammar for her presence to be accepted in renowned art schools, such as the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts of Paris. On the other hand, the presence of her work and selfhood in the Brazilian art world disrupted prevailing power imbalances, offering a testing ground for its artistic myths and totems.

Playing *with* and *against* the desire for participation that permeated Brazilian Neo-Concrete art, Parayzo sharpens Lygia Clark's canonical *Bichos* series, renaming them with a variation of the derogatory word *Bixinhas* (Little faggots). Maintaining the cutting and folding logic of the object, as well as its materiality, she adds a layer pertinent to contemporary issues faced by the LGBTQI+ community. By sharpening the objects, she recalls the metal razor blades that Brazilian *travestis* (translated as transvestite, but a term used and reclaimed by trans women), especially sex workers, often carry hidden in the mouth gums for self-defense. The transformation of the *bicho* (a synonym for animals) into a cutting *bixinha* denounces the intricacies of the lives of dissident subjectivities in Brazil, a country that ranks among the most violent against trans and queer people in the world.

Created in 2018 and now her most notorious series, *Bixinhas* rapidly unfolded into a series of warfare jewelry, shields and weaponry that function as performative extensions of the body. This sculptural turn made Parayzo move beyond the encoded image of her own body without refusing her corporeal experience. She escapes representation but brings into view the symbolic experiences of a body subjected to civil and state brutality and in demand of defense mechanisms – a body that is both a site of desire and fear.

Proposed as an ironic invitation, *Playing with Lyz Parayzo* highlights the libidinal and deceiving dimensions that her work constantly negotiates, whether through the mediums of performance, sculpture, jewelry or the audiovisual. In her first solo exhibition in New York City, we highlight her more recent series, such as the pointed mobiles that pay a mischievous homage to the 1960s Latin American collective GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel). The belligerent nature of the mobiles, which put the visitors in a constant state of alertness, is also present in the *Bixinhas* series and the latest *Joujous*, small cellular-like objects designed from her sex toys shown for the first time at this exhibition.

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