

Leyla Rodriguez, from *Separation Loop* (2015) to *Boom* (2018) :

Dépaysement/Repaysement

(Debasement/Replacement)

Difficult to translate both in English and French, the German word Heimat refers to the country of one's birth, one's homeland. Derived from Heim (home), the notion of Heimat expresses the feeling of belonging to a social environment, referring to: the place of birth, the parents' home, the terroir, the region, the community and, by extension, the homeland in the political sense.

Leyla Rodriguez grew up in Argentina before fleeing the country's military dictatorship and moving to Germany. The lost homeland, a family scattered around the world, and the feeling of living nowhere, are precisely the themes of her protean work. Since the early 2000s, Leyla Rodriguez has been exploring different media, through which her iconographic and photographic work as well as her installations and her objects, correspond with her film productions. Centred around those questions of identity and the individual's relationship with place, time, environment and culture, Leyla Rodriguez's work challenges and experiments with space and time, weaving an infinite loop. The various short films are like so many singular and different gateways to a body of work that is as heterogeneous as it is circular, sometimes accompanied by work in another medium like a thread interwoven with the weaving of the film.

In this respect, the *Interior Landscapes* photographic series acts as an underlying framework for the film *Interior Season*. She takes us through the intimate landscape of the bedroom, in these photos of unmade beds with impersonal white sheets, marked nonetheless by the fixed trace of the presence of a body, an individual, who has momentarily inhabited it. In the same way, the installations of photographic series *Homeless* “textiltaggX - Exiled Textiles” serve as an introduction to the landscape of the short film of the same name. It assembles the ‘scraps’ of photos, in a very cut editing of different takes of each photo, as if to keep a memory of the capture of each display to give it a second life. Beginning in 2006 and now numbering around 240 pieces, these installations are fabrics posted on city walls, as if once again to mark an

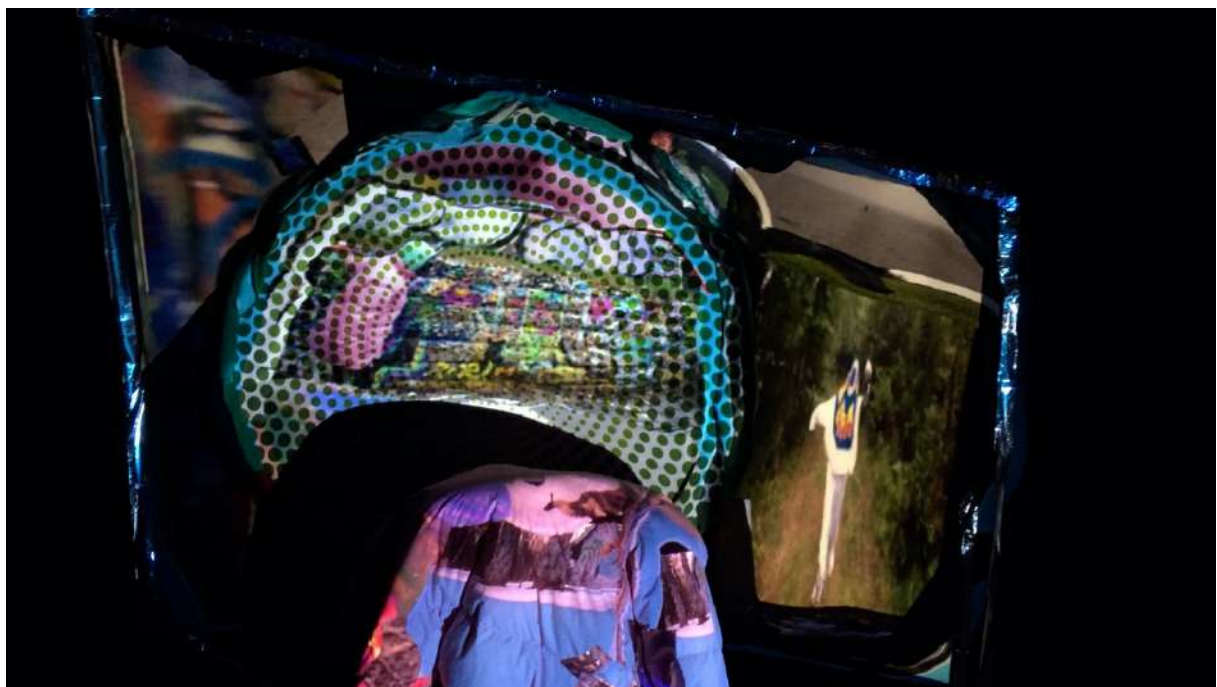
impersonal, uniform landscape with a singular presence. Superimposing memories of the country one has left, paying homage to the tradition of putting posters on walls to commemorate the dead under the dictatorship in Argentina, and transposing them onto a country one tries to tame. Dressing neutral walls as a means of inhabiting a country that is not one's own.

What Leyla Rodriguez succeeds in introducing through her art is a reflection on 'home', how place is likely to define an identity and, conversely, how the individual can inhabit one or more places with his or her presence. Through a editing that is often rapid, even over-edited, a mixture of acoustic Argentine folk music and modern electronic music, close-ups and wider shots that bring us face to face with the immensity of the world, a fusion between spaces and the different individuals, humans and non-human animals that inhabit them, the artist thinks of the relationship to space and the world as shifting, elastic. As a 'guide' to a reconstructed world invested with new codes, the character 'Leylox' - the director's avatar - is a singular, speechless and silent being, always masked, like the self-portraits in the photographic series *I don't see myself like this* (2011). A face covered in layers of fabric, a crochet bonnet or a donkey mask. A hybrid being: human, animal, textile. It was with *Separation Loop* in 2015 that the collusion of spaces and temporalities took place. A flood of images of Argentina: its mountains, its sea, its flora and fauna. Alongside this temporary blurring of the country's boundaries, the increasingly rapid editing mixes the lamas of the high mountains with the horses of the plains, and among the rolls of fabric emerges the birth of this textile-being. This was the first version of the director's avatar, which would populate the short films that follow. *Separation loop* is the first step in this imagery of a memorial reconstruction of a sense of home: the first flag waved over this new country virtually (re)constructed through editing, the first Argentinian folk fabric displayed on a wall completing the short film in its final shot.



The Separation Loop (2015)

The subsequent works of this series on identity and the notion of *heimat* will take up this poetic of rapid editing, of the wandering of Leylox evolving in a world whose limits have been erased: wide shots and close-ups complement each other to capture the individual in their environment, great depth of field, interior and exterior, encounters between different beings. *Optimistic Cover* (2016) opens with the director's dog racing across a misty beach framed in wide shot. An immense space, the symbol of a natural limit that after all is not considered a limit, since the beach remains a space where the animal body is free to run, sometimes fast, sometimes slowed down, breaking the linearity of the sensation of time. Like the tandem *Interior Landscapes/Interior Season*, what appears to be filmed indoors is not a delimited space either, but rather an opportunity for the artist to use object composition, collage and projection to make her subjectivity felt in the space depicted.



Optimistic Cover (2017)

In the course of her short films, Leylox forms her own terrestrial globe: a land where the distance between Frankfurt and Buenos Aires cannot be calculated in terms of time or space, but where these two destinations can be found in the same indefinite, atemporal space. *Boom* (2018) seems to complete this cycle of repatriation both through the intervention of the filmmaker's voice-over evoking a childhood memory at her Argentinian grandmother's house, and through the filmmaker unmasking herself during a surgical operation on her own face. The face is still half-masked by the after-effects of the operation, but the demonstration of a physical transformation as a metaphor to reveal an emotional and psychological transformation as much as an original wound. The heart of Leyla Rodriguez's cinematographic work lies in the ability to think anew about the open and complex notion of *heimat*, so opaque and elastic that it is still today monopolised by extreme right-wing parties with the idea that a *heimat*, a homeland, must be protected from what would be perceived as 'foreign' to it. The artist gives a clear definition here: 'The country that each of us carries within us', abolishing physical borders (and almost biological ones by transforming herself into a chimerical being) in favour of emotion, weaving links between Argentina and Germany, seas and mountains, humans and non-human animals. These are virtual and memorial links rendered physical by sound and visual montage, which interweaves temporalities and contributes to this fusion/break between nature and culture. Added to the montage is the variation and alternation of the scales of the shots, reinforcing the immensity of the world in relation to the individual, and binding beings together. The interplay of echoes between the different films and artistic pieces constitutes a map of the artist's *heimat*.

Leyla Rodriguez started out with an absence of the sense of home. She left behind an Argentina where *heimat* was synonymous with the repression of 'foreign elements' in the face of dogmas imposed by the dictatorship. It is through the interconnections between her different artistic productions that she managed to create her own country. A memorial and virtual country made up of the places impressed on her, that she succeeded in inhabiting and transforming into a 'home'. Through her work, Leyla Rodriguez accomplished in conveying the emotional charge of the notion of *heimat* and the way in which it can give way to hope. In his work on utopia, the German philosopher Ernst Bloch suggests that it is by representing the world as an extensible

and welcoming material, whose plasticity reveals the diversity of the imprints of our individual existences, that we may achieve this.



Hermetica (2018)