

Aníbal López (A-1 53167)

(Guatemala, 1964)

Aníbal López (A-1 53167) has always questioned the more or less hidden rules and practices of regimentation of political and economic authorities. This is why he began his activity as an artist, having himself be known, not by his real name, but by his passport number, an alphanumeric code for government categorization that reduces the uncontrollable individuality of the person to an orderly and classifiable sequence.

He has carried out numerous public actions in Guatemala and in the commercial spaces of art galleries, emphasizing the pervasive action of control and authoritarian tendencies. For example, on the occasion of his exhibition at the Play Gallery in Berlin, in 2004, armed guards prevented the public from interacting in any way with things or other people, under the peremptory invitation of a sign that read: "Do it right!"

Un Chol fotografiando a un Lacandon (A Chol Photographing a Lacandon) is a video from 2006 where the theme of classification and the emptying out of individual identity achieved by organisms of power reveals its ethnographic side, in full consonance with the ideas of Foucault, the first philosopher to analyze how culture is an active part of the codes of power.

In the video López shoots the typical day of a man who is one of the last inhabitants of the Lacandon tribe, a population of Mayan origin that is one of the most closed to the outside world, living in the jungle close to the northern border of Guatemala. Aníbal López, the Chol of the work's title who reveals another tribe of Mayan origin, photographs the Lacandon at the area's ethnographic museum, where voluntarily, with carefully arrayed original garments from his tradition, his subject poses amid the display cases of finds, as a living example of an ancient and almost lost "race." López thus finds himself confronting one of the most odious codes of scientific classification, the source of some of the most disturbing chapters of the twentieth century. And even more, if one considers that the populations in question were wiped off the earth by European colonization, following the discovery of America. It is no accident that López often does not use the Western calendar, but counts the years beginning from 1492, considering that to be ground zero, the annihilation from which he has been forced to begin again.

As in the case of the armed guards, the voluntary anthropological specimen acts not through contrast, but through the hyperbolic treatment of cultural and government codes. López shows us the ultimate imaginable consequence of scientific or pseudo-scientific classification of human species: the object of study who is transformed into a subject of conscious economic exploitation from a colonial perspective. The Lacandon makes a living impersonating himself and selling the value of his rarity. (EV)