

## Representations (and dissemination) of sexuality. Lea Lublin amid local censorship and international circulation

*Representaciones (y diseminaciones) de la sexualidad. Lea Lublin entre la  
censura local y la circulación internacional*

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# Representations (and dissemination) of sexuality. Lea Lublin amid local censorship and international circulation

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

A first version of this text was presented as "Representaciones (y represiones) de la sexualidad. Lea Lublin entre la censura local y la circulación internacional " at the *VIII Congreso Internacional de Teoría e Historia de las Artes. Imagen/Deseo. Placer, devoción y consumo en las artes*, Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte, Buenos Aires, 2015. The access to Lea Lublin archives later on that year, thanks to her son Nicolas Lublin, allowed me to get not only the unknown photography of *Blanco sobre blanco* and of its display at the industrial fair in 1970, but also the documents concerning the trial, and therefore improve and refine my analysis.

- <sup>1</sup> In September of 1970, Lea Lublin partook with her work *Blanco sobre blanco* (1969) in the Pan-American Engineering Exhibition that was held at the Argentine Rural Society in Buenos Aires (fig. 1). Her work was part of the exhibition displayed at the stand of the Argentine company Acrílicos Paolini, and visitors could see (although for not very long) the following image: a naked man and woman on a bed. The press reported it more or less in this way when it echoed the news about the political censorship of the piece.



**IMAGEN 1 – STAND OF ACRÍLICOS PAOLINI AT THE EXPOSICIÓN PANAMERICANA DE INGENIERÍA, BUENOS AIRES, SEPTEMBER DE 1970. IMAGE COURTESY OF NICOLÁS LUBLIN ON BEHALF OF THE ESTATE OF LEA LUBLIN.**

- 2 Lea Lublin had resided for the most part in Paris from 1964 on. By 1965 she had given up painting, and began orienting her work toward disassembling visual representation. She focused on widely circulated preexisting images, which she intervened through painting and different participatory exhibition devices and, at least until 1972, she coordinated a majority of these projects between Paris and a few South American capital cities. Such is the case with the series *Ver claro* (Seeing clearly, 1965-1966), with which she inaugurated this new stage of her artistic production. (fig. 2 and 3) In the first piece of this series exhibited in Paris, a poster of *La Gioconda* by Leonardo Da Vinci was presented behind a glass. The spectator could splash water on the “window” using a nasal aspirator and then turn on a wiper blade to clean it. When making another piece to exhibit in Buenos Aires the artist used reproductions of portraits of General San Martín painted in the nineteenth century. In this sense, Lublin conceived both, her iconographic selections for the *Ver Claro* series and her proposals of institutional critique, and as site-specific projects. Her work was particularly sensitive to the institutional panorama and the public profile of the space where this project was carried out.



Imagen 2 – Lea Lublin, *Ver claro* series, 1965. Reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, painting on glass, rubber bulb with water and motorized windshield wiper. Image courtesy of Nicolás Lublin on behalf of the estate of Lea Lublin.



Imagen 3 – Lea Lublin, *Recuerdo histórico bajo limpiaparabrisas*, 1965, from the *Ver Claro* series. Reproductions of two portraits of General José de San Martín, painting on glass, rubber bulb with water and motorized windshield wiper. Image courtesy of Nicolás Lublin on behalf of the estate of Lea Lublin.

- 3 Interwoven between Europe and South America, the artistic career of Lublin allows for a revision of the boundaries of different but interconnected cultural scenes. Her trajectory also spotlights the imbalance between, on one hand, a visual culture shared between cities separated by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the other the asymmetries of these distant institutional and cultural contexts. We have defended in previous studies the trans-local<sup>1</sup> character of her artistic investigation of the visual representation and the cultural institutions during the sixties. We argued that with projects like *Cultura: dentro y fuera del museo* (1971), Lublin developed her own way to the questioning of cultural institutions, introducing into her work what could be called the geopolitical density of institutional critique. These previous analysis brought then into focus a utopic horizon tied to the figure of the “Third World”; a political horizon that was culturally productive during those years of Latin America’s particular international visibility.<sup>2</sup>
- 4 This article focuses on two works that also present this trans-Atlantic route, but do not fit in that picture, since they portray sexuality and the restrictions for the public exhibition of the representations of eroticism: *Blanco sobre blanco* (1969) and *Lecture d’une œuvre de Lea Lublin par un inspecteur de police* (1972).<sup>3</sup> The first was made and exhibited in Buenos Aires and the second, in turn, was produced and presented in Paris. We argue that the censorship of *Blanco sobre blanco* confirmed the relevance of the artist’s interest in investigating the nature of representation as a visual device and the exploring the links of image with institutions, the imaginary and the libidinal. The esthetic density of Lublin’s geographical trajectory allowed her to use strategically the political and institutional asymmetries between both metropolises; in doing so, Paris proved to be a city where critically addressing the effects of the control of the Argentine dictatorship under General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) on sexuality and its representations.

## ***Blanco sobre blanco* and the “process to image”**

- 5 In 1967 Lublin began a new phase in her work. She oriented it toward the “dissolution with the system of representation”,<sup>4</sup> which she put into practice through the tridimensional deployment of the figurative traces of painting. In works like *Ottocritique* (1967) and *Blanco sobre blanco* (1969), the pictorial surface unfolded in two acrylic boards superimposed with a certain distance between them. The artist used the same resource as Jesús Rafael Soto had explored in the 1950s for the optic production he started in Paris. When the spectator moves while fixating his sight on the work, the superposition of the drawings varies and he or she has the illusion that the image is moving. But unlike kinetic art, Lublin applied this optic device to recognizable figures to distort less visual perception as a neurological and cognitive process, than representation as a semiological and cultural phenomenon.
- 6 *Ottocritique* was the title of the portrait of Otto Hahn produced by Lublin at the beginning of 1967. Hahn was an active art critic in Paris that was Lea’s friend and the father of her son Nicolás Lublin, born at the end of 1967.<sup>5</sup> In English, *Ottocritique* could be translated as “Otto-critic”, but the phonetic pronunciation of “Ottocritique” in French sounds the same as “auto-critique”. The phonetic play-on-words suggests that the painted image was presented, at the same time, like a portrait and an auto-critique. The opacity of the painting was lost and it became a transparent box: the strokes that delineated the face were divided between the outer and inner panes in such a way that the painting was

comprehensible only when straightforwardly seen, becoming illegible from any other angle. In addition, the face represented in profile view, projected shadows onto the background (something done usually by bodies and not flat images); so that the painting turned into a tridimensional entity that involved the body of the spectator, who in contrast with kinetic art, must stay still in front of the work so that it functions as a representation. The privileged central point of view of the Renaissance perspective construction appears placed in evidence by means of a pictorial device that had the effect of giving life to the painting, giving it movement according to the angle from which it was seen.<sup>6</sup>

- 7 *Ottocritique* was shown this same year, 1967, in the exhibition *Le Portrait* in the Parisian gallery Claude Bernard.<sup>7</sup> As it was still a portrait, this gave a glimpse of the personal relation of the critic with the artist; and if the portrait did not denounce that Hahn hadn't recognized his paternity, at least it could generate suspicion about the identity of Nicolas Lublin's father. Months later, Nicolas would become part of – together with his portraits painted on double acrylic boards – *Mon fils* (My Son), the work that she presented at the Parisian May Salon in 1968.
- 8 At some point of 1969, Lublin settled in Buenos Aires and in 1970 she started the “Proceso a la imagen” (Processing the Image) which she defined as an “active deciphering of the elements that construct the system of representation”.<sup>8</sup> One of the devices developed by the artist to put off-center this learned way of looking was the projection of key paintings in the history of art on curtains made of transparent plastic strips that the visitor had to pass through. As Teresa Riccardi claims, to show these canonical images within a context that requires new reading practices from the public doesn't mean investigating in its historic or genealogical sense, but highlighting how they naturalize or reveal – as images – their intrinsic characteristics and the narratives from which they were built upon.<sup>9</sup> “Proceso a la imagen” refers to Lublin's investigation on the nature of the images; but it also alludes to the concrete judicial process to which the artist was subjected to in Argentina: the beginning of this stage was parallel to the obscenity trial that was brought against her for her *Blanco sobre blanco* in 1970 (fig. 4).





Imagen 4 – Lea Lublin, *Blanco sobre blanco* (1969), gliserofthalic painting on acrylic panes, sheet, 160 x 120 cm. Image courtesy of Nicolás Lublin on behalf of the estate of Lea Lublin.

- 9 Although this work was partially destroyed,<sup>10</sup> the artist's archive preserves photographs of the painting and the stand of Acrílicos Paolini where it was exhibited for its first and only showing. The figures were outlined (twice) with glycerophthalic paint over two superimposed transparent acrylic panes of 160 x 120 cm. The feminine figure could be seen on her back with a masculine figure on top of her and between her open legs. The "bed" was, in fact, a real wrinkled white sheet, tightened and protruding between the acrylic panes. Once again, Lublin used acrylic panes with certain distance between them. Employing optical patterns of interference combined with figuration, the artist experimented with visual possibilities of nudity and eroticism. At the same time, in a reference to Malevich that was both literal and ironic, *Blanco sobre blanco* suggested various equally literal meanings: two acrylic panes painted with white, which represented two "white" people, one over the other and at the same time over a white sheet.
- 10 *Blanco sobre blanco* wasn't an isolated esthetic gesture. Between desire and prohibition, the imagination of sensuality and the nude figure became part of the repertoire of sexual modernization in Argentina. Various young artists who sought to articulate a renewed visual language addressed these themes. Thus, a series of works can be considered representative of the sexual freedom to which a segment of society aspired: the mattresses painted in vibrant colors that Marta Minujin sewed in an installation like *¡Revuélquese y viva!* (Roll around and live!, 1964), the sculpture *Biocosmos n. 3* (1964) by Emilio Renart which resembled a giant vulva emerging from the wall (fig. 5), *La esfera del tiempo* (The Time Sphere, 1965) by Dalila Puzzovio, with its reference to corsets and erotic lingerie (fig. 6), the experimental films of nude figures made by Oscar Bony between 1965 and 1966, or the recording of the rapid breathing of a couple having sex that played a part in *Comunicación* (Communication, 1968) by Margarita Paksa.<sup>11</sup>

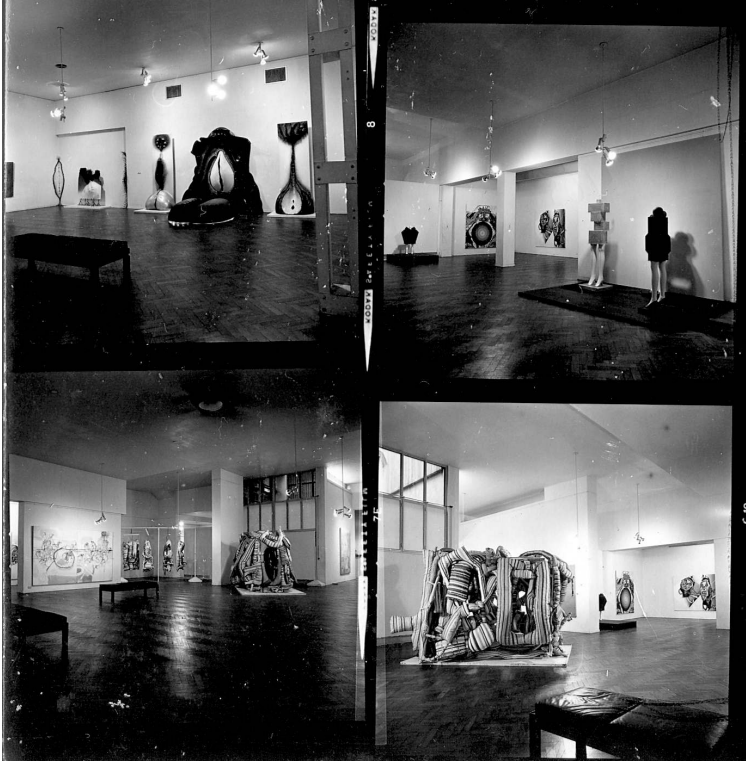


Imagen 5 – Marta Minujín, *Revuélquese y viva* (1964) y Emilio Renart, *Integralismo. Bio-Cosmos N° 3* (sector B) (1964) en el Salón Nacional del Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1964. Di Tella Archive, Torcuato Di Tella University, Argentina.

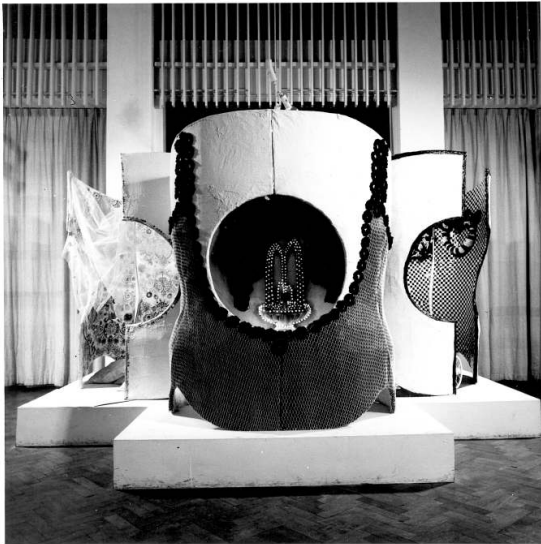


Imagen 6 – Dalila Puzzovio, *La esfera del tiempo* (1965). Installation at the Premio Nacional Di Tella 1965. Di Tella Archive, Torcuato Di Tella University, Argentina.



- 11 In this way, Buenos Aires was not an exception with respects to the emergence of “a culture of young people” that could be seen throughout the 1960s in diverse and remote metropolises. A “collective sensitivity affected by the concept of a generation gap”<sup>12</sup> that gravitated around ways of dressing, loving and consuming culture. However, in Argentina this youth culture was affected by a particular political situation: after the coup d'état in June of 1966, General Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship extended censorship over the media and cultural productions in the name of a “Western and Christian morality”. This censorship reached unprecedented levels for that time and it affected the press, cinema, theatre, rock and even classical music. Furthermore, this de facto, conservative government elevated its surveillance of the appearance and behavior of the youth: the length of (mini) skirts and men's hair, nightlife in bars and dance clubs, intimacy in public spaces or hotel rooms rented by the hour.<sup>13</sup>
- 12 In this context, it is productive to address the paradigmatic case of censorship in visual arts during the Onganía administration: the piece by Roberto Plate reconstructing a public bathroom; the authorities considered that it encouraged indecency due to “obscene markings” made anonymously on it. Plate's installation was part of *Experiencias Visuales 1968*, the exhibition organized by the Center of Visual Arts from the Torcuato Di Tella Institute that ended with all the works being taken down to the street and burned by the artists themselves.<sup>14</sup>
- 13 The aforementioned *Comunicación* by Margarita Paksa was shown in this same exhibition at Di Tella Institute, but doesn't seem to have stood out in the same way. Although the sexual reference appeared duplicated – the audio recording of the couple and the forms of their bodies printed in the sand –, *Comunicación* didn't reveal any part of the couple's bodies or their sexual activity. That privileged moment had happened in another place at another time, and the spectator only experienced its index or traces. Conversely, listening to the couple's moans with headphones was in some way intimate. In this sense, as we will see, *Blanco sobre blanco* with its image of two lovers enlivened by a kinetic device was too explicit in the new context of censorship.
- 14 We have not found a precise iconic source for the couple in *Blanco sobre blanco*, but it is likely that just as in the series *Ver Claro*, the focus was less on creating new artistic images and more on reconsidering existing images, particularly those stemming from the massively circulated visual culture. The drawing recalls to the poor quality of the sketches from popular romance comics of the time, such as *Intervalo*, *Fantasia* or *El Tony*, in which a series of traditional resources from realistic representation were filtered through a sort of photographic visuality and a graphic synthesis that reduced the gradation of color and the level of detail.<sup>15</sup> Like many comic strips, *Blanco sobre blanco* represented movement via the repetition of the moveable parts of the character: the hand and foot of the female figure are repeated.
- 15 Even if the erotic theme is ostensible, the image does not reveal either the genitals or the act of coitus, but it was suggested by the position of the drawn bodies (and given to the imagination of those that viewed it). Also, it doesn't show the motives, poses or style stereotypes corresponding to the massively reproduced erotic prints or photography addressed to a massive male audience: we can't see any intimal part of the feminine figure, who is not making eye contact with the spectator.<sup>16</sup>
- 16 *Blanco sobre Blanco* was way far from the pulpy Isabel Sarli in *Carne* (Meat, 1968), just to mention the most popular of Armando Bo's films having this erotic star as leading figure.

<sup>17</sup> But Lublin went unrelentingly beyond the romantic sketches in the comic strips from magazines addressed to a feminine audience like *Intervalo*. It also transcended the photography and illustrations that were replete with feminine sensuality in *Adán*, one of the few erotic magazines intended for middle class men (and censored in 1968) (fig. 7); even if, according to what studies on these publications have presented, both in the case of *Adán* and *Intervalo*, the images were more suggestive than the script or the adjoined written content.<sup>18</sup>

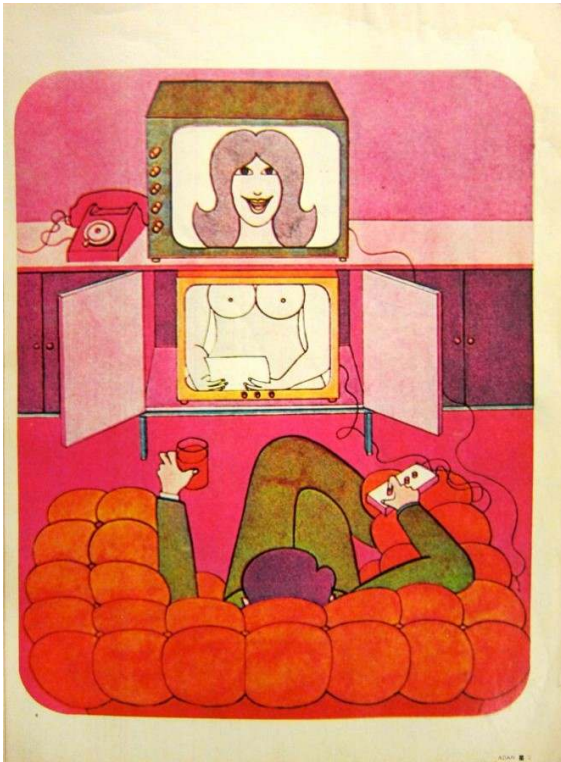


Imagen 7 – *Adán* n. 3, Buenos Aires, September 1966.

- <sup>17</sup> According to what the press reported on September 21, 1971,<sup>19</sup> before the denunciations by the attendees of the *Exposición Panamericana de Ingeniería* were made, a police officer was sent to the exhibition to cover up *Blanco sobre blanco* and take it away. Due to this police censorship and the seizure of the work, an obscenity charge was brought up and the resulting sentence of three months jail time was attained in 1972. The forcefulness of the response to this work seemed to have been due to a series of reasons. Regarding the depicted issue, certainly. But perhaps what should be considered, just as Lea Lublin declared to the press, is the kinetic character of the work and the consequent intolerance of individuals with “good morals” who found themselves moving and shifting in order to see a couple in an imagined sexual act; an almost voyeuristic activity that was considered indecent. We should add to this active willingness required from the spectators, the high public visibility of the work, given that *Blanco sobre blanco* was not shown in an exhibition space visited by a more or less restricted public, but a massive fair.
- <sup>18</sup> As Michel Foucault would define it, a device is a sort of mechanism that makes one see or speak; something (architectural installations, speeches, laws, administrative measures, etc.) that presents a materiality or a concrete function and is not limited to being an object, but establishes or upholds a regime of visibility and/or enunciation that, in turn, modulates a power struggle.<sup>20</sup> As visual devices, images make us do things: they always

interpolate us in the present and quite often in a visceral way. This was how both Lublin and those who carried out police censorship understood them. Such a powerful reaction to publicly exhibiting this piece on an erotic theme testified to the potency of both visual representation and the kinetic devices in general, and also certain genres such as the erotic image or national emblems.<sup>21</sup> It is precisely for this reason that, in addition to building her legal defense, the artist used this distressing episode as material to continue with her reflection on the status of images.

## Reading in French the process to image

- 19 In November of 1970, two months after the censoring of *Blanco sobre blanco*, Lublin presented at the Carmen Waugh gallery the exhibition *Proceso a la imagen: elementos para una reflexión activa*, a selection of her own more recent artistic projects. Lublin explained, with the clarity of a conceptual diagram and a language that recalled the semiotics of Pierce, that the “processing to/of the image” was carried out through its display within the gallery space. They were, in fact, “image indexes”, given that the bidimensional representation appeared “off-center, disassembled, overlapping, projected” through the use of the aforementioned devices: paint onto overlapping acrylic panes or projections onto curtains made of transparent plastic strips that the visitor had to pass through. Additionally, the artist included an ironic allusion to the censorship she had undergone: over a white background she mounted a two sets of acrylic panes that tightened white sheets (fig. 8). On its surface without drawings she had placed a “censored” sign. “It is a nude of a nude”,<sup>22</sup> the artist clarified to the press using one of her productive plays on words.



Imagen 8 – Lea Lublin, *Proceso a la imagen: elementos para una reflexión activa* (1970). Carmen Waugh gallery, Buenos Aires. Fundación Espigas Archive.

- 20 The exhibition in Carmen Waugh consisted of a retrospective tour of Lublin's work that, in line with Guy Debord, revolved around the idea that the flat image denies the dynamic of life.<sup>23</sup> The censorship experience reinforced her concerns about representation: "It is a passivity of language which results from a philosophical ideal that has been overcome by the problems of the present reality, in full revolutionary process", she declared to the press in 1970.<sup>24</sup> From her perspective, the image and the contemplative behavior that it generated belonged to a past rooted in the Renaissance tradition and were maladjusted for dynamic contemporary societies. Thus, in her interpretation, it was the kinetic character of *Blanco sobre blanco*, the illusion of the swaying and rocking that stimulated the erotic image, what had been unacceptable to the authorities.<sup>25</sup>
- 21 Lublin didn't explain to the Argentine press what revolutionary processes she was referring to, but in private she alluded to the quandary created by the pressing local political situation. In a letter from September 11, 1970 written to the French critic Pierre Restany, a regular visitor to Buenos Aires since the mid-sixties that wrote about the South American artistic scenes,<sup>26</sup> the artist warned him:
- You should be aware of the violence and the outbreak of urban warfare in which we live [...] In this situation and despite everything, or you enter in direct action of urban guerilla, or continue questioning the cultural system by means of an investigation that goes to the very bottom of these structures. This is what I'm trying to do [...] My proposal is to search for a new connection between life-language-art that, at the same time, measures and demystifies the traditional cultural structures. Pointing out the breakup but also making the spectator enter in the heart itself of the structure of language so that the active reflection is in the end an opening towards a new way of living and thinking.<sup>27</sup>
- 22 In Argentina, the popular outbreak of 1969, known as the Cordobazo, gave rise to a process of political radicalization marked by the growth of the leftist groups and the armed revolutionary groups, along with the emergence of a "classist" unionism. The most generalized commitment of the middle-class youth, professional and university groups with protest movements and social change policies, and the radicalization of the left were joined by a tightening of the ideology of the "ant subversive fight" in the heart of the Armed Forces starting in the mid-sixties. The escalation had arrived at its climax with the kidnapping and murder, organized by the Montoneros in May of 1970, of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, the leader of the coup that had overthrown Peron fifteen years earlier, in 1955. From there, a severe penal legislation was introduced that included the death penalty by firing squad.<sup>28</sup> But after the fall of Onganía at the beginning of June 1970, the actions of guerilla groups increased, as well as repression.
- 23 Even if Lublin didn't intend to join the urban guerilla groups, it's safe to say that she sympathized with revolutionary process in Cuba and probably even more with the recent access to socialism by means of democracy in Chile, where Salvador Allende had won the presidency for the leftist Popular Union party in the elections of 1970.<sup>29</sup> The artist took part in the "third-world" enthusiasm from a large part of the South American and European intellectuals. But in all probability, when she spoke about "revolutionary processes" Lublin also was referring to other ways in which society was changing that can be related to *Blanco sobre blanco*: she herself was a 44-year-old South American woman that had not only been divorced and created a single-parent family, but just as we have seen, had used these issues as themes in her artistic work. She depicted her lover and the father of her son in *Ottocritique*, exhibited her infant son in the Parisian Salon de mai in 1968 with *Mon fils*, and showed an erotic themed work in a massive industrial exhibition

during moments when the Argentine dictatorship was strengthening its control. Thus, the case for *Blanco sobre blanco* seems to be found in the heart of the tensions between the questioning of the “good manners” and the moralist repression that was labeled as the “discreet sexual revolution” of the long 1960s in Argentina.<sup>30</sup>

- 24 In 1972, the year in which the Argentine justice system sentenced her to three months in prison for obscenity, the artist presented at the *Salon Comparaisons* in Paris a piece entitled *Lecture d'une œuvre de Lea Lublin par un inspecteur de police*. It was an ensemble of photos, official documents and press clippings that referred to the Argentine censorship of *Blanco sobre blanco*, arranged on a panel. (fig. 9)



Imagen 9 – Lea Lublin, *Lecture d'une œuvre de Lea Lublin par un inspecteur de police*, 1972. Collage of photographs and photocopies. Image courtesy of Nicolás Lublin on behalf of the estate of Lea Lublin.

- 25 To the left, a paper with a letterhead of the Interior Ministry transcribed the declaration made the same day as the confiscation of the work, the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1970, by Miguel Ángel Bonifacio, an official inspector of the federal police. (fig. 10, 11, 12 and 13) A photograph of the censored work was placed below and in the middle and was surrounded by various other photos that showed the police official covering the work with newspapers. One of these photos stood out among the others due to its central position and larger size. This same image of the police officer and other very similar ones were repeated with a smaller size in the press clippings. There was then a multiplicity of photos of the work and of the police officer copied on photo sensitive paper, juxtaposed to their photomechanical reproductions in the press (with a black band covering the “corpus delicti”), and the official typewritten document with a verbal description of *Blanco sobre blanco*. Like a display case or a dissecting table, various visual and written representations of the 1969 erotic themed piece were arranged in an orderly way but without any explanation. These representations showed to the eyes of French spectators the censored work; at the same time, they documented the very concrete effects of the reception of this erotic image in Argentina, and its paradoxical proliferation in the form of press and courtroom descriptions.



DECLARACION  
HECHA EN SU PRESENCIA  
POLICIA FEDERAL

Sub-Comisario EDUARDO HUGO BERGHO  
Jefe Comisaría 2da.

Declaración de Miguel Ángel Bonifacio

Doc. Ident. (1) \_\_\_\_\_

En Blanca Nara, hija del Pateram de la Nación el día 20 del mes de Septiembre del año 1970, siendo las 20:45 horas compareció una persona que, impuesta de las penas por falsedad y previo juramento que prestó en forma legal de decir verdad en cuanto supiere y le fuere preguntado, expresó llamarse Miguel Ángel Bonifacio hijo de Horacio Armando y de Miriam Cavallieri de nacionalidad Argentina de 29 años de edad con \_\_\_\_\_ de residencia en el país, de estado civil casado de ocupación Oficial Inspector de la Policía Federal y domiciliarse en Santa Fe n° 4000 teléfono 71-7021 jurisdicción policial Crim. 23a.

Preguntado si conoce a \_\_\_\_\_ las personas que figuran en las presentadas declaraciones y si con respecto a las mismas le acompañarán las garantías de la ley, que previamente se le recordaron, dijo conocerlas según dice y no estar afectado por el acto. Preguntado sobre que conocimiento tiene en el hecho que se investiga declaró que en el día de la fecha en circunstancias que se desempeña como Jefe del Servicio Interno, procedió a instalar el servicio instalado en el interior de la estación del Argentino, sito en la intersección de las calles San Martín y Camacho, lugar en que se efectúa la expedición de tarjetas de identificación, perteneciente a sección de identificación.

(1) Top, número y autoridad otorgante.

Imagen 10 – Statement by Miguel Ángel Bonifacio, federal police inspector, 9/20/1970. File of the case for violation of article 128 of the penal code (obscenity). Image courtesy of Nicolás Lublin on behalf of the estate of Lea Lublin.



Imagen 11 – Photographs of *Blanco sobre blanco* censorship. Image courtesy of Nicolás Lublin on behalf of the estate of Lea Lublin.



of genitals, but due to the muscular features of the man, it's obvious to imagine the act. Said painting, according to the position of the stand, can be seen from any angle in the pavilion, which is dangerous to the numerous children that come to see the exhibition, not being understood as art by either experts or at plain sight.<sup>31</sup>

- 27 The description, which had been translated to French and incorporated to the right of the original headed notepaper, put into words what the image of *Blanco sobre blanco* had effectively shown and what in fact belonged in the imagination of the spectator. Also, the police officer made a conclusive judgment regarding the piece's lack of esthetic value and its injurious effect on the spectators. In this sense, even if the Argentine trial had the intention of keeping the erotic image out of public sight, it paradoxically multiplied the discourses on *Blanco sobre blanco* and therefore on sexuality, inside and outside the courtroom.
- 28 In his *History of sexuality* (1976), Michel Foucault discussed the idea of the bourgeois society as a one characterized by its repressed sexuality, which was actually a common place for many of the young rebels during the 1960's, including probably Lea Lublin herself. Foucault demonstrated that, by means of different forms of confession, sexuality had actually proliferated as religious, medical, psychoanalytic, even legal discourses. Understanding sexuality as a dispositive led him to consider it less as a subterranean urge than as a social construct, a network that joins together physical sensations and pleasure, the incitement to discourse, the formation of specialized knowledge, and political controls and resistance<sup>32</sup>
- 29 After the problematic Argentine reception of *Blanco sobre blanco*, a piece that Lublin codified as an erotic visual dispositive, she probably found out (several years before Foucault's book was published) that these materials concerning the accusation showed more than just an act of censorship: they were evidence of the non-wanted effect of spreading the erotic image and its descriptions all over the press. May be that is why she decided to use the photos, press clipping, and even the justice files in another piece. One that would link the act of reading by the police officer with his speech act, the incitation to discourse that an erotic image brings together with a carnal incitation. Moreover, how those discourses about sexuality could inform not only knowledge about pleasure but also about control, as Foucault would put it.
- 30 Fortunately, the artist didn't have to serve the sentence that was given to her in 1972, the same year in which she created *Lecture* and moved back to Paris. Her lawyer, Américo Castilla, appealed the verdict and Lublin was dismissed.<sup>33</sup> The argument presented before the justice claimed that the bible itself and the history of art were packed with images and stories that were highly erotic. The court files conserve the testimonies provided by Guillermo Whitelow, director of the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires, and Jorge Glusberg, head of the Center of Art and Communication (CAyC). They testified about the artistic trajectory and the lack of pornographic intention of the accused in a work that limited the image sensuality by using plastic material, synthetic sketches and no color. The case file also preserves reproductions of erotic themed works from the Argentine National Museum of Fine Arts library and collection. For example, the sculpture *Creced y multiplicaos* (1911) by Pedro Zonza Briano, that it represent a hug of a man behind a woman<sup>34</sup> (the defense lawyer said that it could even be interpreted as "unnatural coitus") and had been exhibited in 1962 in the surrounding park of the museum with authorization from the Municipality.

- 31 The defense strategy, based on the reference to well-known artists like the French sculptors Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol or the Argentine painter Prilidiano Pueyrredón, yielded a positive outcome. But *Blanco sobre blanco* doesn't seem to have drawn its inspiration from "high culture" erotic representations, but rather, the rudimentary nature of the drawing suggests a reference to materials of the cultural industry that wasn't responding to the expectations of decency that were traditionally expected in the "fine arts". This stylistic decision wasn't made by chance: it engaged the pop matrix of shattering the limits of modern art by using motifs from mass culture. Together with the kinetic character (that questioned the modern parameter of the autonomy of art by involving the body of the spectator), this question of style was central to the esthetic interests of Lublin. But it also gravitated around the reading that the police inspector gave about the image: it didn't seem artistic.
- 32 A couple of years earlier, in an article published in *Arts et loisirs*, Pierre Restany had explained what he understood as the replacing of beauty with eroticism in the images of contemporary society (whether advertising or artistic). Unlike the Argentine police and censors, the French critic optimistically saw that the press, cinema, fashion and publicity were filled with eroticism, and even that art produced towards the end of the sixties was on an equal footing with other products of visual culture.
- The traditional genres must fight in their own territory with the mass media: a nude by Wesselmann is neither more nor less erotic than a movie poster or the centerfold of a magazine for "single men". [...] Eroticism by Sade, practiced by the beatniks has become a classical theme of the happenings. The ritual became spectacle. The search for the aforementioned sexuality ignores, from here on, the taboos, the deviations, the secrecy.<sup>35</sup>
- 33 The description by the French critic offers a proliferate panorama of erotic images without greater controls; a new sensibility with which he was in tune with. A canvas by the Coopérative des Malassis representing a sex scene similar to the one on *Blanco sobre blanco*, (fig. 14) seems to go in the same direction in terms of the actual circulation of erotic images even inside the "high culture" institutions: it was shown during 1970 as part of the exhibition *Qui tue? Vérités sur un fait divers : l'affaire Gabrielle Russier*, at the ARC section of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.<sup>36</sup> After the trial and suicide of that professor who had fallen in love with a student of her high school literature class, this collective painting included the representation of priests, police officers and judges as part of sexuality control in French society.
- 34 Restany saw in North American pop art an initial kick in the rise in eroticism, but he assumed a global scale for the "sexual revolution" that encouraged such profusion. But just as *Blanco sobre blanco* had turned out to be unfeasible in Buenos Aires, *Lecture d'une œuvre de Lea Lublin par un inspecteur de police* was only possible outside of Argentina.





Imagen 14 – *Coopérative des Malassis*, one of the fifty figurative canvases painted collectively by Alleaume, Latil, Cuéco, Mikaeloff, Parré and Tisserand, and exhibited in 1970 at the ARC section of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, as part of *Qui tue? Vérités sur un fait divers : l'affaire Gabrielle Russier*.

- 35 Shortly after the civil unrest in May 1968, the words *récupération*, *manipulation* or *contestation* are keys to understanding the dynamic of a fair amount of actors from the French artistic field. Parallel to the large cultural projects undertaken by the government of Georges Pompidou, such as the cultural Centre announced in 1969 that today carries that president's name, the artistic field was undermined with both cultural "replies" and police interventions in the art institutions.<sup>37</sup> And although the French government had been able to drive out "unruly" foreign artists like Hugo Demarco and Julio Le Parc in June of 1968 during the general strikes of French May,<sup>38</sup> some materials with clandestine or limited circulation in Argentina, like the film *La hora de los hornos* (1968) by Pino Solanas, could be shown without restrictions in France.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the French cultural scene was not only more permissive regarding erotic content of images, but it also allowed the reporting of authoritarian regimes from South America. In this sense, both as the capital of the "Arts Republic" and the birthplace of human rights, Paris became a platform from which diverse artistic and political Latin American scenes multiplied its international visibility.
- 36 *Lecture* exposed the cracks between what *Blanco sobre blanco* had brought into view, what the desiring subjects had projected with their gaze onto this suggestive image, and the proliferation of these eroticizing effects and of discourses on sexuality by means of the censorship and trial. *Lecture* implied an analytic operation concerning the specificity of the means of representation (writing, painting, photography produced in different qualities), in a censorship case that brought to the forefront the links between representation, imagination and libido.



- 37 The print culture and the cultural industry of the sixties allowed for the creation, circulation and reproduction of imaginaries of the highest visibility and fruition. These images and bodies activated a new visuality linked to new experiences. This was precisely what cultural producers that worked with iconography from mass culture saw. For those like Lublin who thought about visual culture in terms of material, perceptive, rhetorical and semiotic processes, the central position that the visual seems to have acquired in the sixties did nothing more than confirm the importance of exploring the powers of image and visual representation.
- 38 Lea Lublin developed her own methods to create works and projects imbibed in the deconstructive possibilities of semiology. At least until 1972, she artistically capitalized her various trips between European and South American metropolises. As a migrant artist she created artwork that was particularly sensitive to political circumstances, intellectual traditions and also cultural backgrounds of the people from different cities. Her work operated with these asymmetries between South America and Europe, incorporating them into her analysis of the rhetoric of culture.

## NOTES

1. Regarding the concept of translocal see Clemens Greiner and Patrick Sakdapolrak, "Translocality; Concepts, applications and emerging research perspectives" *Geotrophy Compass*, vol. 7, n° 5, May 2013, p. 373-384.
2. See, Isabel Plante, "Between Paris and the 'Third World': Lea Lublin's Long 1960s", *Artl@s Bulletin*, vol. 3 n° 2 (2014), École Normale Supérieure, Paris. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol3/iss2/4/>
3. I'm expanding what was put forward in "Tela de juicio. Lo erótico y lo blanco según Lea Lublin," *Blanco sobre blanco. Miradas y lecturas sobre artes visuales* n° 1, September 2011, p. 57-58, written in collaboration with Teresa Riccardi. For a first approach to *Blanco sobre blanco*, see Paola Melgarejo and Florencia Vallarino, "El discurso del arte entre la estética y la censura", in María José Herrera (comp.), *Exposiciones de arte argentino 1956-2006*, Buenos Aires, Asociación Amigos del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2009, p. 137-147.
4. "Lea Lublin, « Parcours conceptuel 1965-1975", *Lea Lublin. Parcours 1965-1975*. Antwerp, Internationaal Cultureel Centrum, 1975.
5. Born in Vienna in 1935, Hahn studied in Paris. Since 1963, for almost 30 years, he was responsible for *L'Express* magazine's art pages. Between 1969 and 1972, he directed together with Françoise Esselier the art magazine *VH 101*. He also collaborated with *Arte International*, *Art press* and *Connaissance des arts*.
6. It was described this way by an article published in the English magazine *Art and Artists*, London, May 1967, p. 50.
7. Nicolás Lublin confirmed that the work was hung in the room of the critic and his wife, Nicole Fauche, but that later it ended up in the garage and was unfortunately destroyed. Interview conducted by the author, May 18, 2015. We rely on the description made by Bernard Teyssède in "Le parcours de Lea Lublin", in *Lea Lublin. Parcours 1965-1975*, *op. cit.*
8. *Lea Lublin. Parcours conceptuel 1965-1975*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

9. Teresa Riccardi, " Archivar mitologías: documentos secretos de una mirada femenina. ¿Cómo leer las vitrinas y las imágenes de Lea Lublin? ", *Art and Archives. Latin American Art Forum 1920 to Present*, 2010, University of Texas, Austin.
10. One of the painted acrylic plates is preserved in the artist's Parisian studio. I am grateful to Stephanie Weber, curator of Lea Lublin's retrospective in 2015 at the Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich, for this information.
11. Paksa's installation consisted of a rectangular sandbox on the floor showing the footprints of two bodies, a man and a woman; Two turntables with headphones that each reproduced a face of the vinyl record specially recorded and manufactured, in which one could hear the sound recording called *Candente*.
12. Sergio Pujol, "Rebeldes y modernos. Una cultura de los jóvenes", in Daniel James (dir.) *Nueva Historia Argentina. Tomo IX: Violencia, proscripción y autoritarismo (1955-1976)*. Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2003, p. 281-328.
13. Andrés Avellaneda, *Censura, autoritarismo y cultura: Argentina 1960-1983*. Buenos Aires, CEDAL, 1986.
14. Regarding *Experiencias 68* and its censorship, see Patricia Rizzo, *Instituto Di Tella. Experiencia 68*. Buenos Aires, Fundación Proa, 1998; and Daniel Quiles, "Between Organism and Sky: Oscar Bony, 1965-1976", *Caiana* n. 4, 2014. [http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article\\_1.php&obj=151&vol=4](http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_1.php&obj=151&vol=4)
15. These magazines from the Columba editorial were the largest on the market. Laura Vázquez, *El oficio de las viñetas. La industria de la historieta argentina*. Paidós, 2010. Enrique Lipszyc's book, *Técnica de la historieta* (Escuela Panamericana de Arte, 1966), includes sections on perspective, tone, line, style and use of photographs as a documentary base.
16. See texts by Gerald Needham, Beatrice Farewell and David Kunzle, in Thomas B. Hess y Linda Nochlin, *Woman as Sex Object*. (1972). London, 1973. These authors link massive erotic images with some XIX paintings by Edouard Manet and Gustave Courbet, among others.
17. The thematisations of sexuality in Argentine cinema of the 1960's does not end with Armando Bo and Isabel Sarli. On this subject, see Karina Felitti, "La pantalla se calienta. El cine argentino de los '60 y sus discursos sobre sexualidad y moralidad", XI Jornadas Interescuelas/Departamentos de Historia. Departamento de Historia. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Tucumán, San Miguel de Tucumán, 2007. <http://cdsa.academica.org/000-108/163.pdf>
18. See, Laura Vázquez, *op.cit.* and Verónica Giordano, "'El erotismo en las imágenes de Adán, 1966-1968", *Caiana* n. 4, primer semestre de 2014. [http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article\\_1.php&obj=134&vol=4](http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_1.php&obj=134&vol=4)
19. "Exposición rural. Miniescándalo", *Crónica*, Buenos Aires, 21/9/1970, p. 6.
20. Gilles Deleuze develops the different senses given to this notion by Foucault in "¿Qué es un dispositivo?" (1988), in AA.VV, *Foucault philosopher*. Barcelona, Gedisa, 1990, p. 155-163.
21. Regarding the intervention of portraits of national heroes, see, from my authorship, "Between Paris and the Third World": Lea Lublin's Long 1960s", *art. cit.*
22. "Vestir al desnudo", press without references [1970]. MNBA files.
23. Debord and many of his contemporaries considered the image as a spectacle, in the sense of pure exteriority and absolute inaction of the spectator. Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (1967). Paris, Folio, 1992. For a discussion of Debord, see Martin Jay, *Downcast eyes. The denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*. Berkeley University of California Press, 1994.
24. "Vestir al desnudo", *art. cit.*
25. "El movimiento es pecado aunque sea una ilusión óptica", prensa sin identificar [1970]. Archivo Lea Lublin.
26. See, of my authorship, "Pierre Restany et l'Amérique Latine. A détournement de l'ax Paris-New York "in Richard Leeman (right), *Le demi-siècle by Pierre Restany*. Paris, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art - Éditions des Cendres, 2009, p. 287-309.

27. Letter from Lea Lublin to Pierre Restany 11/9/1970. PREST.XSAML 26 / 112-115. Archives of the Critique d'Art, University of Rennes.
28. César Seveso, "Escuelas de militancia: la experiencia de los presos políticos en Argentina, 1955-1972", *A Contracorriente* vol. 6, n° 3, Spring 2009, 137-165. [www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente](http://www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente).
29. The artist had visited the island in 1965 in the occasion of a group exhibition at Casa de las Américas, and the following year, had returned to settle an award. In turn, at the end of 1971, a year after Allende was elected, Lublin developed a project at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile, which was sensitive to this political conjuncture. Regarding this project, see from my authorship, "Cultura: dentro y fuera del museo (1971) de Lea Lublin: crítica institucional dentro y fuera del 'Tercer Mundo'", *Museologia e Interdisciplinaridade*, Art Institute, University of Brasilia, v. 5 n° 8, September 2016. <http://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/museologia>, in the process of publication.
30. Isabella Cosse proposes the idea of "discrete revolution" in her *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta*. Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2010.
31. Statement by Miguel Ángel Bonifacio, federal police inspector, 9/20/1970. File of the case for violation of article 128 of the penal code (obscenity). Archive Lea Lublin.
32. Michel Foucault, *Historia de la sexualidad I. La voluntad de saber* (1976). Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1990, p. 129.
33. At a distance, Castilla humorously refers to the audience: "to the third anal penetration of the pre-Columbian erotic *huacos* that I showed, the judge let us go" Author's interview with Américo Castilla, October 2009.
34. See the file of Patricia Corsani on this work, published in the reasoned catalog of the National Museum of Fine Arts in 2010 and accessible at <http://mnba.gob.ar/coleccion/obra/3599>
35. Pierre Restany, "L'école de l'érotisme", *Arts et loisirs* n° 74 22/2/1967, p. 34
36. This exhibition consisted in around fifty figurative canvases focusing on the Gabrielle Russier affair, and painted collectively by Alleaume, Latil, Cuéco, Mikaeloff, Parré and Tisserand.
37. These are some examples: the intervention of the collective La Polycritique in the exhibition of Yves Klein of Musée d'art décoratif from 1969; The 1970 training of the Cooperative des Malassis dedicated to experimenting with collective *engagé* work; The police censorship in September 1971 of two Jean Mathelin fabrics exhibited in the ARC; The closure that year of Bernard Rancillac's exhibition at the Center National d'Art Contemporain; The creation in 1971 of the Front des Artistes Plasticiens (FAP), which had on its agenda resistance to the construction of the arts center on the esplanade of Les Halles, as a symbol of the triumphant "new cultural order" after May 1968.
38. They had been arrested on 7 June on the way to Flins when police were repressing the strikers at the Renault factory there, some 40 kilometers from Paris.
39. See, of my authorship, "Amérique Latine Non Officielle o París como lugar para exhibir contrainformación", in *A Contracorriente. A journal social history and literature in Latin America*, vol. 10, n° 2, Winter 2013, p. 58-84.  
[http://tools.chass.ncsu.edu/open\\_journal/index.php/content/article/view/341](http://tools.chass.ncsu.edu/open_journal/index.php/content/article/view/341)

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## ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on two works by Lea Lublin that address sexuality and the restrictions for the public exhibition of erotic representations: *Blanco sobre blanco* (White on white, 1969) and *Lecture d'une œuvre de Lea Lublin par un inspecteur de police* (Reading of a Lea Lublin's work by a police inspector, 1972). While the first was created and exhibited in Buenos Aires, the second was, by contrast, produced and presented in Paris. We argue that the censorship of *Blanco sobre blanco* confirmed the relevance of the artist's interest in investigating the nature of representation as a visual device and the exploring the links of images with institutions, the imaginary and the libidinal. The esthetic connection of her trajectory as a migrant artist allowed her to strategically use the political and institutional asymmetries between both metropolises: Paris became a city where she could critically visualize and address the effects of the control of the Argentine dictatorship under General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) on sexuality and its representations.

Este artículo se concentra en dos obras de Lea Lublin que tematizan la sexualidad y los límites encontrados para la exhibición pública de las representaciones del erotismo: *Blanco sobre Blanco* (1969) y *Lecture d'une œuvre de Lea Lublin par un inspecteur de police* (Lectura de una obra de Lea Lublin por un inspector de policía, 1972). La primera fue realizada y exhibida en Buenos Aires y la segunda, en cambio, fue producida y expuesta en París. Sostenemos que la censura de *Blanco sobre Blanco* le confirmó a la artista la pertinencia de su interés por indagar en la naturaleza de la representación como dispositivo visual y por explorar los vínculos de la imagen con las instituciones, lo imaginario y lo libidinal. A su vez, la articulación estética de su trayectoria como artista migrante le permitió utilizar estratégicamente las asimetrías políticas e institucionales entre ambas metrópolis: París resultó un lugar donde visibilizar y tratar críticamente los efectos del control de la dictadura argentina del general Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) sobre la sexualidad y sus representaciones.

## INDEX

**Palabras claves:** Lea Lublin, arte y erotismo, censura, artista migrante, años sesenta

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## AUTHOR

ISABEL PLANTE

Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (Conicet)

Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales, Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Idaes-Unsam)

isabelplante@gmail.com