



Bilongo Esmeralda (Let The Devil Take Style)
Genevieve Quick
September 24, 2015



Sofía Córdova. *Bilongo Esmeralda (Let The Devil Take Style)*, 2 x 2 Solos: Sofía Córdova, 2015; video projected on sail, approximately 25:00. Courtesy of the Artist and Pro Arts, Oakland, California. Photo: Josef Jacques.

For Sofía Córdova's *Bilongo Esmeralda (Let The Devil Take Style)* at Pro Arts, the artist presents her latest videos (sections five through seven) in her poetic series *Echoes of A Tumbling Throne (Odas Al Fin De Los Tiempos)* (2014–present). As with previous works, Córdova catapults viewers into her inventive narrative that suggestively addresses migration, cultural hybridity, and the placelessness of screen culture.

Córdova evocatively suggests water as both a transportation mode and a barrier that defines borders and separates people. In the gallery, Córdova's draped sails divide the space and serve as her projection screen. The sails also act like relics of imaginary journeys, suggested but not actually depicted in the videos. The videos begin with a computer-generated ship on the ocean that falls to the sea floor and breaks apart, signaling a disaster that loosely frames the rest of the video's narrative.

The rest of Córdova's video is dedicated to three scenes in which her characters present a cross-cultural fusion of costume, dance, and music. The vignettes include two bare-chested men dressed in Armani Exchange underwear and sunglasses, who pose and then convulsively arch their bodies to ambient techno sounds; a veiled Latina woman (played by Córdova) in a patterned bra, jean cut-offs, and a burka-like veil who suggestively dances to Latin jazz; and a bare-chested black man in white dance tights who gracefully moves to ethereal sounds. The dancer in the last scene performs a spiritual transcendence, and the dancer's white veil—similar to Córdova's burka—is flipped up to reveal his face like a bridal or religious veil. His eyes shift into a piercing blue, and at times he extends his arms in a crucifix-like pose. Collectively, the

figures merge cultural backgrounds in which Western fashion brands, nightclubs, cut-off jean shorts, modern dance, Middle Eastern belly dancing, and religious imagery meet.

Córdova shrewdly treats her figures and their backgrounds to produce visually compelling imagery and to address placelessness. Most of the time, Córdova presents her characters' bodies with rich color and opacity, rendering them as solid and defined forms. In contrast, her backgrounds are frequently abstract, with layers of pixilation, color-reversal filters, and transparencies; much of her imagery suggests water. The subjects frequently stand in front of their backgrounds, rather than being immersed in them. As the dancers' backgrounds have an ethereal sense of dislocation, they also occasionally change, like the unstable and imaginative screen culture of video games and music videos. As with many migrants, who must navigate cultural in-between-ness, Córdova's characters are also not in any specific place; the screen exemplifies this unknown geography through imagery and interface.

Although viewers who are searching for a linear narrative may be frustrated with Córdova's work, those who are patient will be rewarded for their surrender to Córdova's imaginative world that relishes exuberance, sensuality, and strangeness.