

*I've always situated myself in the unknown,  
on the side of transparency*

Roberto Matta

WHO IS MATTA?  
MATTA & MAGIE IMAGE

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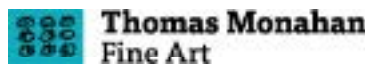
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Oksana Salamatina

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Edited by Oksana Salamatina

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Matta, 1957  
Photograph by Denise Colomb.  
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This discussion between Oksana Salamatina and Saúl Kaminer on Matta and the group Magie Image was conducted on March 16, 2018, at Kaminer's studio in Mexico City.



Carlos Aresti, Saúl Kaminer, Matta, Mercedes Iturbe, Mario Murúa and Heriberto Cogollo (Magie Image group), Paris, about 1980's

OKSANA SALAMATINA | Saul, it's very nice to see you again. Tell me about Magie Image. How did the group start?

SAÚL KAMINER | The beginning was 1982, with eight Latin American painters. We were not Magie Image when we first met. One year later we participated in the exhibition "Magie," then two years later, in 1985, we became the group Magia Imagen or Magie Image. It was Colombian historian and art critic Álvaro Medina who came up with those names, because Medina thought that us six artists were interested in images and realism, "magic realism," which takes its root from Latin American literature, "You are as an artist in the magic dimensions, but you make images."—so, we are talking about Magie Image. That was the beginning of the group.

OS | How did these Matta interviews come to life?

SK | In 1985 we had an exhibition called "Magia Imagen" at the Mexican cultural center in Paris, and Matta came to see it. Afterwards he said, "It would be good to see these artists more," so he began to see us for conversations and meetings, over a period of for four years, talking about many themes. In the first meeting, Matta said, "The first thing you need to do is 'kill Matta,'" in other words, go further than him. All these conversations are in this book, conversations about Marcel Duchamp, about the transformation...

OS | Whose idea was it to record these?

SK | When we had our first meeting with Matta, he asked us, "Why are you not going to record this?" And we said, "We don't want to intrude, we would feel very bad." So, he replied, "Of course! You must record!" So, next time we met, we did.

OS | Do you remember the day?

SK | For sure it was in May, in May of 1985. I don't remember exactly the date. It was in Paris.

OS | In Matta's apartment?

SK | No, it was in the Mexican cultural center.

os | So, you met there always?  
sk | Yes, most of the time. Sometimes we met in his apartment. To be exact, in a kind of bureau he had at 145 Boulevard Saint-Germain.  
os | How many days did it take for you to record everything?  
sk | Four years.  
os | Who was transcribing it?  
sk | Bénédicte [Martin].  
os | How did you find her? And why her?  
sk | Because Bénédicte was an art historian and the wife of Mario Murúa, an artist of the group. She wrote texts for us. So, Bénédicte recorded everything and made an original transcription from recordings to paper. She made some corrections and then I did some, too.  
os | So, what we have here, in this book, is the complete four years of conversations? Never published before?  
SK: Yes, never published before. Four years worth.  
os | Why not?  
sk | Because everyone needed to do their own work, we didn't have someone to do all of this until Bénédicte.  
os | Who participated in these discussions?  
sk | Sometimes it was four or five people, sometimes seven.  
os | Where in art history do you find Magie Image? Most art historians and collectors have never heard about it. You can't even find books on the group. And no one knows about Matta and his connection to it. What's its importance?  
sk | Well, we were the last Latin American group in Paris. It was not possible for it to happen in Latin America, because it was the "French Idea." We were from many different countries, meeting in one place.  
os | What do you mean by "French Idea?"  
sk | French people came to the United States, and part of the US was French, for example Louisiana, New Orleans. Even the name Louisiana comes from the King of France, Louis. The same with the city of New Orleans. Part of the US was French, then there was a war and the French lost their territories to the US. The French Army went to Mexico and they created the idea of a Latin America. The US called us Hispanics, the French called us Latin Americans. That's the way they see us.... So, we were the last group of Latin Americans in the 1960s and 70s, before globalization, modernization, and many things. The landscape of art changed completely

and became very international. If you are in Mexico, you don't have real connection with people from other countries.

os | Why?  
sk | We are connected with the United States and other Mexicans, but not with other people from Latin America. We don't really have a cultural exchange with people from other parts of Latin America. In this way, the group Magie Image was very special, because it was made up of people from different countries. We showed that it was possible to make the world come together. That is one of the ideas behind Magie Image. In this group, you could find people who have a Spanish heritage and Black heritage, like Cogollo or Cuevas, African, Zarate, from Indian (Mixtecos) and Spanish heritage. I come from a Jewish family. All of us come from all kinds of backgrounds, and we work together as one group. Coming from different horizons, we built the world together. I think it is one of the most important messages, that we accept others who are different.  
os | I would assume it was unique to find such a group in Europe. How did the audience react to you, your art?  
sk | Well, we exhibited a lot in museums and galleries. Art critics wrote a lot about us.  
os | What did they like the most?  
sk | Our strong images, our magical images, Latin American literature...  
os | Why did the group disband?  
sk | We lasted ten years, making a lot of drawings together. Four canvases we worked together at the same time; these are now in museum collections. We worked in the same studio. We would gather as a group and have dinner once a week, converse, both with each other and with Matta. We would attend exhibitions together. We were in touch and are still in touch, but we are not a group. We dissolved in 1992. The European community had more of an interest then in European artists, not Latin American ones.  
os | How many works did you create together as a group?  
sk | We made seven large paintings at around 3 x 8 square meters each. They are in one museum in Chile, one in Uruguay, one in Israel...