

Exhibition Guide

Dora García
Amor Rojo

June 29 – September 17, 2023



Rituals of Speaking

02

Amant

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Amor Rojo (Red love) is the third and final chapter of Dora García's trilogy of films about the complex yet ongoing legacy of Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952), a Russian author, Marxist feminist, sex activist, political exile, and diplomat. We screened the two preceding films, *Love with Obstacles* (2020) and *If I Could Wish for Something* (2021), as part of our exhibition *Revolution, fulfill your promise!* in spring 2022.

Dora García traces the ideas Alexandra Kollontai coined and implemented at the beginning of the 20th century. Through her research, she tries to understand how these revolutionary propositions have been translated and transmitted across the globe, and how they have mutated, disappeared, and reemerged through different waves of feminisms and transfeminisms. The films focus on the impact of Kollontai's legacy in Latin America, especially in Mexico, where she was ambassador at the beginning of the 1920s. Whereas gender violence continues to be extremely high in Mexico, the country also has a strong history of feminist movements that aim to go beyond the fight for equality towards a full subversion of society.

This project combines historical documentation with conversations about pressing contemporary issues to underscore that transnational forms of feminism and transfeminism are related to today's ecological and decolonial struggles. When commenting on the project, Dora García says, "Who is doing the work of Kollontai today? It is certainly a collective. There is a collective of people that are demonstrating and working for these things to happen."

Amor Rojo gathers a polyphony of voices from the past and present. They range from the intimate voice of Kollontai's personal diaries to her agitational pamphlets, from feminist and LGBTQ group debates to reflections by the trans singer La Bruja de Texcoco, from demonstrations to dances. They emerge against the background of actual protest marches from which a collective voice of thousands of women arises.

In our Learnshop, adjacent to the screening of *Amor Rojo*, we provide documentation, books, images, and original work by the artist around the notion of feminist disappointment. The two prior films of the trilogy also play on loop on smaller monitors.

Amor Rojo is part of *Rituals of Speaking*, a film-led series that explores how artists represent the voices of others through collective storytelling. *Revolution, fulfill your promise!*, the first chapter of Dora García's project on the legacy of Kollontai, was part of *First Person, Third Person, Same Person*, Amant's inaugural film-based series, running between fall 2021 and summer of 2022, that explored how artists used film to give voice to historical figures.

For this third film, *Amor Rojo*, Dora García collaborated with three young Mexican researchers (Olga Rodríguez, Carla Lamoyi, Paloma Contreras Lomas) and Mexican historian and author Rina Ortiz.

Image: Film still from *Amor Rojo*, 2022.

Conversation between Dora García and Ruth Estévez, Amant's Director and Chief Curator

RE: Dora, you have explored characters who have been left out of the official narratives, often for their revolutionary and visionary radicalism, resisting a society anchored in traditional and patriarchal values. Why did you choose to focus so closely on Alexandra Kollontai's persona and controversies?

DG: I always encounter my characters by accident, just as you meet people. In this case, our connecting "friend" was Maria Lind, who asked me to accompany her and the participants of Curatorial Lab at the Art School of Stockholm for one year, studying Kollontai's writings. For me it was a great discovery, first because she is an incredible character: first female government officer, first female ambassador, Soviet revolutionary, Marxist feminist, emancipated feminist woman--a superhero. But I also discovered her connection with fourth-wave feminist concerns over 100 years later, and her connection with Latin America. Two of her concepts are central for me: love comradeship (love transcending the couple and the family, becoming a political tool and the structure of a revolutionary community), and the notion that class identity is stronger than gender identity, which is why back then (as well as now) bourgeois feminist and working-class feminists did not have the same struggles and which can also be extended to questions of race.

RE: In the past several years, you have made three films, authored several books, and collected many sources of documentation that you have incorporated into *Amor Rojo*. You have also built a network of collaborators who are nurturing and contributing to the project, updating her work in the present. What has been the development of the project over time?

DG: It all started with a visit to Mexico City, when I was already thinking of Kollontai, and meeting scholar Olga Rodríguez by chance. I somehow managed to get her interested in my embryonic Kollontai project. From this a web of accomplices started to grow, which accelerated when we got Rina Ortiz on board, the great expert on Kollontai, who is bilingual in Russian and Spanish. She opened the doors of the Moscow archives, and therefore the doors to the "hidden" Kollontai. This initial moment coincided with the 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution and our research continued on through the 150th anniversary of Alexandra Kollontai's birth, both of which brought very interesting texts to light, prompting new editions, translations of her work, as well as the "green wave" or "fourth wave" of feminism that started in Argentina with the #niunamenos movement – which was actively trying to establish connections with other generations of feminists with the motto "because they were, we are".

RE: In general, your own voice does not appear in your films: you build the narrative through different sources; readings of documents, interviews, and various testimonies surrounding the characters you are interested in. This film is a compendium of voices: Kollontai's own voice through the reading of her letters; the voices of participants in the demonstrations; the voices of activists who describe their experiences; but also your voice. How did this happen?

DG: Yes, you are right. *Amor Rojo* is the first of my films in which my own voice is heard. I had always cut myself out. But in this project, I literally could not keep my mouth shut. So there is a lot of me in these three films, much more than I am used to. For me, the experience of visiting the Moscow archives with Rina Ortiz was really transformative. To go through those files and find those personal letters in Kollontai's handwriting or little notes meant for her eyes only, was like going through the rabbit hole, encountering a woman who was a feminist icon and at the same time a passionate lover of everything--of her friends, of her lovers, of her son. I tried to recreate this feeling in the first film, *Love with Obstacles*, which is intimate, full of whispers.

RE: And the collective voices appear above all in *If I Could Wish for Something* and *Amor Rojo*.

DG: Yes, from Moscow we went to Mexico in search of this fourth wave, this green revolution (green refers to the color of the handkerchiefs worn in demonstrations demanding access to free and safe abortion). Somehow, the atmosphere there was just too much to resist. I got totally swept in; you really have this feeling of being inside of a collective revolution, which is incredibly powerful, euphoric, and overwhelming. But then you also feel the fragility of it all, the confrontations, the little betrayals ... and this also connects with Kollontai and the story of her life, the obstacles she was confronted with, the hardships, together with the passion.

RE: During the multiple encounters that took place in Mexico, you meet with la Bruja de Texcoco, who stands for me as a contemporary Kollontai, transferring the thoughts of one in the other. How did la Bruja's character take shape within the narrative?

DG: La Bruja was completely unplanned: she came, and she conquered. I was looking for someone to do a "Mexican" version of Friedrich Hollander 1930's song "If I Could Wish for Something", famously sung by Marlene Dietrich. (I have since forever been obsessed with this song). I wanted to use a Spanish version as a soundtrack for the demonstrations. We went through several possibilities and one of them was La Bruja, who is so much more than a composer and an incredible musician. She is also a larger-than-life character, like Kollontai. We had this moment of recognition, when I thought: "fate has brought me this character, and now the whole film has no other option than to be about her." So this is how it happened: a character that was secondary completely stole the show. As a director I had no other choice but to accept it. Something similar happened in the third film, with La Havi, the beautiful trans woman with the "te quiero" [I love you] tattoo on her cheek. When a friend saw the footage and saw her face, he immediately said: "Well, you got really lucky, didn't you?" The whole project is in fact a series of lucky strikes, of people I have been so fortunate to encounter.

RE: This project brings together two seemingly contradictory states of mind that complement each other. On the one hand, you have the optimism and hope that are part of every struggle and, on the other, the disappointment and frustration of not being able to fulfill a revolution. How is that reflected in the development of this project?

DG: At the beginning of the project, when I was studying the Soviet Revolution, this moment of euphoria between 1917 and 1920 was very palpable: everything seemed possible, it was the moment of the massive alphabetization of society, the moment of massive participation, the moment of the new, the new woman, the new order. And then, there is the moment of awareness of the terrible difficulties, the "cold shower of reality" where you have to start making concessions (such as the New Economic Policy in 1921), and finally, these concessions lead to the total collapse of the revolutionary idea, and eventually the run-for-your-life moment (1929).

This is something common to most revolutions: La Commune, The Cuban Revolution. All revolutions are started by women, in the hopes that the revolution will satisfy all "woman" demands (but of course there are no "woman" demands, only demands for justice): equality, divorce, abortion, economic independence, sexual emancipation, sexual freedom, health care, maternity care, the acknowledgment of reproductive work. And then time and time again, seeing how these demands are forever delayed, because other, more "urgent" matters have to be resolved first. So women have always been betrayed, and, most painfully so, by their male comrades. This observation became more prevalent in this project, which led to the "Letters of Disappointment" collection, bringing together paragraphs from novels, diaries, speeches, letters, written by revolutionary women, where they express their bitter disappointment. I copy those passages of sadness and bitterness in my own handwriting because I do not consider them as moments of defeatism, but rather as moments of lucidity that somehow make those women return to the struggle, reinvigorated with wisdom and strength.

Reading List

Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now* (Haymarket Books, 2022)

Dora García, *If I Could Wish For Something*(ed.) (Idea Books, 2021)

Dora García, *Inserts in Real Time, Dora García Performance Work 2000–2023* (K. Verlag, 2023)

Dora García, *Love with Obstacles*, 2020(ed.) (K.Verlag, 2020)

Girls Like Us (Magazine), *ISSUE #14 – Letters of Disappointment*, 2023

Christina Heatherton, *Arise!: Global Radicalism in the Era of the Mexican Revolution* (University of California Press, 2022)

Alexandra Kollontai, *A Great Love*, 1923

Alexandra Kollontai, *Love of Workers Bees*, 1978

Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings*, Norton, NY, 1997

Edited by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke, *Transgender Marxism* (Pluto Press, 2021)

Enzo Traverso, *Revolution: An Intellectual History* (Verso, 2021)

Yoyes, *Desde su ventana* (Katakarak, 2011)

Biography

Dora García lives and works in Oslo. She often works with film, performance, and theater. Her research focuses on contemporary history, ethics, and politics.

Her works have been exhibited internationally in museums and biennials, such as MuHKA, Antwerp; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Fondation d'Entreprise Hermès, Brussels; Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto; Fonderie Darling - Centre d'Arts Visuels, Montreal; FRAC Île-de-France, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris; as well as (d)OCUMENTA 13 in Kassel, 2nd Athens Biennial, Lyon Biennial, 29th São Paulo Biennial, and the Gwangju Biennial. Dora García represented Spain at the 54th Venice Biennial in 2011.

Rituals of Speaking is a series of film-led projects that explores how artists represent the voices of others through collective storytelling. Borrowing its title from Linda Alcoff's essay "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (1991), which analyzes the contexts in which speaking and being heard are made possible, the series responds to recurring questions over who speaks for whom in the stories we tell, by redirecting our attention to how the stories are told. *Rituals of Speaking* includes recent and newly commissioned work by Helen Cammock, Dora García, Ephraim Asili, and Natalia Lassalle-Morillo.

Each film installation is accompanied by a series of public programs alongside a collection of artworks, texts, and contextual materials that provide further insight into the artist's research and collaborative processes.

Helen Cammock, *Bass Notes and SiteLines: The Voice as a Site of Resistance and the Body as a Site of Resilience*, March 23 – June 18, 2023

Dora García, *Amor Rojo*,
June 29 – September 17, 2023

Ephraim Asili, *Song for My Mother*,
September 28, 2023 – January 8, 2024

Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, *En Parábola: Conversations on Tragedy*, January 19 – April 23, 2024

