

# **KAAI** **THEATER**

Lola Arias  
**Veterans**

**13>28/01/17 – Mon > Fri 11:00 > 18:00**  
**+ before and after the shows – Kaaitheater**  
video installation

## VETERANOS [VETERANS]: CAMERADERIE AND CULTURE

excerpts from a text by Maria M. Delgado

This is an installation that questions the de-Malvinising of history on numerous levels. Crucially, it is about the invisible conscripts of a conflict where they finished on the losing side. Silenced by the regime to protect the failing dictatorship, placed to one side by successive democratic governments, they have struggled for decent war pensions, for psychological assistance and for appropriate recognition of their grievances and the abuses suffered at the hands of the military – the same military leaders who masterminded Argentina's 'dirty war'.

Four of the five ex-servicemen whose memories shape the narrative of *Veterans* speak to the camera in the spaces of their everyday world where each now negotiates their post-Malvinas existence. The five films play concurrently; the viewer can choose whose story to follow, or move between the different tales: *The Swimmer* by Marcelo Vallejo, a formal metal worker now a triathlon champion; *The Voice* by Daniel Terzano, a psychologist now employed at a psychiatric hospital; *The Sinking of the Belgrano* by Dario Volonté, a petty naval officer who now earns his living as a tenor; *Last Day of War* by Guillermo Dellepiane, a retired brigadier and airforce pilot and *The Diary of a Soldier* by Fabián Volonté, a car mechanic reading from his tattered diary recording his experiences prior to the commencement of the War as a soldier on Port Stanley; the camera lingers on the handwritten lines as Volonté turns the pages and reads the precise timed entries detailing the chaotic preparations for combat.

Marcelo, Daniel, Dario and Guillermo share photographs of their previous selves over their now fifty-something faces: young boys frozen in formal photographs delivering a thumbs-up in the cockpit of an aircraft flier, surrounded by military paraphernalia, earnest commanding officers, or a pastoral landscape that suggest a stage backdrop. The plain black credits to each film are both an obituary for those others who never lived to tell their stories and a reminder of the space between who the veterans are now and who they were. The conflict's 649 Argentine dead (and the number of suicides by veterans thought to surpass those who perished on the battlefield) hover over each of the films. Fabián's diary tellingly ends as the War begins – the conflict's horrors erased from the record. Marcelo wears a black t-shirt with a map of the islands where he signals where he first landed with his regiment. 'En esta parte de la historia, esta todo negro para mi' [In this part of the story, it's all black], he states as he narrates his colleague Sergio's death. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Daniel is unable to go to a remembrance ceremony for his fellow soldier Carlos: 'Yo había sobrevivido, él estaba muerto. Yo ya no tenía nada para contar' [I had survived, he was dead. I had nothing left to say]. The film gives him the space to narrate that which could not then be said. Dario too finds a voice – singing the *Giunto sul passo estremo* [Having arrived at the end of my life] from the epilogue of Arrigo Boito's *Mefistofele*. Dario sings Faust's lines which insist on the need to stand firm against temptation; the aria is a eulogy to lost lives, a testament to the power of the culture to find ways of commenting on a contested past and a way of articulating how Dario's has cultivated a new voice for himself.

Memories are visibly reconstructed and reenacted for the camera. The military order given to Marcelo on Port Stanley/Puerto Argentino is performed by Marcelo and two fellow swimmers in the changing room. Marcelo directs the action, giving lines to the actors. Others watch him in their swimming shorts and speedos. Only the incongruity of the setting – the sounds of the swimming pool, the costumes and caps, serve to remind us of the gaps that lie in every articulation of memory. Daniel visits the hospital canteen as he speaks of the cramped Malvinas/Falklands cafeteria. A clapperboard announces his entry into the hospital where he

now works. Dario shows a mock up of the raft he boarded on escaping the sinking Belgrano, drawing attention to the viewer's need to visualize how it differs from the original. The effects of the stormy weather conditions are evoked (distinctly *not* recreated) by a cluster of fans adorned with the blue and white ribbons of the Argentine flag. As one character notes, this is not like the movies and yet the screen images consistently play with the mechanics of film. Fabián stops for an instant, not sure as to whether to share some less salubrious terms with the viewer. But the off-screen voice of the director animates him to speak out. Censorship is not to be promoted. An off-screen voice calls for 'Acción' [Action] as Guillermo begins narrating his final mission of the War, putting on his fighter pilot helmet and bomber jacket as he recounts the tale of a dangerous mission that left 8 of his 16 fellow pilots dead. A replica Skyhawk, toy soldiers and a map of the islands serve as his props; 'parece una película' [it looks like a film], he states as he describes the perilous operation to refuel his stalling jet from the tanker aircraft, the Hercules.

This Hercules is framed in a studio adorned with framed certificates and photographs, equipment and mementos: the stage where past and present are layered in the process of retelling. This is what theatre is: a fiction embedded in the truths of the characters' lived experiences. Is it a coincidence I wonder that Fabián's makeshift barracks are housed in a theatre in Port Stanley? When he repeatedly writes of 'going to the theatre', the association is anything but reassuring.

*Veterans* is an act of remembrance but one that refuses to idealise or romanticise these men. The rhetoric of nationalism may have driven some of them to enlist – Daniel speaks of responding unquestioningly like a robot when conscripted, Fabián of doing his duty fighting 'por la patria' [for my country] – but the Post-War era has seen the men reinvent their lives. This empty rhetoric has been repositioned, questioned, sidelined and in some cases even silenced. Marcelo has to come close to drowning but learns to swim at 40; Dario moves from petty naval officer to tenor, singing an aria immortalised by Caruso, Carelli, Pavarotti, Kaufmann, and Villazón. Daniel has a degree of agency in the hospital denied him in the armed forces. And former Brigadier Guillermo Dellepiane stares straight ahead at the viewer, at the present and indeed into the future, with one part of himself firmly anchored in the past that that *Through the Eyes of Love* played out of an old portable audio cassette player represents.

## CREDITS

### concept, direction

Lola Arias

### performed by

Argentinean veterans of the  
Malvinas/ Falkland War:  
Guillermo Dellepiane, Daniel  
Terzano, Marcelo Vallejo, Dario  
Volonté, Fabián Volonté

### mise en scene

Nele Wohlatz,  
Ignacio Masllorens

### cinematography

Manuel Abramovich

### camera

Manuel Abramovich,  
Ignacio Masllorens

### sound

Francisco Pedemonte,  
Facundo Moreno

### production

Sofía Medici, Luz Algranti

### executive production

Bureau Cokot / Julie Le Gall &  
Hanna El Fakir

### editing

Alejo Moguillansky

### editing collaboration

Nele Wohlatz

### technique

Martín Borini

### translation

Daniel Tunnard

A House of Fire production  
co-funded by the Creative  
Europe Programme of the  
European Union



## VETERANS

**nl/** In de video-installatie *Veterans* blikken Argentijnse oud-strijders terug op hun traumatische ervaringen tijdens de Falklandoorlog in 1982. Ze doen dat door hun oorlogsherinneringen vijfendertig jaar later 'na te spelen' op plekken waar ze zich dagelijks bevinden. Zo reconstrueert een psycholoog samen met zijn collega's een bomexplosie in het psychiatrisch ziekenhuis waar hij werkt, en herbeleeft een triatleet de dood van zijn partner in het zwembad waar hij dagelijks traint. Ze halen hun oorlogsherinneringen door een soort teletijdmachine die hun verleden naar het heden transporteert.

- Lola Arias is een Argentijnse schrijfster, actrice en theatermaakster. Haar werk situeert zich steeds in het grensgebied tussen fictie en realiteit.

**fr/** Dans l'installation vidéo *Veterans*, d'anciens combattants argentins portent un regard rétrospectif sur leurs expériences traumatisantes pendant la guerre des Malouines en 1982. Ils le font en « jouant », trente-cinq ans plus tard, des souvenirs de guerre sur des lieux qu'ils fréquentent quotidiennement. Ainsi, un psychologue reconstitue avec un collègue l'explosion d'une bombe dans l'institut psychiatrique où il travaille et un triathlonien revit la mort de son partenaire dans la piscine où il s'entraîne chaque jour. Ils puisent leurs souvenirs de guerre dans une sorte de machine à remonter le temps qui les téléporte du présent vers le passé.

- L'Argentine Lola Arias est auteure, actrice et créatrice de théâtre. Son œuvre se situe toujours à la frontière de la fiction et de la réalité.

**en/** In the video installation *Veterans*, Argentinian veterans look back at their traumatic experiences during the Falklands War in 1982. Thirty-five years on, they do this by 'reconstructing' their war memories in places where they go every day. For example, together with his colleagues, a psychologist re-enacts a bomb explosion in the psychiatric hospital where he works, and a triathlete relives the death of his partner in the swimming pool where he trains every day. They retrieve their war memories through a kind of time machine that transports their past to the present.

- Lola Arias is an Argentinian writer, actress and theatre maker. Her work always plays out in the borderlands between fiction and reality.

### Length of videos

Guillermo Dellepiane	8:10
Darío Volonté	10:30
Daniel Terzano	8:46
Marcelo Vallejo	8:34
Diary of Fabián Volonté	49:29