

Sol Calero
Amazonas Shopping Center

The past decades have seen a sharp rise in development projects and demolitions to make way for luxury apartments across the world as wages stagnate and income inequality continues to skyrocket. The original Amazonas Shopping Centre in Bermondsey, London first referenced in Calero's 2014 exhibition *Bienvenidos a Nuevo Estilo* was forced to close its doors by 2016 due to rising rents. The small businesses it once contained, such as Gloria's Hair Salon, dispersed to various parts of London. This process continues to alter the appearance of neighborhoods as precarious finances and unpredictable circumstances reshape communities.

For her 2017 exhibition at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Calero revisited her past 3 years of work, combining a series of her installations into a tightly overlapping homage to Amazonas Shopping Centre. The "Center" compiled her repertoire of small business and social space adaptations including *Ciber Café* (2014), *Salsa* (2014), *Bienvenidos a Nuevo Estilo* (2014), *La Escuela del Sur* (2015), *Casa de Cambio* (2016), *La Sauna Caliente* (2016) and *Agencia Viajes Paraíso* (2017), while adding an additional cinema to screen *Desde el Jardín* (co-directed with Dafna Maimon, 2016).

The themes investigated in the prior iterations of each project came back to life, multiplied across the crowded space. The installation fused various stages of Calero's work into an *informal*¹ mall, reflecting the impromptu solutions of Latin American businesses and those of immigrants to the West in particular. The areas were activated simultaneously through participatory encounters: visitors scrolled through the interface of the cyber cafe, had their hair braided, traded cash for an editioned stack of fake bills, donned bathrobes emblazoned with "Caliente," learned to dance salsa and gathered in the darkened screening room to witness the latest shocking betrayal in *Desde el Jardín*.

Calero also added many new details and works throughout the spaces, most notably a series of neon pieces, as well as several platforms and bedazzled mosaic steps, all used to delineate different zones. The original institutional aesthetic of the room was obscured by patterned vinyl flooring and disrupted by the removal of the ceiling tiles,

¹ See Justin McGuirk, "Caracas: The City Is Frozen Politics," in *Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture* (London: Verso 2014) p. 139.

which opened up the space from above—the empty aluminum grid adorned with dangling plant vines. Plaster patches on the painted drywall, pigeon spikes, and a wall topped with the makeshift security measure of broken glass stuck in concrete were installed among other vernacular interventions.

Overall, *Amazonas Shopping Center* represented a culmination of years of research on the embodiment of Latin American identity in social space,² and also marked a shift in Calero's practice after which her focus moved away from recreations of small commercial enterprises and into a variety of topics ranging from La Escuela Cuzqueña to larger architectural projects, as well as a more personal approach to painting.

² For background on the hegemony of space, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991).