

Sol Calero
El Buen Vecino

El Buen Vecino returns to the theme of the Good Neighbor policy—first referenced by Calero in *La Perla del Caribe*—as a seminal sociohistorical factor in the international perception of Latin Americans. In the context of her large-scale architectural intervention at SALTS, referencing the policy and its repercussions implied a multi-layered approach: a façade of peaceful coexistence, with the inherent complexities of a policy intent on manufacturing cultural stereotypes for its own economic benefit bubbling under the surface.

Calero dramatically transformed the outdoor garage of SALTS into a colorful Caribbean house, expanding its exterior with a built-in porch and vernacular roof structure. A window was cut out from the wall to install decorative metal security bars and shutters. Additionally, *The Hole*, a permanent installation by Karsten Födinger, was converted into a provisional swimming pool through the use of tarps, pallets, and painted bricks.

The indoor space of this temporary habitat underwent an elaborate transformation as well, presaging Calero's later installations in which no surface goes untouched. Found domestic elements were combined with artworks; a cascading fabric sculpture evoked a mambo dancer; colorful 'fruit paintings' sat atop bricks or hung on patterned wallpaper of organic waves and abstract motifs. Custom-upholstered lounge chairs were arranged on a beach of red carpet, gazing into a wall-sized painting that depicted a surreal interior exploding with fruit and plants. The living room also included a series of hand-painted ceramic plates, a tribute to the 20th century modernist pottery tradition interspersed with formal tendencies of popular iconography.

Nestled among residential buildings in a quiet area near Basel, *El Buen Vecino* functioned as a hyperbole of hospitality, encouraging nearby residents to stop by and hang out on the porch. It's here that the disarming nature of Calero's work becomes apparent—breaking the white cube is not so much a formal gesture as a necessity for seduction. The public, including those who may not normally frequent art exhibitions, are welcomed by a casual and charming, if still unfamiliar, atmosphere. The consideration of the visitor as a guest is a consistent element throughout her practice, whether as a result of the pleasant feng shui of objects and furniture, or of outright hosting—providing food, refreshments and activities. It's at this cozy crux where

uncomfortable realities collide: the Caribbean house is clearly out of its element, a stand-in for the figure of the immigrant. Its mere existence there is a glaring anomaly. Will it be embraced by its neighbors? Is it a welcome curiosity? A happy refuge? A garish eyesore? A cause for a neighborhood association meeting? From the tension of these questions arises the deeper theme of the work: simply acknowledging the Other is never enough. What is its fate? Dismissal? Integration? Deportation? For there is little hope that it can be accepted as it truly is in any permanent sense, despite its concessions.