Sol Calero
Desde el Jardín

Amazonas, the young gardener of an extravagant estate, dreams of a life of luxury. But be careful what you wish for. When El Señor begs her to secretly take over the identity of his deathly ill wife, Amazonas' upper-class dream quickly proves to be a nightmare. A cast of telepathic maids and the neighbour's handsome gardener become wrapped up in a tale of intrigue, betrayal, greed, and romance. Tune in to witness the dramatic conclusion of Amazonas' struggles with her new identity and what happens as El Señor begins to show signs of the same disease that killed his wife—a contagious curse of greed!

The cultural context of the telenovela is epitomised by the presence of contradictions—rifts between realities. In the fictional TV world, characters experience public reality almost completely within the domestic sphere[1]; they are rarely depicted outdoors due to the practicalities of daily filming. Meanwhile, the melodrama is carried over into the real as the actual telenovela actors' lives are cultivated as a tabloid spectacle, creating a carefully managed parallel narrative to be closely followed by fans.[2] Further layers of rifts exist within the audience members themselves—a principally working class demographic within societies of gross inequality—as they project their own aspirations, frustrations and desires onto the on-screen characters and situations. The Venezuelan telenovela industry rose to prominence alongside its oil industry, both pumping out promises of miracles at a startling rate which remain elusive to this day.

Created as a set for an eponymous telenovela, *Desde el Jardín* appears as an opulent hacienda caught between the sometimes harmonious and sometimes dueling aesthetics of Calero and the telenovela genre. Using the most economic means to convey wealth and glamour, the set was all surface, designed to be seen from fixed viewpoints—look the wrong way and the illusion crumbles. Yet the telenovela for which the set was designed is as real an endeavour as it could be. Written and directed by Calero and artist Dafna Maimon, the series is an original production by Conglomerate and was filmed at David Dale Gallery in the days leading up to the opening.

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[1] Tomás A. López-Pumarejo, "Soap Opera, Globalization and National Culture," Assaph Kolnoa: Studies in Cinema & Television (Tel Aviv University, 2001).

[2] see Pablo Helguera, "The Factory of Dreams" essay from the eponymous book of photographs by Stefan Ruiz (Aperture, 2012).

Desde el Jardín embraced the contradictions inherent in the world of telenovelas by showcasing the sets, normally hidden from public view, as the exhibition itself. The space contained not only the evidence, but also the metaphysical essence of the collective act of making a TV show. Inundated with the classic ingredients of greed, envy, deception, family drama, and tragic twists, the plot centred on the main character Amazonas (played by Caique Tizzi), whose role as a look-alike interloper carried additional layers of contradictions surrounding class, gender, sexuality and origin. The rift between Amazonas' real self (a poor gardener) versus her constructed identity as Jenette (the rich matron of the hacienda) paralleled real-life Tizzi's performance in drag, but also a perhaps less obvious liminal space: an imaginary and indeterminable Latin America placed in Glasgow, Scotland. This context surrounding the show's production meant that all of the Spanish-speaking actors were themselves immigrants in real life.

With this in mind, we're brought again to the intersection of marginalisation where the imposed difference between outsider and insider can become a symbol of commonality, asking the questions "When to blend in? When to stick out? When to assimilate? When to rebel?" This further subversion was largely inspired by the sensibilities of queer underground icons such as Jack Smith, Mario Montez and José Rodríguez-Soltero, who often utilised a Latin kitsch that Hélio Oiticica termed "Tropicamp"[3]. While the cultural gap between the queer art scene of 1960s New York and Latin American immigrants who were overwhelmingly Catholic might have seemed insurmountable, a certain solidarity of the disenfranchised did exist.

Just as the classic telenovela can be, according to writer Pablo Helguera, "a collective catharsis for those class issues never confronted in real life", *Desde el Jardín* pushes catharsis beyond class and into the realms of sexuality and gender, as well as immigration.

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[3] See Juan A. Suárez, "Jack Smith, Hélio Oiticica, Tropicalism." *Criticism* 56, no. 2 (2014): 295-328.