

LA CASA DE OLGA / THE HOUSE OF OLGA

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While experimental cinema often promises to offer new ways of seeing, the cinema of Alexandra Gelis provides new ways of listening and new forms of solidarity. Through personal cinema, film poets present new visions to the world, allowing others access to their subjective gaze. Gelis's work challenges this notion by asking us to think beyond consciousness as an individual's first-person perspective. Instead her work orients us towards communal consciousness and interconnectivity, both human and non-human. While faces tell stories, what stories do the individuals behind these faces tell? Given that we only have limited access to the experience of others, it is through storytelling and collective experience that we are able to relate to another person's subjective reality. Gelis's work is a gesture away from first-person experience and towards a third-person experiment.

Exhibit A: CONVERsalón was started by Gelis and Jorge Lozano as a way of disseminating contemporary art outside of traditional gallery spaces. The series usually takes place in their living room and the title is derived from the Spanish word *conversar*, meaning "to talk." The work exhibited is an entry point, a framing device—it offers a way to communally think through ideas, concepts, and politics. It is not a singular vision, but a collective dialogue. The work is there to facilitate this conversation and, since it is impossible to think on an empty

stomach, delicious meals are lovingly prepared by the hosts for each event. These gatherings are an experiment in solidarity and communal consciousness. Each guest is treated with the same respect that is traditionally reserved for the artist (and other celebrity guests).

Exhibit B: *The House of Olga* is a video documenting Olga Leticia's house, an open-air space beside the ruins of an old church in Panama City. Gelis's camera does more than simply bear witness to Leticia's living situation; it listens to her without judgment. As Leticia reveals, "They don't understand it. Everybody thinks I live in bad conditions. They ask, How can you live like this?" She replies to this hypothetical question with a grin and a shrug: "I just let them talk. I keep quiet." If Gelis had simply bore witness, one might perceive Leticia as a "poor woman" living in "bad conditions." But because Gelis actively listens, we begin to understand Leticia's situation and see her strength, resilience, defiance, and independence.

