Embracing a variety of literary and cinematic references, Marco Rios’s interdisciplinary practice explores themes of film noir, paranoia, death, and delirium. For Street Views, Rios presents his recent work, At Loulou’s Door, on CAM’s exterior facade. Rios’s hauntingly beautiful video reinterprets Gustave Flaubert’s 1877 novella Un coeur simple, taking the influential French writer’s work as its point of departure.

Flaubert’s text tells the story of Félicité, a devoutly spiritual and altruistic servant who remains unwaveringly virtuous despite a life characterized by sorrowful events. The reader learns of Loulou, Félicité’s pet parrot and sole companion, with whom the protagonist holds a complex relationship: “At church, she always contemplated the Holy Spirit and noticed that it had a look of the parrot.” Flaubert concludes his text with Félicité on her deathbed, where she “believed she saw, in the heavens as they opened, a gigantic parrot flying above her head.”

Filmed in real time, Rios’s video references Flaubert’s heartbreaking short story. The symbol of the parrot was influential to Flaubert and Rios, serving as a muse for both artists. Loulou assumes the role of the Holy Spirit in both the novella—as a literary allegory—and in Rios’s work—as an image projected upon the Museum, perched high above the heads of passersby. The parrot, displayed at a disquieting monumental scale, transcends its literal and corporeal existence, and can be understood instead as a symbolic and omnipresent being. By forgoing any form of visual narrative, Rios compresses the viewer’s experience of his work into a ceaseless loop of Loulou’s slow and anxious movements. As the parrot becomes a surrogate for a multitude of spiritual and existential concerns, its deadpan depiction pervades the work with a sense of the uncanny.
Marco Rios (b. 1975, Los Angeles) lives and works in Los Angeles. He received his BFA from Otis College of Art and Design and his MFA from the University of California, Irvine. Recent exhibitions include Simon Preston, New York, LA><ART, Los Angeles, and, with Kara Tanaka, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. He was also included in Let Them Eat LACMA at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, This is Killing Me at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, and the 2008 California Biennial at the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach.

Marco Rios: At Loulou’s Door is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Jeffrey Uslip, Chief Curator.

Special thanks to Pulitzer Arts Foundation.

Related Programs

Public Reception
Friday, January 16, 7:00–9:00 pm
Join us to celebrate Marco Rios: At Loulou’s Door and the opening the spring exhibition season.

Member Book Club: A Simple Heart
Thursday, April 2, 6:00 pm
Chosen by exhibiting artist Marco Rios, Gustave Flaubert’s 1877 novella, A Simple Heart, follows the life of servant girl Félicité and her parrot, Loulou, who is the inspiration for Rios’s work At Loulou’s Door.

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