



DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

The ways in which the books *I Love Dick*, *Letters from a Peruvian Woman*, *Letters from a Portuguese Nun*, and *I'm Very Into You* use the epistolary format have made me notice different methods of narrating and structuring ideas. These texts have led me to reconsider the weight of descriptiveness in contemporary culture. Description, often via precise object labels by artists like Cameron Rowland, Teresa Margolles, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, is the way intent, context, and values are best expressed.

VIDEO MAIL

AMAME, the Archivo de la Memoria Audiovisual de la Migración Ecuatoriana, is an organization that collects “video-letters” recorded by Ecuadorian families. In the 1990s, this type of correspondence was widely popular in immigrant communities. The camcorder videos document both everyday life and special events: family meals, beach excursions, toy assembly instructions from a father to his son. Social media, smart phones, and messaging apps have probably made this form of communication extinct.

MATERNAL CONNECTION

News from Home (1977), one of Chantal Akerman's earliest short films, shows places in New York where the Belgian artist spent time earlier that decade, when she was in her early twenties and living in the city. For the voice-over, Akerman reads the letters that her mother sent her during those years, messages that vacillate between banal and poignant—reporting that someone in town got married, asking whether her daughter is OK, saying she's sent a remittance with the letter, and that she is anxiously waiting for a response. I take *News from Home* as Akerman's belated answer.



Anicka Yi: *The Flavor Genome*, 2016, video, 22 minutes.

TRAVELOGUE

I am passionate about traveling, and have recently taken up hiking as a sport. These adventures have introduced me to the history of travel, expeditions, and field research. I'm also interested in contemporary research-based art by women, and the way female artists have overcome gendered limitations often associated with travel and exploration. At the moment, I am looking into work inspired by trips to the Amazon, and so watching everything from Hollywood films like *The Lost City of Z* (2017) to Anicka Yi's recent video in the Whitney Biennial.



Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy

The curator shares five recent insights with Ross Simonini.

For six years, beginning in 2011, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy was curator of contemporary art at the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, organizing projects in both Caracas and New York. Previously, she served as director of the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City and as a curator at Art in General in New York. On January 1, Hernández Chong Cuy begins a new position as the director of the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Travel and field research are essential components of Hernández Chong Cuy's work, and she aims to address immigration from many angles in curatorial projects planned for Rotterdam. Here, she discusses several artworks related to her ongoing interest in expeditions and the intimate art of correspondence.



Nicole Kidman and Robert Pattinson in *Queen of the Desert*, 2015.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Werner Herzog's *Queen of the Desert* (2015) is a kind of biopic of Gertrude Bell, an Englishwoman who traveled extensively in the Middle East at the turn of the twentieth century. She was a contemporary of Lawrence of Arabia, though a bit older, and possibly more sensible and brilliant—at least in my view. Few women in that era experienced a life anything like Bell's, or had so much political sway. I first learned about her while studying the lives of various artists and intellectuals who relocated to the desert at a critical point in their life.