

When Falling Feels Like Flying

Carlos Motta

November 22 — January 14



No one
bears witness
for the witness

These words, borrowed from the poet Paul Celan, appear at the start of *No One* (2025), Carlos Motta's new video and the emotional heart of his exhibition at mor charpentier. What does it mean to bear witness? Can a witness be more than a bystander? Is it enough to record and share what we see? How can we resist in meaningful ways? What if we are among those the government wants to disappear? Who bears witness for the witness?

After Celan's text fades, the artist appears in a tightly cropped closeup of his head and shoulders, surrounded by darkness. Over the course of forty-five minutes, Motta attempts to look straight ahead at the camera without blinking—an impossible task that turns his eyes bloodshot and watery, and at last brings him to tears. *No One* is a collaboration with the composer ELO, whose sorrowful soundtrack evokes the thrum of heavy machinery and the drone of an insect swarm or weapons of war, mixed with Motta's amplified breaths. Slowly, the sound swells into a symphony of melody and noise, before returning to the sparseness of a piano and a desolate horn. Fifteen minutes into the video, a distorted male voice begins enunciating a series of words—among them, equality, identity, inclusion, justice—which stutter, echo, and fade. These are the words banned from use in the US federal government under Trump.

When words are erased from a nation's vocabulary, people are erased as well: immigrant, LGBTQ, transgender, victim. If Everyman is the archetype for all members of society, then *No One* symbolizes those whom society excludes—the marginalized, the despised, the disappeared. While the video might appear to be a self-portrait, Motta here represents *No One*.

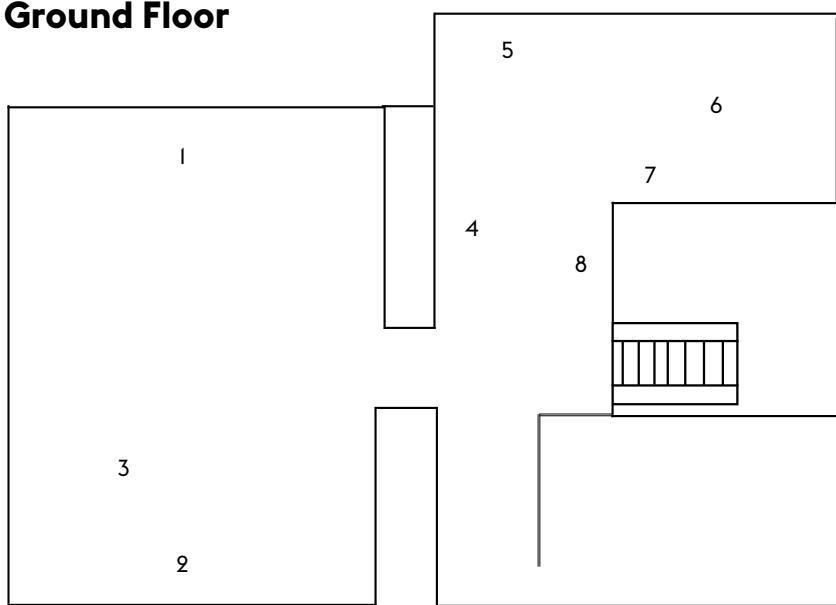
Installed in the same space as the video is a series of miniature sculptures, which lends its name to the exhibition. Each work in *When Falling Feels Like Flying* (2025), just five centimeters tall and cast in silver with emerald inserts—speaking to Colombia's violent history of extraction—consists of a pair of figures. One person stands while holding the full weight of the second: draped across the erect figure's shoulders, hanging by arms or legs, or carried in front like an offering or pietà. It is a burden never abandoned, transformed into an eternal embrace.

The second room of the gallery contains recent photography and drawing, dating from 2019 and 2021. With references to the history of poetry and art—Dante's deviance from the straight path, Goya's depiction of brutal discipline, Mapplethorpe's mirror onto pleasure and pain—these works present Motta's earlier formal and conceptual explorations of self-portraiture and visibility, transgression and punishment, recuperation and resistance. A new sculpture, *El Auto de Fe* (2025), is positioned in the center of the space. Made from ceramic painted the blackest of blacks, it is another portrayal of *No One*, burned alive by the Inquisition for "sins of the flesh." All that remains are charred pieces: feet engulfed in flames that curl like locks of hair; a peaked cap engraved with demons; a rosary with the devil on a burning crucifix; two hands connected by rope, fists raised as if in a final act of defiance.

Tracing a vicious lineage of expulsion and elimination through to today, Motta continually shifts from witness to subject and back again. We are all joined in this eternal embrace; sometimes we bear the weight, and sometimes we are borne by others. In truth, there is no third position—except to look away. Here Motta presents us with a moral imperative in the face of cruelty: to endure, to resist, to confront, and, ultimately, to protect one another.

— Nikki Columbus

Ground Floor



1. No One, 2025

In collaboration with ELO
Video projection, color, sound
46:31 min.

2. No One, 2025

5 drawings
Graphite and paint on paper
25,4 x 20,3 cm each

3. When Falling Feels Like Flying, 2025

5 miniature sculptures
Silver and emeralds, plexiglas bases
on wooden plinths
ca. 130 x 18 x 18 cm

4. Modo de volar (A Way of Flying), 2021

5 drawings
Graphite and paint on paper
29 x 22 cm each

5. Untitled #2 (from Midway upon the Journey of Our Life I Found Myself within a Forest Dark / For the Forward Pathway Had Been Lost), 2019

Archival inkjet print on paper
114,3 x 76,2 cm

6. El Auto de Fe (Homme qui va être brûlé par arrest de l'Inquisition), 2025

Painted ceramic on two wooden plinths,
paint on fabric
Variable dimensions

7. Self-Portrait with Whip (after Robert Mapplethorpe's Self-Portrait with Whip, 1978), 2019

Archival inkjet print on paper
61 x 51 cm

8. Descubriendo el nuevo mundo, 2024

Archival inkjet print on paper
112 x 62 cm