

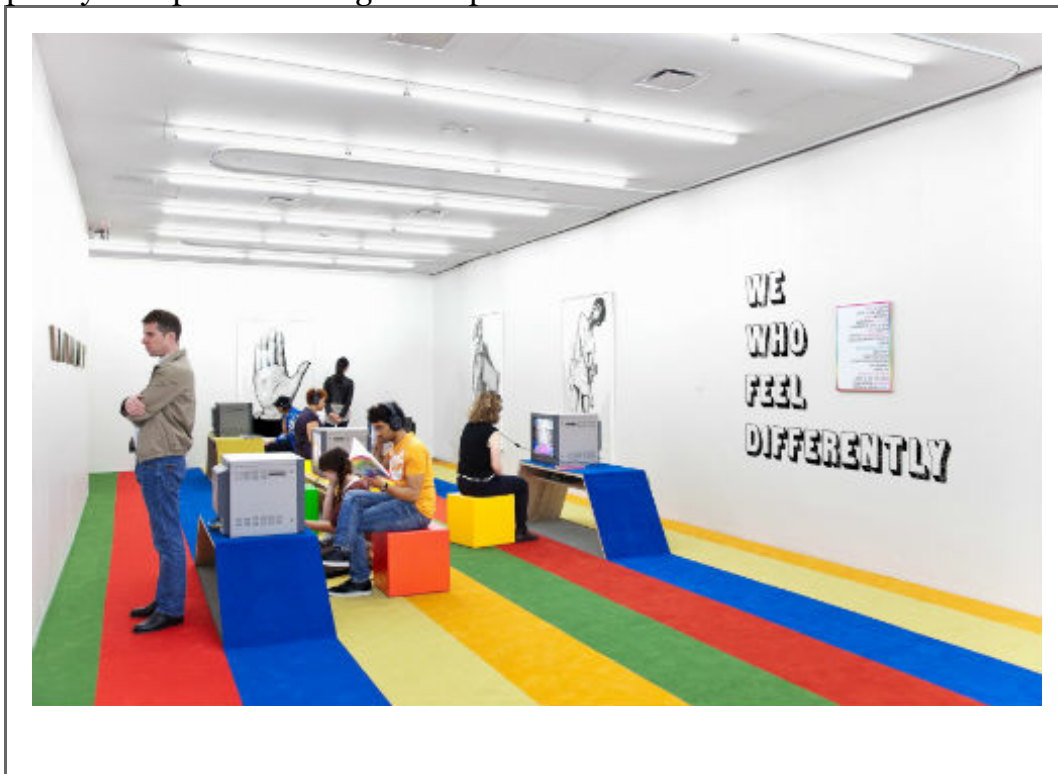
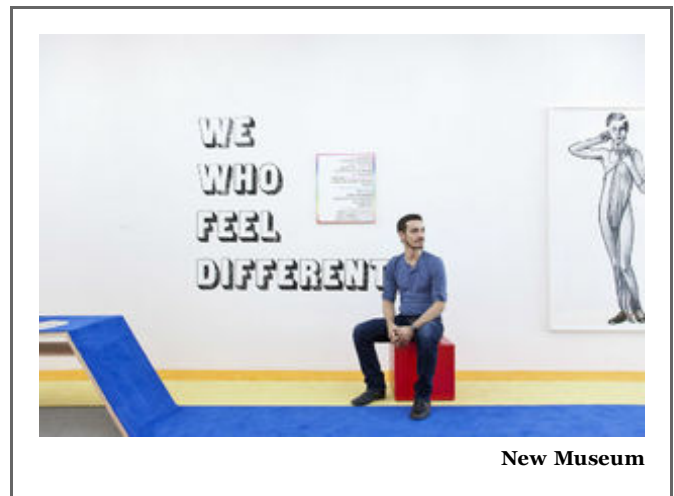


# Carlos Motta, Artist, On 'We Who Feel Differently' and Obama's Gay Marriage Stance

By Araceli Cruz

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When it comes to discussing LGBT rights, multidisciplinary artist [Carlos Motta](#) has a lot to say on the matter. The Colombian-born artist draws upon "political history in an attempt to create counter narratives that recognize the inclusion of suppressed histories, communities, identities and ideologies" in his pieces. His work has been exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum, MOMA/PS1, Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Museo de Arte del Banco de la República in Bogotá, among several others. His latest show "[We Who Feel Differently](#)," at the [New Museum](#), explores the idea of sexual and gender "difference" within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer community via a series of sculptures, prints, interactive forums, and a video installation based on 50 interviews with academics, artists, politicians, and researchers. Motta's mission isn't just about tolerance; rather, he looks ahead to a "concept of equality that provides for greater personal freedom."





**Village Voice:** What first sparked the idea behind "We Who Feel Differently?"

**Carlos Motta:** When I first started, I wanted to create an archive to document how different countries have been implementing policy and how that activism reflects in the culture and how it affects our lives, and the discrepancies. For example, there are some places in which the culture is very repressive but the legislation is very advanced or the other way around. So as I started interviewing people, I realized there was not one singular LGBT policy or idea, but that it was something much more complicated and much more fraught with nuances.

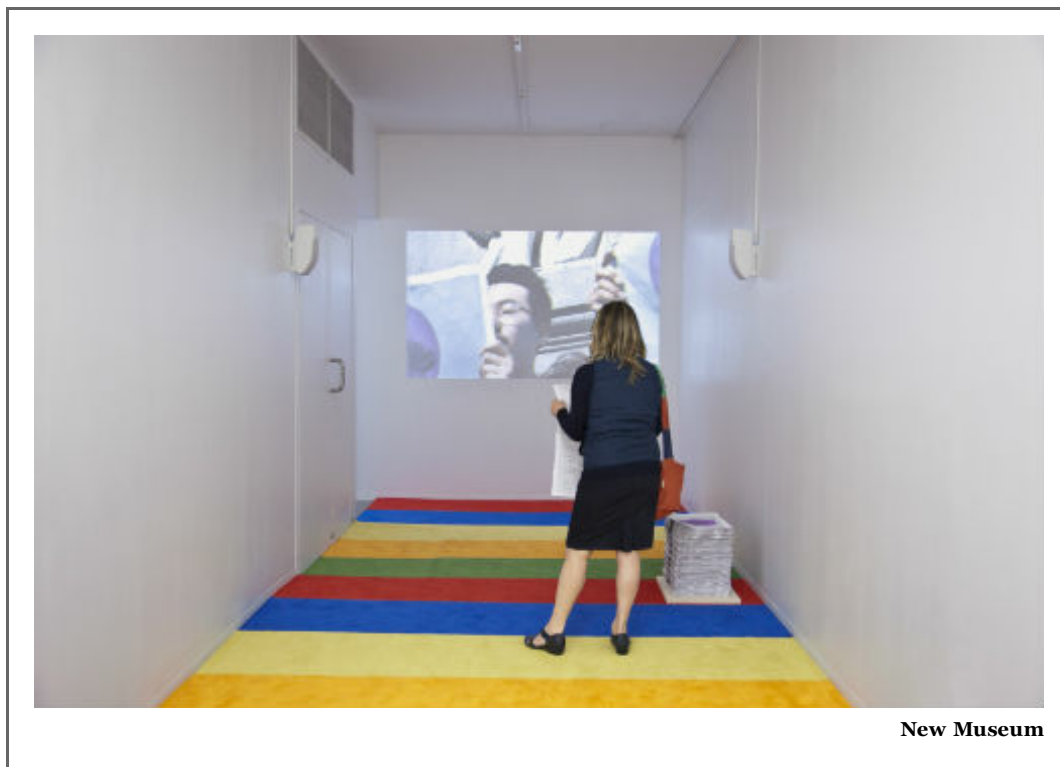
So I started to think about shifting the focus of this project and towards recuperating some of the discourses around gay and lesbian and trans rights that have gotten lost, and the new liberalizations and the sexual movements the rapid decline of this idea of sexual liberation in very radical terms that came to be in the late 1960s and '70s towards a much more moderate approach that is looking more towards assimilating to the already existing frameworks and institutions like marriage, the military -- just to speak of the United States, etc., as opposed to wanting to challenge a more systematic ways of the larger system.

It archives a wide spectrum of people's work and ideas from activists to medical doctors to academics and so on. At the same time, my weaving of this work trying to resurface the concept of difference -- hence the name, as opposed to the idea of equality, which is the dominant discourse of LGBT politics internationally today.

**VV:** In your show, you confront "difference" head on. The notion of celebrating the differences *instead of* fighting for equality can be seen as an extreme concept, and definitely not one you hear within the gay rights discourse

**Motta:** It's interesting you say that because during one of the symposiums, a few of our speakers were reflecting upon the title of this project and the word 'differently' as opposed to "different." And they were speaking on the idea of feeling "differently' and the 'l-y' as the political dimension of that feeling. So, in other words, I do not just feel different but differently, and implying that there is some kind of political poster to that position. And that is something that I really feel strongly about.

When I was constructing this project, one of the things that was really important to me was thinking beyond individual identity politics. Beyond sitting here and confessing to my sister, my friend, or my mother that I am gay, and that is who I am, and you have to tolerate me. Like this kind of 'please accept me' as opposed to saying 'you know what, I can see the world in a way that you can't, and the way that I see it is actually really great so you should come on the ride with me.'



**VV:** Aside from the informative aspect of this project, explain the style and overall look of the show.

**Motta:** The aesthetic component to the show is the entry point to it, and the people have responded to it really, really, well. It's a welcoming space. It is a space that invites them to spend time here. I have been receiving emails from people who have spend two or three hours here watching the videos.

**VV:** This exhibition also features a few large scale illustrated portraits featuring a couple of recognizable figures from the Mexican board game [La Loteria](#).

**Motta:** They are emblems of the project. They are very reductive in a sense, but in a positive way. What I wanted to do was kind of collapse the different things that are discussed in the project. Like the one of the androgynous figure. You would perhaps respond to this as a 'she' but it could also be a 'he.' And if you notice it has one exposed breast, but the other breast that is exposed is actually flat. And it also has some sort of a bulge but it also [wears] a very soft drape falling over its body. So I wanted to suggest this non- normative, non-dichotomous figures.

The 'Hand' [illustration] from La Loteria has been queered. I don't know if you noticed this, but in the bottom of the suit is a little heart. I wanted to imply this idea of motive, or sexual citizenship. Because the 'Hand,' even in the context of La Loteria it implies a presence of citizenship.

**VV:** Thoughts on President Barack Obama's approval of gay marriage?

**Motta:** I think have too many comments.

**VV:** For example?

**Motta:** I don't want to be too confrontational

**VV:** Please, by all means, it's the Voice!

**Motta:** I feel that while it is a milestone in the history of the world because the United States being such a strong hegemonic power, to have a head of state such as Obama support the idea of gay

inclusion to the existing systems. So I do think that is something very rare that should be celebrated. Now, of course, things are not that simple. So I think Obama's advisers are very much part of the mainstream -- very politically savvy, strategizing the discourse on LGBT rights. The discourse that promotes this idea of equality based on what queer theorists would call 'An Assimilationist Discourse.' It is the idea that we, LGB, really just LGB because T in this discourse is very different, that we LGB are the same as you, we feel just like you, and hence we deserve the same rights.

Obama's political discourse is very much influenced by that logic. And while I find that to be somewhat positive at the same time I feel that it's very troubling and very problematic, because what he is promoting, kind of hiding behind this idea of equality, is that there isn't such a thing as equality. Because in order for you to be granted the rights that any human being should have despite of their sexual gender, identity, or orientation, is that you can only be granted those rights if you conform to the existing norms that determine the way that we are supposed to be understood as citizens. And this is what I was troubled by, that you have to be monogamous, and you have to be committed. [He said something like](#) 'I've been noticing that my friends *can* be monogamous and committed.' And hence '*should* be allowed to marry'. So it's a very hetero-normative way of thinking of relationships, and I find that very troubling.

It is a discourse that gives predominantly a focus on marriage as a singular and most important issue of gay rights, which is to some, but it is disproportionately prioritized.

So, we live in a country in which millions of dollars are given to organizations that are fighting to achieve equality of rights that iare marriage and inclusion in the military. But we also live in a country in which HIV research is stalled in many ways; in which minorities of color, or immigrant queer minorities don't have access to any rights whatsoever; imprisoned minorities continue to be relegated, discriminated within the prison system.

So, that is to say, the focus of the movement is servicing a very elitist movement, and I think that is very troubling. Of course I cannot expect, one day to the other, the President of the United States to come out and advocate for the rights of every black, trans, women of color in the prisons, though I *would* expect my President to, you know, support [these causes]...so that's something that is not easy. It's a very troubling position. So yes, thumbs up in some cases, but no, thumbs down in other ways to that discourse.

*Upcoming events in conjunction with "We Who Feel Differently." Exhibition ends September 9 at the [New Museum, 235 Bowery](#).*

[June 7: "Jeannine Tang and Reina Gossett: Love Revolution, Not State Collusion"](#)

[June 21: "Against Equality: Don't Ask to Fight Their Wars"](#)

[July 12: "Jared Gilbert: Liberation Theologies for Secular Society"](#)

[July 19: "QUEEROCRACY: 30 Years In, 30 Years Out: AIDS Activism Today"](#)

[September 6: "Carlos Motta and friends: Collective Reading"](#)

[\[ACruz\]](#) [\[@chelipj\]](#)

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