

Coco Fusco at The Project

For an exhibition called "Buried Pig with Moros," Coco Fusco assembled various documents and artifacts pertaining to the treatment of Islamic insurgents, known as Moros and also as *juramentados*, who resisted the U.S. occupation of the Philippines in the early part of the 20th century. (Not cited by Fusco, though certainly part of the subject's current relevance, is the notorious use there of waterboarding.)

The exhibition gets its piquant title from another shamefully pertinent bit of abuse said to have occurred at the time. A letter of 1911 from General "Blackjack" Pershing to an unnamed colleague, printed on the wall, reads in part, "It has long been custom to bury *juramentados* with pigs when they kill Americans. This I think a good plan, for if anything will discourage the *juramentado* it is the prospect of going to hell rather than heaven." Fusco also presents an excerpt from a 1939 film starring Gary Cooper in which a Filipino insurgent, so bestially strong as to be unstoppable by bullets, is reduced to abject terror by being threatened with burial alongside a pig's skin. Other documented villainy is less imaginative. In one of several postcards of dead insurgents displayed in a vitrine—they are very much like American lynching postcards of the era—a severed head lies on the ground, with the phrase "Head of Moro Outlaw" hand-lettered next to it, along with the Malaysian word "amok."

Also shown was an 18-minute audio and PowerPoint presentation (2008) based on what seems to be an actual 2005 lecture on interrogation techniques

delivered by a former Special Forces member; Fusco found it on Wikileaks. With Dale Carnegie-worthy enthusiasm, a male narrator recites, off-screen, the preferred method for handling a terrorist suspect in custody. On-screen, as in a bullet-pointed corporate presentation, are key words from the lecture, though the highlighted terms—Torture, Truth Serum, The Pleasure of Pain—are not necessarily those that the original speaker would have chosen. After dispensing with common stumbling blocks ("the Geneva Convention was not signed by any terrorist group") and misconceptions ("Fallacy #1: torture never works"), the speaker arrives at a discussion of various drugs that may loosen inhibition and promote confession; his clear preference, though, is for the spinal injection of Scopolamine, in amounts calculated to cause excruciating pain. Even if the lecture's source is hard to corroborate, its credibility alone makes the point.

In a recent undertaking, the subject of a newly published book as well as a movie shown at the Whitney Biennial, Fusco hired professional (i.e., allegedly ex-military) interrogators to test her, and several other female volunteers, against the rigors of abusive questioning. The women who broke down in this simulation—four out of seven—are shown, in the movie, humiliated and in tears; Fusco herself is mostly seen smirking. The deep

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confusion revealed by her evident pleasure in this triumph (at her colleagues' expense) remains unexamined. By contrast, the new work at The Project, in which Fusco—uncharacteristically—stays out of the picture, is clear and bluntly forceful.

—Nancy Princenthal

Image from Coco Fusco's re-creation of a 2005 lecture by Dr. Larry Forness, 2008, audio recording and PowerPoint presentation, 18 minutes; at The Project.



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