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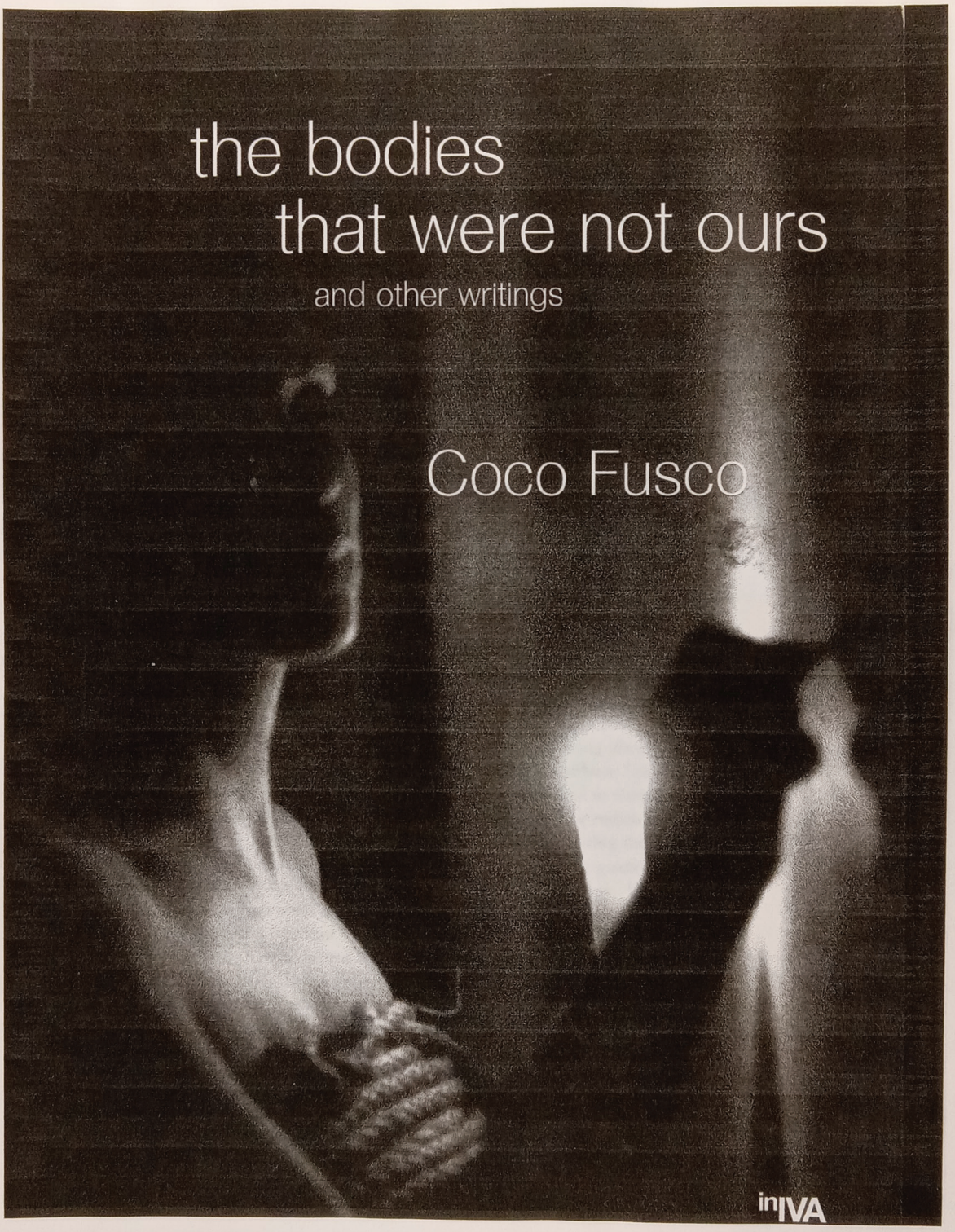

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THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHTINESS OF BEINGS

Art in Mexico after NAFTA[1]



Death is a mirror which reflects the vain
gesticulations of the living.
Octavio Paz
The Labyrinth of Solitude

When I arrived in Mexico City in the summer of 1994, just six months after the Free Trade Agreement went into effect and the Zapatistas launched the first indigenously based, electronically savvy revolution, there were two conversations I remember hearing at every gathering. One was about the eloquent letters appearing in the press by Subcomandante Marcos that were making the *damas* in the wealthy neighborhoods of the capital swoon. Many people I spoke to were impressed that news of the rebels' occupation of San Cristobal had reverberated around the world, and this had given them hope that real political changes were imminent. Intellectuals and artists were preparing to journey to Chiapas for the first *Encuentro* that *El Sub* had convened to strengthen support for the rebels' demands and to elaborate a critique of neoliberal policies' effect on Mexico's poor.

The other conversation was about an exhibition that was taking place at the Museo Carrillo Gil that featured dead animals. Ensconced in the affluent San Angel neighborhood in the south of the city, the museum was dedicated to showcasing contemporary art, but it did not have a reputation for taking risks or embracing the macabre. I joined a group of friends who were attending a gathering there one afternoon, and can remember being overwhelmed by the smells that greeted me as I entered the main gallery area and made my way up the ramps. Wafts of formaldehyde and a faint scent of putrescent flesh floated through the air.

The exhibit by the Mexican artists' collective SEMEFO, entitled ***Lavatio Corporis***, began with a reproduction of a José Clemente Orozco painting that lay in a box parallel to the floor. In the center of the image was the head of a fallen horse pointed vertically upward, framed by the slain rider's pierced palm and head. Beyond the reproduction was a rusted carousel with three preserved colts chained and suspended above a bed of spikes. Next to the carousel were three metal rings set above eye level, each containing a preserved horse fetus that was visibly desiccating. Further into the gallery were six lucite blocks arranged in a descending row, each holding a sliced section of a horse's head. Finally, at the rear of the gallery were two older dead horses, each shackled to metal constructions reminiscent of torture paraphernalia. One horse was splayed out on all fours, while the other was held up with his head thrown backward and his rear legs chained wide apart.

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When I have spoken of this exhibition to American and European friends, they invariably think of Damien Hirst and his lifeless shark, lambs, and split pigs. But Hirst's animals are exhibited under glass, like specimens in a science display. SEMEFO's horses, on the other hand, were exposed to the elements in the museum, their poses suggest scenarios of pleasure and pain, and their oxidizing frames recalled the instruments of the Inquisition. Whereas Hirst's composition evokes the hyperrationalist world of the laboratory, SEMEFO's theatre of death invokes Catholicism's embrace of suffering as the performative imitation of Christ.

One could argue that Hirst's choices of animals carry specific symbolic meanings in the context of Britain, but SEMEFO's horses definitely demand a reading in relation to Mexican national allegory. The Orozco reference at the onset of the exhibition set the wheels of such an interpretation in motion. The title of the painting, "**Los Teules**," was the epithet the Aztecs used to denigrate the Spanish conquistadors, and the horse is a well-known icon of colonialism. Here the symbols of mastery are rendered abject, as corpses whose subjugation has not ended with their death. I have sifted through memories of this exhibition for years, and with each effort to reckon with the complicated sentiments it aroused, I see more clearly how SEMEFO offered a prescient commentary on Mexico's condition at the onset of the country's entry into the global economic order.

SEMEFO's name is an acronym for Servicio Médico Forense, or Forensic Medical Service, a term they borrow from the actual state agency that manages the transfer of unclaimed bodies to the country's many morgues. Over the past decade, the art group has elaborated a series of installations, performances, and videos involving the corpses of human beings and other animals. Their works delve into the mushrooming culture of violence that has transformed urban life in the capital and in the northern cities that host the country's drug trade. Recasting creativity as an analysis of human remains, they present themselves as pathologists and morticians who tend to the ruins of a dysfunctional social organism. To grasp the significance of their creative endeavors, one must take into account how neoliberalism (i.e. globalization) affects both their country and their practice as artists.

Globalization is usually defined as an economic system in which the international circulation of information supplants nation-based industry as the primary source of wealth. It is characterized by the free flow of goods across borders; the dispersal of manufacture to export processing zones in different parts of the third world; the drastic reduction of government involvement in industries and services; and the rise of the multinational corporations whose assets surpass those of several nation-states.[2] Parallel to these developments, the artworld has reorganized itself around a string of global exhibitions managed by a network of itinerant curators from different parts of the planet. A series of moves by these arbiters and their artists have shifted the thematic focus on work from the periphery from the *politics* to the *marketing* of location. Several historical exhibitions mounted during this period have rewritten various chapters of modernism to posit that movement as a global rather than strictly

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European or American phenomenon, as if to cry out to the world that modernity was always already everywhere. These changes have contributed to the growth of high-art tourism, as artworld professionals globe-trot in search of the avant-garde's every permutation. And, at the same time, as pure information becomes the stock market's most prized commodity, ephemeral art and new media have become the hottest genres on the global art circuit.

Mexico's transition to a neoliberal economic order has been particularly tumultuous. Its proximity to the US has turned Mexicans into the shock troops of free trade. But the changes are also difficult because the country was managed for seven decades as a one-party state in which the PRI or Institutional Revolutionary Party exercised almost total control over the economic, social, and cultural life of the citizenry. While privatization may signify increasing efficiency in management of the country's resources to many, it also entails the dismantling of state operated social services and agrarian reform, a move that has greatly imperiled Mexico's vast underclass, which cannot afford the alternatives offered by the private sector.

Mexican society is regularly described as tied to the past, to family, memory, and tradition. Translated into economics, this actually means that most Mexicans are less voracious consumers, are more likely to engage in non-commercial social activity and to rely on kin or minimally remunerated and unregulated live-in servants for domestic labor. Current neoliberal policies promote increased dependence on consumer goods and service industries, which Mexico's overwhelmingly poor population can access only minimally, if at all. Mexico's capital and border cities are bloated by a continuous flow of poor people who abandon rural areas to go to the urban centers in search of ways to insert themselves into an increasingly money-driven social order. Mexico City, the most populous urban center in the world, with more than 20 million inhabitants, is doubly invaded, by American chain stores and a floating army of chronically under- and unemployed countrymen. The more the poor occupy public space, the more the rich barricade themselves behind gates, elaborate alarms systems, and private security forces.

What further exacerbated the difficulties of the transition was the wild financial speculation that preceded NAFTA. From 1989 until 1994 under President Salinas, Mexico attracted $70 billion dollars in foreign investments. Only 10 percent of this actually made its way into the economy, while the rest went into stocks and bonds.[3] Twenty-four billionaires emerged in Mexico during this period, and around them a new technocratic elite with high-end consumerist habits. At the end of the Salinas presidency, after the assassination of favored candidate Luis Donaldo Colossio and revelations of corruption that linked the president to the drug trade, the Mexican stock market collapsed, the peso suffered its third devaluation since 1982, and the country's middle class and poor were decimated. Though the Clinton administration did organize a bail-out that tied Mexico to yet another round of austerity measures, a steady flow of Mexicans have ventured northward across the border in search of any means of survival.

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While other crises, from earthquakes to the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco, generated swift and direct responses from artists in the past, the recent art from Mexico City that has received the most support, media coverage, and international attention has evinced the most attenuated forms of social commentary, or avoided it altogether. (I am here thinking of such artists as Gabriel Orozco, Francis Alys, Miguel Calderon, Melanie Smith, and Yishai Judisman.) As part of a break with a long history of promoting indigenist populism, art promotion in the wake of NAFTA has been directed toward inserting younger more experimental artists into the international art market, forging collaborations with American foundations and the private sector, and promoting a more modern image of Mexican culture. The brash contradictions that mark everyday life are visible only intermittently as decorative detail in most art of the post-NAFTA era, despite the heated debates in the Mexican press about globalization, maquiladoras, political corruption, the drug trade, and the Zapatistas.

Curators acting as brokers during this period have helped to redefine these priorities. That post-NAFTA spirit is evident, for example, in the apolitical character of featured art projects selected for San Diego–Tijuana's "In Site", the "border biennial." The more confrontational, locally based political art that put that region on the artworld map in the 1980s combined human rights activism, radical pedagogy, and experimental and public art strategies, and was resolutely anti-institutional. "In Site," on the other hand, has domesticated border art by suppressing proposals that touch on controversial subjects and by separating work into low-profile community projects on the one hand and international artists' showcases that are readily consumed by the arts media on the other.

While it is undeniable that many artists are entirely complicit with these reworked mandates, the increasingly powerful artworld arbiters do play a pivotal role in the shift. One Mexican critic and curator who spoke on a panel with me in Madrid in 1997 suggested that Mexican artists were better off leaving politics to the comic talents of the artisans who each day devised new modes of caricaturing corrupt leaders. Another curator averred to me in an interview during this period that he was tired of artists who became famous as "vampires of misery," referring to avant-gardes of the 1960s and 1970s. What was consistently clear to me from conversations I had with the new protagonists of Mexico City's art scene in the wake of NAFTA was that neoformalism was the strategy of choice. It made them more attractive candidates for the global art market, and it made them look and feel anti-statist, and therefore modern. The children of the new technocratic elite are attending art schools in the US and Europe, and are absorbing the lessons of the backlash against identity politics, which they interpret in relation to the seventy-year PRI project of state-supported populism that so many have learned to vilify.

In the midst of an arts milieu such as the one I have described in Mexico City, SEMEFO and Santiago Sierra stand out as countervailing forces. These artists offer key critical visions of the social and political situation of the country. Santiago Sierra

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has focused on the degradation of human labor as a symptom of social malaise, while SEMEFO concentrates of the culture of violence in the overblown metropolis. Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), though not based in Mexico City, could be considered as a parallel force to the aforementioned artists, operating within the virtual sphere. Pointing to President Zedillo's hypocritical dealings with the EZLN and the peoples of Chiapas, EDT directs its internet actions against the Mexican government web site as a virtual embodiment of the state. I would like to consider some of these artists' projects in detail here, as I believe they comprise a crucial link between older forms of avant-garde interventions and new aesthetic and political strategies for the global era.

Santiago Sierra is a Spanish artist who has lived in Mexico City for the past five years. Though several of his more recent projects have been carried out abroad, Mexico City's urban landscape is the laboratory in which Sierra concocts his experiments. Like many Americans and other Europeans who arrive in Mexico City with fresh eyes, Sierra was taken by just how visible the social contradictions were in the city center where he settled. Walking out of his apartment onto the streets of the Centro Histórico, he is confronted by Precolombian, colonial, and modern architecture, extreme wealth and wrenching poverty, the most ancient cultural expressions existing side by side with pirated versions of the latest Disney characters. Most daunting of all is the sheer number of people, the presence of masses of humanity that bears down on the city with an astounding intensity. No urban experience in a European or American city is comparable. "*Es que somos muchos*!" (it's just that there are many of us!) Mexican friends often say to me when they lack concrete explanations for failures in social engineering.

Sierra calls upon the services of others and makes a public display of their work. His pieces have taken place in alternative spaces, galleries, and museums. He purposely selects or offers employment to individuals from the most marginalized sectors of the cities in which he works; among the participants in his projects there have been petty criminals, prostitutes, drug addicts, unemployed day laborers, and undocumented foreigners. The actions Sierra requests others to perform are repetitive, often nonsensical, and even humiliating. People have been asked to sit under huge boxes, to hold up walls, to stand still in a hall for hours, or to allow their bodies to be permanently marked. The artist makes a point of paying his participants and sets their fees slightly above the day rate that comparable workers in non-art situations would receive. The amount of payment is noted in the documentation of the works, as are other details about the tasks performed. All information is presented in the cool, matter-of-fact tone associated with minimalism. Consider, for example, some of Sierra's titles: ***30cm Line Tattooed on a Remunerated Person***, ***A Person Remunerated for Remaining in the Trunk of a Car***, or ***A Removed Gallery, Inclined at 60 degrees from the Floor and Held by Five People***.

Sierra is not the first or the only artist to involve others as bodies, props or laborers in the creation of an artwork. In 1968, Oscar Bony of Argentina put a worker

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Sierra's two actions to date in Cuba have underscored how, in a burgeoning dollar-driven economy organized around tourism, the island's inhabitants can make more selling themselves than working in any trade for which they may have been trained. For ***250 cm Line Tattooed on Remunerated Persons*** (El Espacio Aglutinador, January 1999), Sierra paid $30 each to six unemployed mulatto men from Old Havana to stand shoulder to shoulder and have a line tattooed across their backs. In November 2000, Sierra returned to Havana during the biennial to present ***Santiago Sierra Invites You for a Drink***. He called on the international art tourists to join him on the roof garden of a local artist's home. The foreign guests were invited to sit on three long wooden boxes that served as benches, each of which contained and concealed a Cuban sex worker who was being paid $30.



Santiago Sierra
Person Remunerated for Cleaning Shoes of Attendees to an Opening Without their Consent (performance, photograph) 2000
Photo courtesy of the artist

Sierra's work throws into relief the harsh realities that many artworld globe-trotters prefer to elide on their junkets and in their exhibitions. While I find the local controversies surrounding his work to be quite telling, I hardly find them hard-hitting. Having witnessed some of Sierra's actions and having had the opportunity to speak to the participants, I do not come away with the impression that they see

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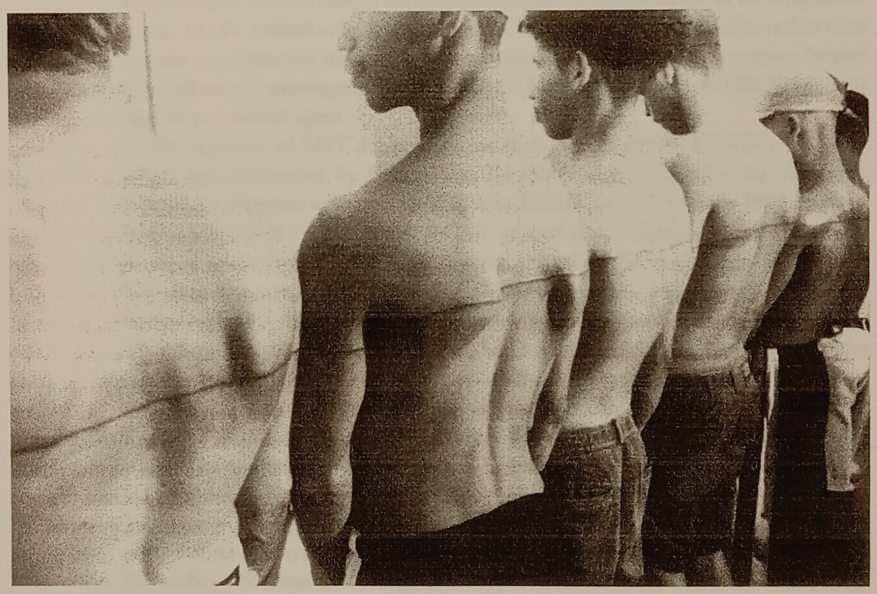
themselves as exploited. That notwithstanding, Sierra's current popularity in Europe may be leading him into situations that could jeopardize his work and even dilute its force as institutional critique. In the past year, Sierra has received invitations to present his work in Berlin, Madrid, Pusan, Paris, and New York, and some of these events have even been partially subsidized by the Mexican government. In accepting these invitations abroad, Sierra must rely more heavily on institutional support and relinquish some control over the selection of participants for his projects. The institutional structures he negotiates with often diminish the element of surprise he could use when operating independently. In some cases, advance notice produces a split audience in which some arrive to watch the others' reactions, to act as anthropologists, or to parody the behavior of a bourgeois *épaté*. These dangers are ones



Santiago Sierra
250 cm Line Tattooed on Remunerated Persons (performance, video, photograph), 1999
photo courtesy of the artist

that any artist working on the international circuit faces as s/he moves quickly from context to context. That nomadism makes it terribly difficult to form a protracted analysis or engagement with any social situation. In addition, mega-exhibition audiences are frequently dominated by equally nomadic professionals without a stake in the political context of event locales. As artists like Sierra attempt to transfer a set

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of issues from their own working environment in a developing country to a first-world arena, they face thrill-seeking audiences that consume the political drama of the periphery as spectacle.

During 1998 and 1999, Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT) offered a strategy for managing contemporary nomadism without relinquishing political intervention. Their virtual performance promoted "global citizenship" via the internet. The group's project was rooted politically in the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, but EDT's actual members are dispersed throughout the US; Ricardo Dominguez and Stefan Wray are in New York, Carmin Karasic in Boston, and Brett Stalbaum in San Jose. Through creative *détournement* of HTML software, EDT devised means of bringing civic dialogue to a domain that is increasingly dominated by consumerism. Giving the issues raised by the Zapatistas a global platform, in which people all over the world contribute to a debate about the civil and economic rights of an indigenous group, EDT established links across borders based on political solidarity rather than escapist identification with the indian as romantic "other." This discussion helped to transform the privileged signifier of official Mexican discourse, *el indio*, from silent symbol to political agent.

The activities of EDT derive from the theory of Electronic Civil Disobedience which was elaborated by Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), a collective of which Ricardo Dominguez was a member prior to founding EDT. In their 1995 essay on "Electronic Civil Disobedience," CAE argued that blockage and information dispersal were the key means of intervening politically in the virtual domain.[4] This idea was predicated on the notion that information is currency in the global economic order and that those who own it seek to block others' access to it. Therefore, argued CAE, subversion of the system lay in controlling institutions by blocking their information circuits, and democratizing the internet by rerouting information free of cost to the public. These strategies, according to CAE, blend the political radicalism of the old left with the technical expertise of new and transgressive, albeit apolitical, hackers. What EDT did was to develop the means for thousands of internet users to "block" the Mexican government's website as a gesture in support of the EZLN's demands that President Zedillo's government recognize indigenous rights. They created their actions in direct response to the December 1997 massacre of Zapatista supporters in Acteal, when forty-five women and children were killed by paramilitary forces.

EDT's virtual actions structurally altered the electronic embodiment of the Mexican state. They did so via an operation that they developed called FloodNet, a command that retools the usual "refresh" or "reload" button on a web server. Whereas under normal conditions a user would hit the "refresh" button to obtain updated information, FloodNet activates this command each time a user enters a site. In this sense, the server being acted upon "feels" the presence of the users. If several hundred or several thousand users activate this procedure simultaneously, it is unlikely that a server will be able to manage the entries and will thus be forced to

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shut down. In the course of a year, some 80,000 people participated in EDT's FloodNet actions. The virtual sit-ins did in fact shut down the Mexican government's official web site several times. That these mass occupations of the Mexican government's web site disabled its capacity to represent the country is an uncannily accurate metaphor for the PRI's dysfunctional relationship to the citizenry – the more people applied pressure the state to recognize their presence, the less able it was to maintain itself in operation.

FloodNet also makes structured *absences* on a web site intelligible. In addition to alerting the server to user presence, FloodNet offers a second upload function, enabling users to send information into the site. EDT programed FloodNet to continuously upload the names of the Acteal victims into the Mexican government web site, cognizant of the implications of the server's failure to recognize the dead. Users also have the option of manually uploading other information of their choice. For example, if users uploaded questions about human rights on the Mexican government site, the server's response would be a 404 file, which signifies that the server cannot locate any information on this subject. This also suggested that there was no space accorded to human rights on the server, which could be read as government resistance to the issue. Those uploaded requests, though unanswered, left a trace – of precisely what was left unanswered. Virtual sit-ins activated scores of requests for this kind of absent information, thus creating a record for the server of that information which it could not recognize. In this sense, FloodNet not only blocked and deterred, it also cast negative space.

That EDT would call its actions "theater" might seem odd, particularly because of what is actually visible on screen. A virtual sit-in participant will have received a call to action via the internet and may have imagined hundreds of collaborators, but sharing a physical space was not part of the experience; instead it was shared time and a consensual collective hallucination that constituted a group. These factors notwithstanding, EDT's Floodnet actions did follow a script, and they had a beginning, a middle, and an end. What appeared at the bottom of the screen was a row of vertical black lines moving up and down – a barometer of FloodNet activity, but hardly a mimetic representation of actions. EDT's theater is resolutely non-mimetic; instead, it operates in a manner similar to that of early conceptual art by such artists as Douglas Huebler, in that the effects of a textual description of something imagined resonated in the minds of its audience-participants without a realist representation serving as an intermediary. The difference was that what was "imagined" *did* actually happen, even though *what* happened was not visible to the agents of the action. Judging by EDT's impressive audience-participant numbers and the high rate of repeat-participants, it seems fair to argue that audience-participants' consciousness was indeed altered by their experience of virtual theater.

EDT's FloodNet actions also engendered a whirlwind of controversy among hackers. In tampering with software, EDT's activities resembled those of hackers; but unlike hackers, who operate surreptitiously, EDT acted in the open, announced

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its projects, introduced its members and invited collaboration. As a result, several hackers attacked EDT as "digitally incorrect" for their non-conformity to the unwritten principle of electronic subversion: secrecy above all. The reactions to EDT from the US Department of Defense and the Mexican government betray their difficulty in distinguishing between criminal activity and political action. EDT's transparency appears to have baffled the US military, which interpreted the theory and practice of "electronic civil disobedience" as a euphemism for cyberterrorism.

During EDT's swarm action against the Mexican government, the Pentagon and the Frankfurt Stock Exchange at the 1998 Ars Electronica New Media Festival in Linz, Austria, the Defense Information Systems Agency, a division of the US Department of Defense, launched a counter-offensive. Requests from EDT were redirected to a hostile applet that crashed the browsers and froze FloodNet. This constituted the first time the US had unleashed its electronic arsenal against a civilian organization, which, in the eyes of EDT members, violated the Posse Comitatus Law that forbids the US military from attacking American civilians. That attack came on the heels of telephoned threats to Dominguez from a Mexican who he identified as a government representative. One year later, in the wake of dozens of articles about this skirmish in the mainstream media, Domiguez and Wray were invited to Washington by a security consultant for the US military to exchange information about electronic warfare with the National Security Agency. The two EDT members gave a presentation on their activities and were subjected to hours of interrogation by the military about the future of electronic civil disobedience.

In the aftermath of the controversy over EDT's methods, other similar means of virtual intervention emerged that have led to moves by several governments to criminalize such activity. Since EDT distributed its Disturbance Developer Kits (DDK) in January 1999, Floodnet political actions have taken place around the world in support of such causes as ending the death penalty in the US and the dismantling of nuclear bombs in India. The tactics of Floodnet, however, continued to mutate. In 2000, major commercial servers such as Yahoo and America On Line were brought down by means of "distributed denial of service (DDoS)," a mechanism that enables one computer to perform even more potent flooding actions than EDT's Floodnet. These shutdowns, for which as yet no one has claimed responsibility, prompted the European Community to legislation banning "distributed denial of service," based on Britain's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act that was passed in 2000. Though EDT's Floodnet system demands mass participation to achieve its goals, the fact that the DDK's circulate worldwide is being construed by some governments as tantamount to "distributed denial of service." Current virtual skirmishes between Israelis and Palestinians have come under the scrutiny of the Israeli government, which is now seeking to make their activities illegal.

Though most of the metaphors Dominguez uses to describe EDT actions are drawn from the language of theatre, he also borrows frequently from the vocabulary of sculpture to describe the structures his group build, jam, and alter. For example,

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Ricardo Dominguez
Tales of Mayan Technologies
(performance) 2000
Photo: Mark Harvey, ID.8
Photography

Dominguez describes the FloodNet as an electronic tombstone that repeatedly inscribed the names of the Acteal dead. To him, servers are social sculpture, with endless potential for creating new communications networks and cooperative relationships with street-level political action. Like Sierra, EDT's fundamental task is to make the presence of the forgotten sectors of Mexican society felt. The group's notoriety in the cyberart world has enabled them to spread their tactics to other "hactivists" by generating a multiple interactive artwork. In 1999 EDT culminated its FloodNet action by issuing DDKs via the internet for other organizations and individuals who sought to create FloodNet operations for other causes.

Why the Zedillo government might not have chosen of its own accord to recognize the names of victims killed by its own military hardly needs explanation. Organizing an examination of social ills around the exploration of the status and history of corpses links the efforts of EDT with the work of SEMEFO. SEMEFO's focus, however, highlights another effect of globalization – the social disintegration

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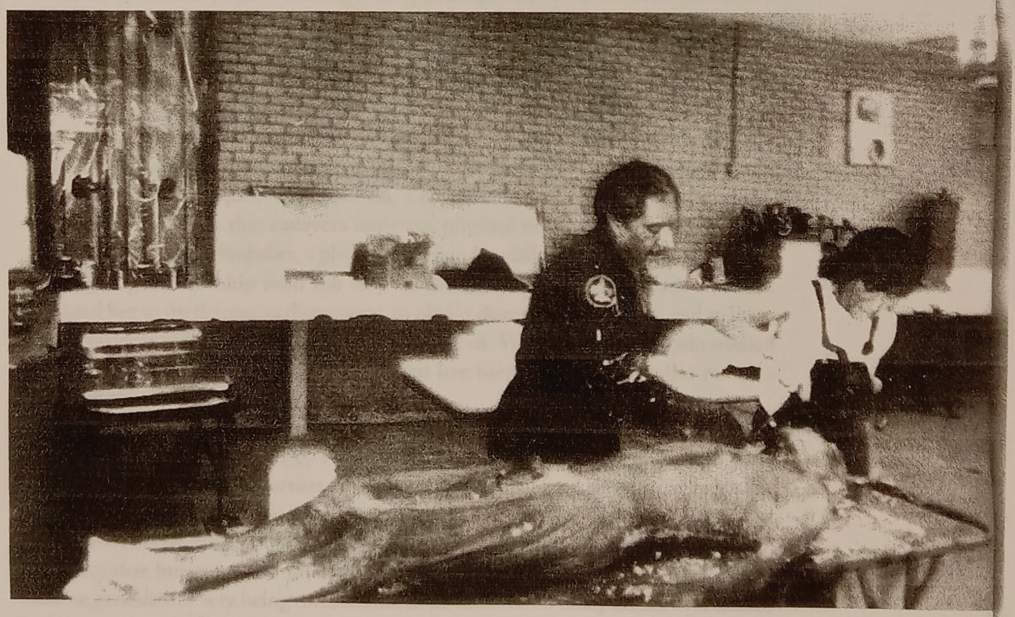
in the metropolis. During the 1990s, Mexico's cities experienced soaring crime rates; the urban infrastructures have been heavily taxed by exploding population growth and diminished resources; and kinship structures have been ruptured by accelerated migration and extended work hours. As the number of displaced and disappeared persons increases, so does the number of unclaimed bodies, which end up in the country's morgues as property of the state. Though the majority of the bodies that find their way to the morgues are victims of crimes, some are simply casualties of poverty. Even for those who retain family contacts, the cost of even the most basic funeral services offered by the state – US $250 – far exceeds the purchase power of good portions of the citizenry, many of whom eke out an existence on less than $5 per day.[5]

Those cadavers and their personal effects are the stuff with which SEMEFO weaves its unseemly tales. Some works seem to have sprung from the covers of Mexico's many scandal sheets, such as the laminated cards for cutting cocaine lines that feature photos of murdered drug dealers. In their other projects appear clothing marked by the bloodstains of fatal wounds and pounds of hair shorn from heads in preparation for dissection. SEMEFO has taken government-issued sheets impregnated with body fluids, attached them to stretchers and exhibited them as



Teresa Margolles in the process of making *Catafalco*, 1997
Photo courtesy of Teresa Margolles

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painting. They have imbedded objects found on murder victims in blocks of cement resembling sidewalks. They have filled glass cases with the carbonized bones of unknown people that they extracted from crematory ovens.

The artist who is perhaps best-known for exhibiting objects as charged traces of actions is Joseph Beuys; but the actions recalled by his objects were his own. Beuys, Chris Burden, and many others have exhibited props and instruments from performances, while numerous other artists, from Adrian Piper to Andres Serrano and Bob Flanagan, have made their own flesh, fluids, and waste the stuff of their work. That focus on the artist's body and actions was part of an attempt to reframe aesthetic value as the performative residue recalled by a used substance rather than the intrinsic qualities of matter. Still, all these practices draw on a history of the Catholic relic, the exhibit of human remains and personal effects as curiosities and mystical objects *par excellence*. In the Middle Ages, relics, particularly those that showed no evidence of decay, were relished and revered as evidence of the triumph of spirit over matter, of the saintliness of those martyrs who were metonymically represented in the displays. In the centuries that have followed, numerous candidacies for sainthood have been proposed based on the belief that the flesh of the Christian in question withstood torture, destruction, and even death. The specter of those traditions lingers behind these contemporary artworks that thrust the unclaimed bodies into spotlight in an effort to thwart the efforts to efface them, and with them the unspeakable violence that brought an end to each one's life.

SEMEFO does not champion the sanctity of the body with its focus on corpses, but rather underscores the desacralizing of life that is the suppressed underside of Mexico's ongoing economic crisis. The work is not simplistically denunciatory; instead it evinces a strange ambivalence about, if not fascination with, decomposition. The group's most eloquent spokesperson, Teresa Margolles, readily avers her attraction to the processes that cadavers undergo; physical decay, hair growth and nail growth after death. Margolles, a photographer and installation artist, has established an ongoing relationship with the staff of the real SEMEFO morgue. This has enabled her to participate in dissections, to obtain discarded body parts, and to learn about taxidermy and techniques for preserving flesh. Whereas Michelangelo studied cadavers to improve his ability to represent live human form; Margolles remains fixed on the corpse *qua* corpse.

To my mind, SEMEFO's project has more in common with a Gothic sensibility that begins with Mary Shelley's ***Frankenstein*** than it does with the anatomical obsessions of Renaissance artists. Shelley's story is organized around the revival of a corpse as an allegory about repressed desires; the monster embodies a split and projected part of the self.[6] That composite corpse is a man-made entity, a scientific product that functions as a metaphor for socially constructed aspects of the self, whose genesis and very being threaten life as we know it. As many critics have noted, Shelley's monster was a symbol that explained a philosophical dilemma for which no rational language had been codified. Similarly, SEMEFO's projects draw us into

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a space beyond life as we usually see it by bringing us in contact with the dead. SEMEFO thus inhabits a metaphor that theatricalizes the irrational dimension of Mexico's present.

Much in the same way that Sierra's work flies in the face of a longstanding tradition of romanticizing Mexico's poor, SEMEFO's endeavors call into question the widely held assumptions about the culture's embrace of death. Artists, anthropologists, and tourists are routinely enamored with altars to the dead, José Guadalupe Posada's skeletons, the popular cultural personification of death as "La Pelona," and many other symbolic means by which Mexican society supposedly confronts mortality. It has almost become a cliché to suggest Mexicans are more culturally adjusted to death than Americans, and that that sensibility is rooted in a purportedly Aztec view of death as a regenerative force. This view veers dangerously close to an essentialist characterization of contemporary Mexicans as people destined by ancestry to respond to endless fatal violence with humor and resignation, an argument that can easily be used to legitimatize their further exploitation. SEMEFO does invoke the Aztecs in their citation of Orozco's painting, but the group also regularly cites George Bataille's theories about how cultures ritualize violence as a form of social control.[7] Whereas Shelley was preoccupied with science's encroachment on morality in the age of Enlightenment, SEMEFO enables us to grasp global economics as a form of instrumental reason levied against a people in the name of "modernization." Through their focus on violent death they chronicle the social disintegration that is a by-product of an imploding economic order.

SEMEFO, Sierra, and EDT are caught in the interstices between the post-human and the antihuman aspects of our current moment. The term "post-human" usually refers to the possibilities of sentience outside the body, the advent of artificial reproduction, and the dissolution of recognizable boundaries between life and death engendered by organ transplants. Instead of rehashing cyberculture's glorification of these developments as intrinsically liberating, the artists in question examine the human cost of "progress." They all describe a world in which some human beings can exist impervious to the demands of the social while others are viewed as cumbersome weight. They make work about societies in which power is best expressed as the ability to commodify all elements of life, and whose impoverished majorities are subject to modes of objectification that the privileged hide from view. Commodification of the human body none the less runs rampant in the age of globalization in the form of illegal organ traffic, the international traffic of sex workers from the third world, and the sale of children from poor countries to adoptive parents in the first world.

The artwork that makes this point most poignantly is a piece that Teresa Margolles presented at Ace Gallery in New York in the spring of 2000 called "**Tongue**." It consisted of a taxidermied human tongue, perforated by an earring, that protruded from a white wall in a small room. Directly across from it was a tiny sign that explained how the tongue was obtained by the artist from the mother of

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the deceased in exchange for a coffin in which to bury the rest of his remains. Margolles explained in an interview that she had approached the mother upon learning of the situation. The woman's teenage son had died of a drug overdose and the mother could not afford the cost of a funeral. According to Margolles, the mother was shocked by the artist's offer at first, but after a lengthy conversation they reached an agreement to exchange the tongue for the coffin. Margolles herself surgically removed and preserved the tongue.

For the first exhibition of the tongue in Mexico City, Margolles invited the deceased's relatives. Out of discretion, the artist had not mentioned the name of the deceased in the gallery flyers or in the description of the work on the gallery wall. The boy's relatives complained to Margolles about this. At one point, one of them said that if he were to die and if she were to exhibit any of his body parts, he would want to have his name mentioned in the artwork.

In a world in which the subject of organ donation still stirs up profound questions about the integrity of the human organism, this tale is particularly resonant. That a subaltern would accept the transformation of a part of his body into an artwork that would be credited to another person runs counter to what one might expect. I cannot help but recall for a moment the tragic colonial history of exhibiting remains of indigenous peoples and the later efforts to repatriate and bury those remains. So many postcolonial critiques of anthropology and of Primitivism have been centered on the failure of both to attribute agency to the subjects who produce the artifacts. Yet here is someone in the present who matter-of-factly imagines himself bartering his own flesh with an artist to pay for his coffin. One could read this as an assertion of agency or a symptom of profound social decay. I prefer to see it as a combination of the two. The artists I have discussed here call upon us to contemplate the implications of these ethical and aesthetic dilemmas, which are proliferating at the onset of a new millennium.

Notes

[1] Much of the information in this piece came from interviews that I conducted with Ricardo Dominguez (November 1999), Santiago Sierra (May 2000) and Teresa Margolles (May 2000). I thank them for their help in the development of this essay.

[2] For an extended analysis of these processes, see David Korten, ***Globalizing Civil Society***, The Open Media Pamphlet Series (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998).

[3] Korten, op. cit., p. 18.

[4] Critical Art Ensemble, "Electronic Civil Disobedience," http://www.critical-art.net/ECD/content.html

[5] This information was provided by the Mexico City Forensic Medical Service. Thanks to Maria Diaz for research.

[6] Sarah Kember, ***Virtual Anxiety: Photography, New Technologies and Subjectivity*** (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 80–82.

[7] For example, the catalogue for SEMEFO's Lavatio Corporis exhibition includes citations from three texts by Georges Bataille: ***Theory of Religion***, ***Erotism*** and ***The Tears of Eros***.

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'Coco Fusco makes crucial interventions as both an artist and a writer that have advanced debates in the study of postcoloniality, interculturalism and performance.'

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Fusco's acute, witty and always compelling writing offers an incisive look at the impact of globalization on contemporary art and culture.

Coco Fusco is a writer and interdisciplinary artist and one of North America's leading interpreters of intercultural theory and practice. She is the author of *English is Broken Here* (1995) and *Corpus Delecti* (1999), and is Associate Professor in the School of the Arts at Columbia University.

Cover image: Coco Fusco in Votos (1999-2000). Photo: Stuart Burrill

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Zones de tolérance:

Teresa Margolles, SEMEFO et (l')au-delà

Cuauhtémoc Medina

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Trafic d'organes
Teresa Margolles

Un jour du printemps 2000, le cadavre d'un jeune punk est arrivé à la morgue de Mexico: une autre victime de la guerre sans fin du trafic de la drogue et du gangstérisme qui sévit dans les bidonvilles de la plus grande mégapole de l'hémisphère occidental[1]. Reposant paisiblement sur la table d'examen en inox de la morgue, le corps svelte de l'homme témoignait d'une histoire de privations et de mépris. Cet héroïnomane (la drogue qui vient de supplanter les autres substances dans les goûts de la pègre mexicaine) avait le corps couvert de tatouages et de piercings de toutes sortes. Malgré la mode de leur dissémination dans la société courante, ces deux formes de «défigurement ornemental» peuvent être perçues comme une «humiliation honorable» qui exprime le ressentiment d'une personne face à l'ordre social ou métaphysique[2].

Nous savons tous que, quoiqu'en dise l'adage, la mort n'est pas égalitaire. Les taxonomies sociales sont réinscrites non seulement dans les causes de la mort, mais aussi dans le destin de nos restes, la qualité de nos rites et monuments funéraires, et la part d'attention publique consacrée à notre disparition. Ainsi, malgré le fait que le corps du punk ait été officiellement identifié et réclamé par sa famille, il risquait de subir l'ultime exclusion: être envoyé à la fosse commune, ou pire encore, finir comme spécimen dans l'amphithéâtre d'une faculté de médecine, pour être dépouillé (même) de ses propriétés charnelles. Non seulement le défunt n'avait pas eu droit à l'éducation, à l'aide sociale, à un emploi satisfaisant, ou à quelque forme d'avenir, mais encore ses restes étaient-ils condamnés à l'oubli bureaucratique parce que sa mère n'avait pas les moyens d'acheter même un modeste cercueil pour l'enterrement ou la crémation. Évidemment, ceci rendait encore plus absurde l'examen post-mortem de cet homme. Dans un pays où plus de quatre-

Organ Trafficking
Teresa Margolles

One day in the spring of 2000 the corpse of a young punk arrived at the morgue in Mexico City: another casualty in the endless war of drug trafficking and gangsterism that pervades the slums of the biggest megalopolis in the Western hemisphere.[1] Peacefully resting on the stainless steel examination table of the mortuary, the slender body of the man told a story of deprivation and defiance. This heroin addict (the drug that quite recently has displaced other substances from the tastes of the Mexican underworld) had tattoos covering most of his body and carried a wide array of piercings. Both forms of "ornamental disfigurement," despite their fashionable dissemination in the mainstream society, can be seen as an "honourable degradation" that conveys the person's resentment with the social or metaphysical order.[2]

We all know that, despite popular wisdom, death is not egalitarian. Social taxonomies are re-inscribed not only in the causes of death but also in the fate of our remains, the quality of our funerary rites and monuments, and the amount of public attention devoted to our disappearance. Despite the fact that the punk's body had been officially identified and claimed by his family, it was in risk of suffering the ultimate exclusion: being disposed of in a common grave or, worse, ending up as a specimen in a medical faculty amphitheatre to be stripped (even) of its carnal properties. The dead man had not only been denied education, social security, a satisfactory job, or any semblance of a future, but his remains were condemned to bureaucratic oblivion because his

TERESA MARGOLLES: *TARJETAS PARA PICAR COCAINA*, *ANDEN*, *ANDEN*; FRANCIS ALŸS: *REENACTMENT*; MARGOLLES: *ANDEN*.

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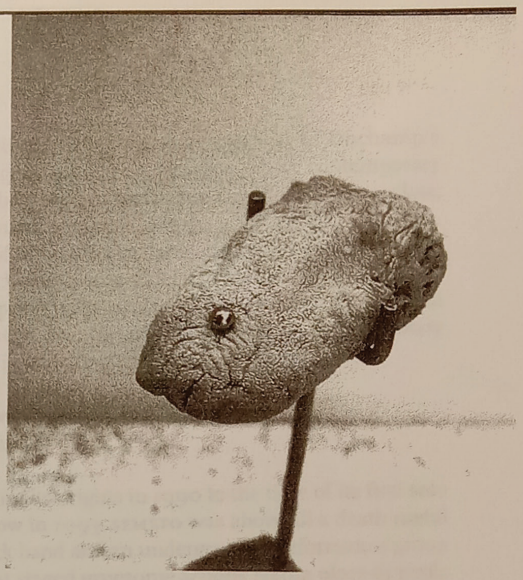

Very much like Victor Frankenstein, the members of SEMEFO were convinced that in the observation of the tiniest details of the corruption of corpses they could extricate the essence of life.

destiné à être exposé comme de l'art contemporain. La langue (après avoir été conservée selon les normes médico-légales) fut présentée dans trois lieux d'exposition différents durant la première moitié de 2001. Elle a d'abord été exposée au centre d'art contemporain X-Teresa, avant de circuler à la ACE Gallery de Los Angeles, traversant la frontière par l'intermédiaire d'un service régulier de messagerie. Elle fut finalement incluse parmi les pièces majeures de la rétrospective historique «officielle», et mal organisée, sur la sculpture mexicaine contemporaine au Palais des beaux-arts, situé dans le centre de Mexico[7].

La route symbolique empruntée par cette langue était pour le moins étrange: depuis les abords défavorisés de la mégapole en passant par une galerie chic des États-Unis, jusqu'à un des édifices publics parmi les plus prétentieux du continent (un opéra de style français néo-baroque affecté qui constituait l'objet fantasmatique de l'aristocratie mexicaine des années 1900). Pour rendre le tout encore plus extraordinaire, le Palais des beaux-arts a été depuis des décennies le salon funéraire par excellence des artistes et des intellectuels (Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Octavio Paz, Cantinflas, etc.). L'État mexicain rend hommage à ses icones nationaux en utilisant ce lieu. Ainsi, en plus d'avoir un exemple plutôt pervers de la lignée de Duchamp, il s'agit d'une situation où l'art contemporain se comporte comme une anomalie sociale capable de traverser les différences de classes, de cultures, de nations, de prestige et d'institutions. Si cette «œuvre d'art» avait tenté de défier les conditions objectives d'injustice liées à sa fabrication, elle pourrait fournir un point de vue utile dans la discussion de l'art contemporain mexicain au tournant du siècle.

De la nécrophilie à la nécropolitique

SEMEFO

De ses origines en 1990 jusqu'à sa première exposition solo en 1993, SEMEFO était avant tout un groupe de death metal rock et un groupe de performance underground qui présentait des actions sordides se déroulant dans des mares de boue, parmi des flaques de sang et des animaux morts. Ces actions (inspirées en partie par les Actionnistes viennois et le groupe de théâtre catalan La Fura dels

served) was displayed in three different exhibition sites in the first half of 2001. It was first exhibited at the X-Teresa contemporary arts centre before travelling to ACE Gallery in Los Angeles, crossing the border in a standard courier service. Finally, it was included, as one of the main pieces, in the poorly curated and "official" historical overview of contemporary Mexican sculpture at the Fine Arts Palace in downtown Mexico City.[7]

The symbolic route travelled by this tongue was certainly bizarre: from the deprived margins of the megalopolis to a fancy gallery in the United States to one of the most pretentious public buildings on the continent (an affected French-style neo-baroque opera house that was the fantasy object of the Mexican aristocracy of the 1900s). To make things even more extraordinary, the Fine Arts Palace has been for decades the funerary parlour of choice for artists and intellectuals (Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Octavio Paz, Cantinflas, etc.). The Mexican state pays homage to its national icons using this site. So, beyond

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Baus) étaient des explorations brutes des relations entre l'impureté, le désir et l'abjection, non sans lien avec une quête romantique de la transcendance[8]. Tout comme Victor Frankenstein, les membres de SEMEFO étaient convaincus que l'observation des plus infimes détails de la corruption des cadavres leur permettrait de dégager l'essence de la vie[9]. Ils supposaient l'existence d'une continuité fondamentale entre la matière inerte et la chair vivante, et souscrivaient à la vision underground du monde, où la violence, l'érotisme et la vitalité sont conçus comme des forces naturelles interchangeables[10]. SEMEFO est bientôt passé du milieu plutôt restreint de la performance mexicaine à celui des arts visuels. En 1993, ils ont eu leur première exposition solo au Musée Carrillo Gil, pour laquelle ils ont créé des sculptures provocantes avec les corps à peine empaillés de chevaux morts[11]. D'une certaine manière, SEMEFO faisait éclater de l'intérieur le stéréotype de la prétendue affinité mexicaine avec la mort en le portant à une interprétation extrême. En même temps, le groupe utilisait la matrice de la vie du cadavre pour établir un étrange dialogue avec l'art contemporain. Au milieu des années 1990, SEMEFO a commencé à s'approprier des méthodologies conceptuelles pour les appliquer aux restes humains, presque comme s'ils avaient l'intention de réviser l'histoire de l'art d'un point de vue nécrophile.

En 1996, par exemple, ils ont imprimé la silhouette de cadavres à l'aide de sang sur la toile blanche de civières d'ambulance (*Dermis*, 1996)[12] comme pour imiter les *Anthropométries* de l'époque bleue d'Yves Klein (1960-1961). Influencés par le «process art», ils ont produit des installations avec des vitrines contenant des fluides corporels, où ils ont simplement exposé les contenants utilisés à la morgue pour déposer des restes humains, comme s'ils portaient l'aura de ces derniers. Ils ont également employé des méthodes d'indexation, comme les moulages de cadavres entiers ou la présentation de vêtements «trouvés» appartenant à des enfants tués par des automobiles[13]. Comme pour mettre en question la légitimité de la peinture traditionnelle, ils ont collectionné les tatouages sur la peau des bras de plusieurs sujets, pour éventuellement les suspendre aux murs de la Art & Idea Gallery à Mexico (1997). Teresa Margolles insufflait à cette pratique feuilletée des références aux nombreux auteurs qui ont exploré le sens de la mort au cours de la modernité, tels que Georges Bataille, Philippe Ariès,

having a rather perverse example of Duchamp's progeny, we have a situation where contemporary art behaves as a social anomaly able to traverse class, cultural, national, prestige and institutional divides. So if this particular "artwork" had by no means tried to challenge the objective conditions of injustice implied in its making, it might provide a useful vantage point from which to discuss contemporary art in Mexico at the turn of the century.

From Necrophilia to Necropolitics

SEMEFO

From its origins in 1990 to the time of its first solo show in 1993, SEMEFO was above all a death metal rock band and an underground performance group that staged gruesome actions taking place in pools of mud and amidst stains of blood and dead animals. These actions (partly inspired by the Viennese Actionists and the Catalonian theatre group La Fura dels Baus) were rough explorations of the relations between impurity, desire and abjection that were not entirely foreign to a romantic pursuit of transcendence.[8] Very much like Victor Frankenstein, the members of SEMEFO were convinced that in the observation of the tiniest details of the corruption of corpses they could extricate the essence of life.[9] They assumed that there was a fundamental continuity between inert matter and living flesh, and participated in the underground worldview, which sees violence, eroticism and vitality as interchangeable natural forces.[10] Soon, SEMEFO moved from the rather small performance art world in Mexico to the visual arts milieu. In 1993, they had their first solo show at the Carrillo Gil Museum for which they created provocative sculptures with barely stuffed bodies of dead horses.[11] In a certain way, SEMEFO blew up from within the stereotype of Mexico's purported kinship with death by taking it to an extreme interpretation. At the same time, the group used the matrix of the corpse's life to establish a bizarre dialogue with contemporary art. In the mid 1990s, SEMEFO started appropriating conceptual methodologies in order to apply them to human remains, almost as if they were intending to revise art history from a necrophilic point of view.

In 1996, for instance, they printed silhouettes of corpses with blood on the white linen of ambulance stretchers (*Dermis*, 1996)[12] as if they were mimicking Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* of the

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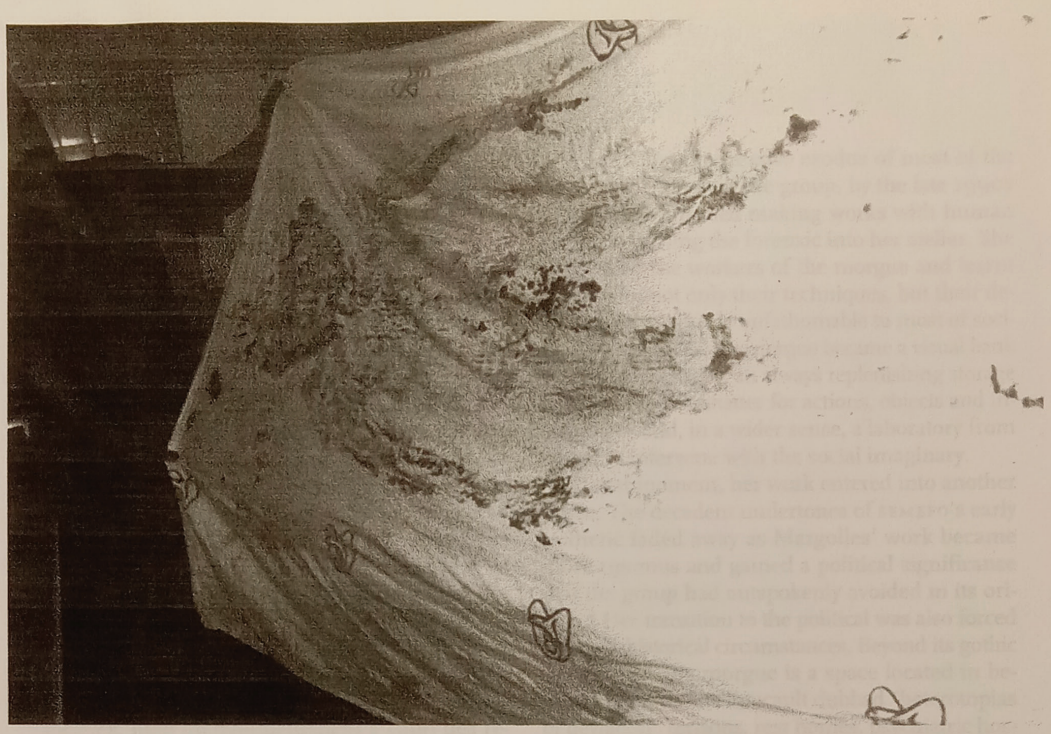

Antonin Artaud et William Burroughs[14]. Mais au-delà des fondements théoriques, littéraires ou thématiques, il est clair que les membres de SEMEFO, comme la plupart de leurs contemporains, étaient préoccupés par la généalogie de l'art contemporain dans la métropole. D'une façon plus systématique que ne laissent le suggérer leurs inclinations sanglantes, ils ont disséqué le cadavre de l'art conceptuel et du minimalisme, en adaptant ces traditions au sombre contexte social du tiers-monde.

Malgré l'exode progressif des membres originaux du groupe, Margolles a continué, vers la fin des années 1990, à faire des œuvres à partir de restes humains, faisant du département médico-légal son atelier. Elle s'est liée d'amitié avec les travailleurs de la morgue, apprenant d'eux non seulement leurs techniques, mais aussi leur attachement à un travail incompréhensible pour la majeure partie de la société. La morgue est devenue pour Margolles une banque visuelle pour ses photographies, un dépôt sans cesse renouvelé d'accessoires et de matière première pour des actions, des objets et des installations, et dans un sens plus large, un laboratoire lui permettant d'intervenir dans l'imaginaire social.

Blue Period (1960-61). Influenced by "process" art, they produced installations with vitrines containing body fluids or simply exhibited containers used in the morgue that display human remains as if they were carrying their aura. They also employed indexical methods like taking casts from whole corpses or displaying "found" clothes from children killed by cars.[13] As if questioning the legitimacy of traditional painting, they collected tattoos on human skin from the arms of several subjects, to later hang them on the walls of the Art & Idea Gallery, Mexico City (1997). Teresa Margolles infused this multi-layered practice with references to the many authors who have explored the meaning of death through modernity, such as Georges Bataille, Philippe Ariès, Antonin Artaud and William Burroughs.[14] But above the theoretical, literary or thematic underpinnings, it is clear that SEMEFO, like most of its contemporaries, are concerned with the genealogy of contemporary art in the metropolis. More systematically than its gore inclinations would suggest, they have dissected the corpse of conceptualism and minimalism, adjusting such traditions to the dark social setting of the Third World.

SEMEFO, *Dermis*, 1995, IMPRESSIONS DE CADAVRES SUR DES DRAPS D'HÔPITAUX PUBLICS _ IMPRESSIONS OF CORPSES ON PUBLIC HOSPITAL BED SHEETS; PHOTO REPRODUITE AVEC L'AIMABLE PERMISSION DE _ COURTESY SEMEFO.

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Son travail est alors entré dans une nouvelle phase. Les connotations décadentes de l'esthétique des débuts de SEMEFO se sont dissipées alors que le travail de Margolles devenait plus rigoureux et acquérait une portée politique que le groupe avait carrément évitée à l'origine[15]. Sa transition vers le politique était également provoquée par des circonstances historiques plus globales. Au-delà de l'horreur qu'elle inspire, la morgue est un espace qui se situe entre ce que Michel Foucault a qualifié d'«hétérotopies de la déviation» (les prisons, les maisons de repos, les hôpitaux psychiatriques) et le cimetière comme représentation d'archives de la ville moderne[16]. La morgue est une institution qui allie espace de confinement, cabinet scientifique et archive de l'horreur. Destination de tous ceux qui en principe *n'auraient pas dû mourir* (ceux qui ont péri dans des circonstances violentes ou dont la maladie était suffisamment anormale pour mériter une élucidation scientifique), la salle de dissection constitue un échantillon spectaculaire de toutes les sociétés. Bien qu'habituellement à l'abri des regards du grand public, dans le contexte turbulent du Mexique, le département médico-légal est devenu une vitrine de la brutalité de la crise sociale de la fin des années 1990. Alors que se terminait le régime de sept décennies du Parti révolutionnaire institutionnel (P.R.I.), il s'est produit une recrudescence spectaculaire de la criminalité, de la corruption et de la violence, perturbant la fiction du développement mexicain, tout en détruisant l'auréole patriarcale de l'autorité. Comme l'écrivain et historien Federico Navarrete l'a expliqué, les tueries et les assassinats politiques ont transformé le dépôt mortuaire en un des principaux espaces de représentation de la nation :

Il n'est pas exagéré de dire qu'au Mexique, la morgue est devenue le centre de la scène publique[...]. [Nous] avons été les témoins télévisuels des débuts d'une guerre civile en 1994, avec ses massacres et ses exécutions, et quelques mois plus tard, nous avons vu le crâne du candidat présidentiel Luis Donaldo Colosio percé d'une balle; en 1996 et 1997, nous avons vu les corps des légions massacrées à Aguas Blancas et Acteal, et en 1997, nous avons regardé pendant plusieurs jours les restes en décomposition du corps présumé du magnat de la drogue Amado Carrillo[17].

Dans ce contexte, la nécrophilie de SEMEFO revêtait sa pertinence politique propre. Durant les dernières années du siècle, Margolles a créé des actions rituelles qui allaient au-delà du simple défi

Despite the progressive exodus of most of the original members of the group, by the late 1990s Margolles continued making works with human remains, turning the forensic into her atelier. She befriended the workers of the morgue and learnt from them not only their techniques, but their devotion to a job that is unfathomable to most of society. For Margolles, the morgue became a visual bank for her photographs, an always replenishing storage of props and raw matter for actions, objects and installations and, in a wider sense, a laboratory from which to intervene with the social imaginary.

At that moment, her work entered into another phase. The decadent undertones of SEMEFO's early æsthetic faded away as Margolles' work became more rigorous and gained a political significance that the group had outspokenly avoided in its origins.[15] Her transition to the political was also forced by wider historical circumstances. Beyond its gothic undertones, the morgue is a space located in between what Michel Foucault dubbed "heterotopias of deviation" (prisons, rest homes, psychiatric hospitals) and the cemetery as an archival representation of the modern city.[16] The morgue is an institution that combines a space of seclusion, a scientific cabinet and a gruesome archive. Being the destination of all who supposedly *should not have died* (those who perished in violent circumstances or whose disease was abnormal enough to merit scientific elucidation) the dissection room provides a dramatic sample of any society. Although normally protected from the eyes of the wider public, in the turbulent context of Mexico, the forensic became a showcase for the brutality of the social crisis of the late 1990s. As the seven-decade long regime of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) came to an end, there was a dramatic upsurge in criminality, corruption and violence, disrupting the fiction of Mexico's development, while also breaking down the patriarchal halo of authority. As writer and historian Federico Navarrete has explained, mass killings and political assassinations turned the forensic into one of the main spaces of representation of this nation:

It is not an exaggeration to state that, in Mexico, the morgue has come to be at the centre of the public arena.... [W]e were televisual witness of the beginnings of a civil war in 1994, with its respective massacres and executions, and a few months later we saw presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio's skull pierced by a bullet; in 1996 and 1997, we beheld the

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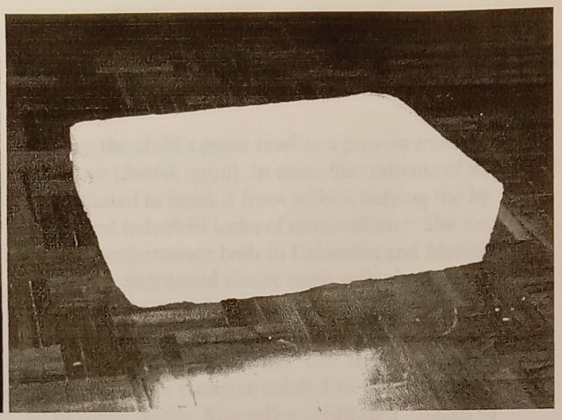

des conventions sociales[18] et a commencé à traiter de l'accumulation des corps dans les laboratoires médico-légaux comme conséquence directe de la violence sociale et politique. Par conséquent, la poursuite du choc était remplacée par l'invention de formes conceptuelles de deuil non seulement plus subtiles, mais en fait davantage favorables à la réflexion contemplative qu'à l'atmosphère de transgression des sub-cultures urbaines.

Dans toutes ces œuvres, Margolles a infiltré des images ou des résidus de cadavres comme méthodologie sociologique mettant l'accent sur le cycle de vie et de mort lié à la crise latino-américaine actuelle.

En août 1999, Margolles s'est rendue en Colombie dans le cadre d'une résidence binationale. Là-bas, elle a organisé une action rituelle collective, au cours de laquelle elle ramassait et enfouissait des objets dans une bande de trottoir en ciment longue de trente-six mètres, comme autant de témoignages des personnes disparues pendant la guerre civile[19]. Un an plus tard, une amie perdait son bébé et n'avait pas les moyens de lui donner une sépulture. Elle a fait don du fœtus à Margolles, qui a d'abord fait une performance documentée sur vidéo, pendant laquelle elle baignait tendrement le petit corps (*Bathing the Baby*, 1999). Plus tard, elle a enfoui le fœtus dans un bloc ordinaire de ciment blanc qui a été montré en galerie; la sépulture de l'enfant faisait d'abord penser à un calembour sur la sculpture minimaliste (*Burial*, 1999). Avec le temps, le contenu du bloc l'a fait se désagréger de l'intérieur, défiant l'aspect hygiénique et industriel du minimalisme[20]. Elle a également présenté une performance en Colombie et au Mexique, à l'occasion de laquelle elle distribuait des cartes en plastique avec les photographies de personnes tuées à cause du trafic de la drogue. Les cartes étaient offertes symboliquement comme ustensiles per-

bodies of the legions massacred at Aguas Blancas and Acteal, and in 1997 we watched the decomposing remains of drug lord Amado Carrillo's alleged body for several days.[17]

In that context, SEMEFO's necrophilia took a political relevance of its own. In the last years of the century, Margolles created ritual actions that moved beyond simply defying social decorum[18] and started to address the accumulation of bodies in forensic laboratories as a direct result of social and political violence. Therefore, the pursuit of shock was replaced by the invention of conceptual forms of mourning, which were not only more subtle, but were in fact more amicable to contemplative reflection than to the transgressive mood of urban subcultures.

In August 1999, Margolles went to Colombia as part of a bi-national residency. While there, she organised a collective ritual action, where she collected and buried objects in a thirty-six-meter stretch of cement sidewalk as tokens for people who disappeared in the civil war.[19] One year later a friend lost her unborn baby but could not afford the cost of burying it. She donated the fœtus to Margolles who first made a performance, recorded on video, where she tenderly bathed the small body (*Bathing the Baby*, 1999). She later buried the foetus in a white regular cement block that was displayed in a gallery, at first,

TERESA MARGOLLES, *TARJETAS PARA PICAR COCAINA* (CARTES POUR COUPER LA COCAÏNE _ CARDS TO CUT COCAINE), 1998, ACTION AU MEXIQUE ET EN COLOMBIE _ ACTION IN

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mettant aux cocaïnomanes de «couper» la drogue tout en faisant la consommation de la violence liée à leur toxicomanie. Dans toutes ces œuvres, Margolles a infiltré des images ou des résidus de cadavres comme méthodologie sociologique mettant l'accent sur le cycle de vie et de mort lié à la crise latino-américaine actuelle. Pour son action de loin la plus discrète, Margolles a fait entrer de la graisse humaine (prélevée dans une morgue mexicaine) à Cuba dans le cadre de sa participation à la délégation non officielle du Mexique à la 7e Biennale de La Havane, en novembre 2000. Elle a clandestinement étalé la graisse sur les murs de plusieurs édifices publics de La Havane pour commenter de façon métonymique le désastre politique et économique de Cuba[21].

Périodicité dans la périphérie

À la lumière de ces actions, la brutalité muette de la langue coupée du punk apparaît comme l'aboutissement d'un processus de raffinement conceptuel, plus que comme une grossière provocation opportuniste. Assurément, à une époque où l'on scrute beaucoup le droit à la représentation, depuis le sort des vestiges archéologiques dans les musées jusqu'à la diffusion de photographies dans le domaine public, le travail de Margolles défie l'éthique provisoire de la pratique artistique. Mais il demeure vrai que de telles œuvres ne provoquent que peu ou pas de scandale dans leur lieu d'origine, un fait qu'il serait complètement naïf d'attribuer à une sorte de relativisme culturel, comme les «différences d'attitude face au caractère sacré des restes dans la culture mexicaine[22]». D'une part, les terribles images produites par Margolles ne sont pas si difficiles à regarder dans le cadre d'une société accoutumée à une overdose de vraies histoires de crimes et de revues de police très crues[23]. Au-delà de ceci, il serait erroné de comprendre leurs origines sub-culturelles et leur faible circulation dans le marché de l'art comme étant des indices de la position prétendument «marginale» de SEMEFO dans le milieu de l'art local[24]. Bien au contraire. Au long de son histoire, le groupe de SEMEFO a été remarquablement accueilli par les institutions artistiques, le public, les commissaires et les critiques de Mexico, qui lui ont accordé des expositions dans des musées d'État, et qui ont même contribué à établir le groupe comme faisant partie de délégamaking the child's grave read as a pun on minimal sculpture (*Burial*, 1999). In time, the contents of the block started to break it from within, defying the hygienic and industrial looks of minimalism.[20] She also made a performance both in Colombia and Mexico, where she distributed plastic cards with photographs of people who were killed in relation to drug trafficking. The cards were symbolically offered as tools to cocaine addicts so they could "cut" their drug while consuming the violence related to their habit. In all of these works, Margolles infiltrated images or residues of corpses as a sociological methodology that emphasised the life and death circle involved in the current Latin American crisis. By far the most discrete of these actions, Margolles smuggled human fat (taken from a Mexican morgue) into Cuba as her contribution in the non-official Mexican envoy to the 7th Havana Biennial in November 2000. She clandestinely smeared the fat over the walls of several public buildings in Havana to metonymically comment on the political and economic Cuban disaster.[21]

Periodicity in the Periphery

In the light of these actions, the silent brutality of the punk's severed *Tongue* appears as the culmination of a process of conceptual refinement, more than as a raw opportunistic provocation. Certainly, in a time where the right of representation is heavily scrutinised, from the fate of archæological remains in museums to the circulation of photographs in the public realm, Margolles' work defies the provisional ethics of artistic practice. But it remains true that works like these provoke little or no scandal in their place of origin, a fact that would be entirely naïve to blame on some kind of cultural relativism, say the "differences of attitude in Mexican culture regarding the sanctity of remains."[22] On the one hand, the terrible images Margolles produces are not so hard to watch in a society used to an overdose of true crime stories and extremely graphic police magazines.[23] Beyond that, it would also be a mistake to see their subcultural origins and their little currency in the art market as indicative of SEMEFO's purportedly "marginal" position in the local art world.[24] It is quite the contrary. Throughout its history, the SEMEFO group has had remarkable acceptance amongst art institutions, audiences, curators and critics in Mexico City, who have granted

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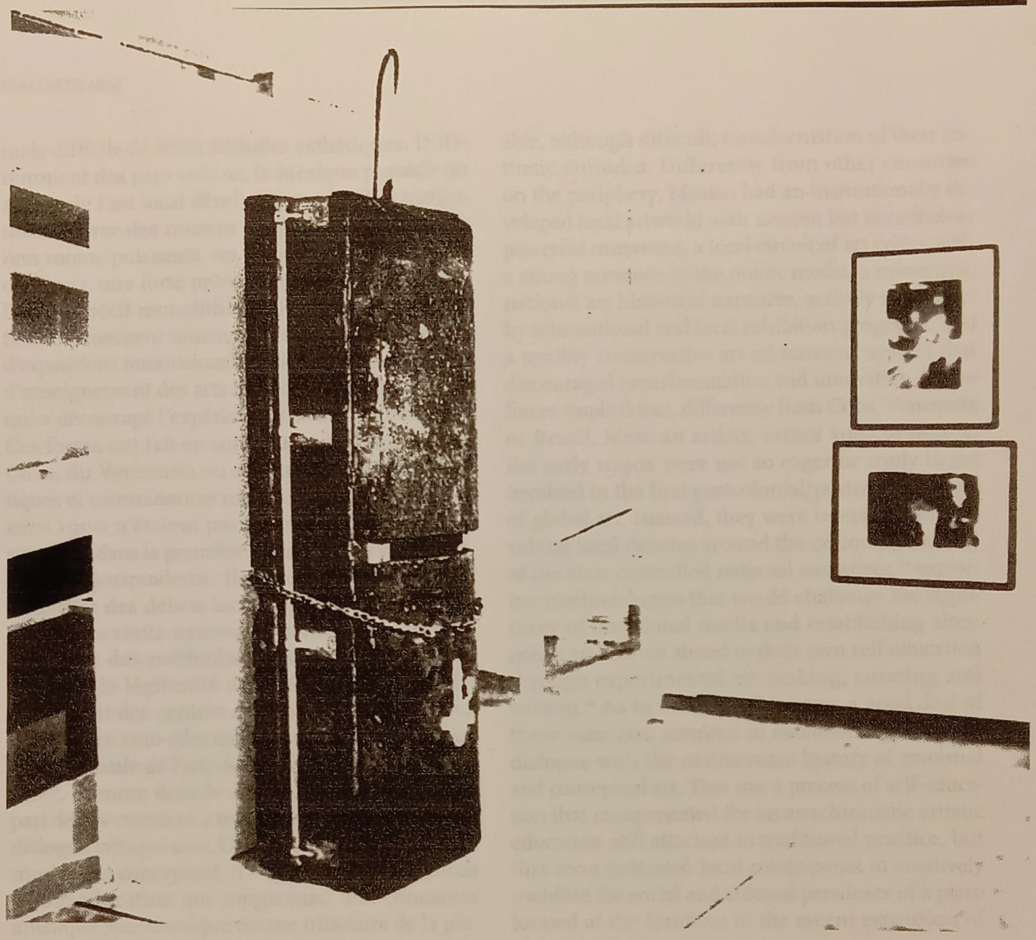

tions artistiques mexicaines officielles et non officielles vers d'autres pays. Il ne serait pas exagéré de dire que, par son propre mérite, Teresa Margolles fait partie de la scène émergente locale. Ainsi, au lieu de prétendre hypocritement être moralement intimidé par son «objet d'art» parce qu'il exploite de brutales disparités économiques[25], on devrait comprendre *Tongue* comme un indice de la situation locale de l'art contemporain.

En fait, les trois phases traversées par le travail de SEMEFO et de Margolles depuis dix ans pourraient être dégagées comme schéma provisoire des étapes de l'art contemporain mexicain durant les années 1990. Rompant presque complètement avec les tendances conservatrices dominantes de l'art local depuis les années 1950[26], les artistes mexicains se sont engagés dans une transformation remarquable

them exhibitions in state museums, and even helped to establish the group as part of official and unofficial Mexican art envoys to other countries. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that Teresa Margolles is, by her own merit, part of the emergent local canon. So instead of hypocritically pretending to be morally intimidated by her "objet d'art" for abusing the brutal economic disparities,[25] *Tongue* ought to be taken as an index of the situation of contemporary art in its locality.

In fact, the three phases through which SEMEFO and Margolles's work underwent in the last ten years could be abstracted as a provisory schema for the stages of contemporary art in Mexico during the 1990s. Breaking almost completely with the dominant conservative trends of local art since the 1950s,[26] artists in Mexico embarked on a remark-

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mais difficile de leurs attitudes esthétiques. Différemment des pays voisins, le Mexique possède un milieu de l'art local développé sur le plan institutionnel, avec des musées de qualité inégale, mais non moins puissants, un circuit local de critiques d'art avec une forte présence dans les médias publics, un récit monolithique d'histoire de l'art national, activement soutenu par des programmations d'expositions internationales et locales, et un système d'enseignement des arts terriblement conservateur qui a découragé l'expérimentation et l'innovation. Ces forces ont fait en sorte que, à la différence de Cuba, du Venezuela ou du Brésil, les artistes, critiques et commissaires mexicains du début des années 1990 n'étaient pas si empressés ou prêts à s'engager dans la première vague d'art mondial postcolonial/postmoderne. Ils étaient plutôt intéressés à susciter des débats locaux sur la critique (ou la satire) des récits nationaux contrôlés par l'État[27], explorant des méthodologies qui mettraient en question la légitimité des médias traditionnels, établissant des centres d'art parallèles destinés à leur propre auto-éducation, et ce par une pratique expérimentale de l'art, du commissariat et de l'écriture[28]. Comme dans le cas de SEMEFO, une bonne part de ces exercices a mené à l'établissement d'un dialogue critique avec l'histoire dominante de l'art minimal et conceptuel. Il s'agissait d'un processus d'auto-éducation qui compensait une éducation artistique anachronique encore tributaire de la pratique traditionnelle, mais qui a rapidement conduit les participants locaux à mobiliser de façon créative les paradoxes sociaux et culturels d'un lieu situé à l'avant-plan de l'expansion récente du capitalisme mondial.

C'est ainsi que durant les années 1990, ces artistes ont abandonné la traditionnelle modestie de l'art de leur pays dans les décennies précédentes pour aborder, sur un mode poétique et parfois cynique, les contradictions sociales et culturelles qui les entouraient. Ils ont transformé leurs préoccupations «expressives» et «lyriques» de départ en outils de recherche politique et esthétique. Cette dernière transformation résultait en grande partie des conséquences de la mondialisation: en effet, si les pressions de changement artistique du début des années 1990 provenaient déjà largement d'un dialogue à l'échelle mondiale, la crise sociale et politique mexicaine de 1994-1995, produite par la modernisation autoritaire et l'intégration économique

able, although difficult, transformation of their æsthetic attitudes. Differently from other countries on the periphery, Mexico had an institutionally developed local artworld with uneven but nonetheless powerful museums, a local circuit of art critics with a strong presence in the public media, a monolithic national art historical narrative, actively supported by international and local exhibition programs, and a terribly conservative art educational system that discouraged experimentation and innovation. Those forces implied that, differently from Cuba, Venezuela or Brazil, Mexican artists, critics and curators in the early 1990s were not so eager or ready to get involved in the first postcolonial/postmodern wave of global art. Instead, they were interested in provoking local debates around the critique (or satire) of the state controlled national narratives,[27] exploring methodologies that would challenge the legitimacy of traditional media and establishing alternative art centres aimed to their own self-education through experimental art making, curating and writing.[28] As in the case of SEMEFO, a good deal of these exercises resulted in establishing a critical dialogue with the mainstream history of minimal and conceptual art. This was a process of self-education that compensated for an anachronistic artistic education still attached to traditional practice, but that soon indicated local participants to creatively mobilise the social and cultural paradoxes of a place located at the frontline of the recent expansion of global capitalism.

Therefore, during the 1990s those artists abandoned the traditionalist modesty of the art in the country in the former decades to address, poetically and sometimes cynically, the social and cultural contradictions that surrounded them. They turned their original "expressive" and "lyrical" concerns into tools of political and æsthetic investigation. This last turn was in great part the result of the consequences of globalisation – for if the pressures of artistic change in the early 1990s were in great part already coming from the dialogue with a globalised world, the social and political crisis that authoritarian modernisation and economic integration produced in Mexico in 1994-1995 also radicalised artistic practice. While Mexico's landing into the global economy and its agitated "transition to democracy" was dominated by the clash between global market forces and the resistance movements of Indian societies, the widening of social differences between

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mique, a également radicalisé la pratique artistique. Alors que le Mexique accédait à l'économie mondiale et que sa turbulente «transition vers la démocratie» était dominée par le conflit entre les forces du marché mondial et les mouvements de résistance des sociétés indiennes, le creusement des différences sociales entre les nouveaux magnats et les masses appauvries, et les contradictions culturelles dérivant de l'effritement de l'idéologie nationaliste/modernisante du régime post-révolutionnaire, les artistes contemporains sont intervenus plus délibérément sur l'imagerie de la crise vécue par leur pays.

The most disturbing element in Teresa Margolles' forensic art does not lay in the horror of the images and objects she creates but in the institutional conditions which make them possible.

Ceci explique peut-être l'apparition tardive de l'art contemporain mexicain sur la scène mondiale. Car le nouvel art mexicain était à la fois marginal sur le plan local, et intégré sur le plan mondial: engagé dans la critique du processus de modernisation du pays et ayant rompu avec les généalogies locales d'avant les années 1980, il n'a jamais incarné les revendications de contemporanéité des élites locales[29]. Toutefois, l'institutionnalisation relative de la scène locale et ses débats laissaient entendre que cet art ne s'adaptait pas aux attentes liées au multiculturalisme au début des années 1990, supposant que la périphérie allait produire une forme hybride de culture postmoderne résultant de l'adaptation des traditions vernaculaires et «non occidentales» à la pratique dominante. Par conséquent, au tournant du siècle, ces mêmes interventions politiques locales, marquées par une dextérité conceptuelle tout en conservant un fond amateur, avaient acquis une circulation mondiale, réussissant à maintenir la tension poétique et politique au sein d'une pratique post-conceptuelle.

Dans cette perspective, le cheminement de SEMEFO est non pas marginal, mais bien paradigmatique du déplacement généralisé depuis la dissidence d'amateur vers l'auto-réflexivité post-conceptuelle et finalement, vers la politisation esthétique du Mexique des années 1990. Il serait possible de démontrer que la plupart des artistes de leur génération ont passé d'une manière ou d'une autre par les mêmes phases, même si ce n'est pas forcément dans le même ordre.

new tycoons and impoverished masses, and the cultural contradictions deriving from the crumbling nationalist/modernising ideology of the post-revolutionary regime, contemporary artists intervened more resolutely into the imagery of the country's crisis.

Thus, maybe, the belated appearance of Mexican contemporary art in the global arena. For new art in Mexico could be, at the same time, locally marginal and globally integrated: involved in the critique of the process of the country's modernisation and having broken with the local genealogies before the 1980s, it never embodied the claims of contemporaneity of the local elites.[29] However, the relative institutionalisation of the local scene and its debates implied that it did not adjust to the multiculturalist expectations of the early 1990s, which assumed that the periphery was to produce a hybrid brand of postmodern culture resulting from the adjustment of vernacular and "non-Western traditions" and mainstream practice. Therefore, by the turn of the century, those same local political interventions, infused with a conceptual dexterity but retaining an amateurish basis, had gained global currency in terms of keeping a poetical and political tension within post-conceptual practice.

Seen in this perspective, SEMEFO's route rather than being marginal is paradigmatic of the overall move from amateurish dissidence to postconceptual self-reflectivity and, finally, æsthetic politicisation of the 1990s in Mexico. If not necessarily in that sequence, it may be possible to show that most of the artists of their generation went through, in one or another way, those same phases.

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Pour une redéfinition de la transgression

Francis Alÿs

L'examen minutieux de l'art médico-légal de Teresa Margolles révèle que l'élément le plus troublant ne réside pas dans l'horreur des images et des objets qu'elle crée, mais plutôt dans les conditions institutionnelles qui les rendent possibles. Des œuvres comme *Tongue* décrivent implicitement les conditions de négligence dans lesquelles les restes humains sont traités au cours des procédures médico-légales mexicaines, et par extension, la crise institutionnelle du système judiciaire. Depuis sa soumission au salon national officiel de la relève de 1991, pour lequel SEMEFO avait présenté un cercueil dérobé dans un cimetière, qui semblait fraîchement déterré, jusqu'aux œuvres plus récentes, faites à partir d'entrailles humaines (par exemple, un sofa rembourré de viscères humaines), le groupe a tout au moins transgressé les règles sanitaires[30]. Pour qu'une artiste comme Margolles puisse fouiller dans le service de la morgue pour prendre des photographies, collectionner des échantillons, faire des

Redefining Transgression

Francis Alÿs

Under close inspection, the most disturbing element in Teresa Margolles' forensic art does not lay in the horror of the images and objects she creates but in the institutional conditions which make them possible. Works like *Tongue* implicitly describe the negligent condition of the handling of human remains in Mexican forensic procedures and, by extension, the institutional crisis of the judiciary system. From its submission to the 1991 "Young Art" official national salon, where SEMEFO displayed a coffin taken from a cemetery, which seemed as if it had been just unearthed, to more recent works made with human entrails (for instance, a sofa upholstered with human viscera), the group has at least transgressed the sanitary rules.[30] For an artist like Margolles to scavenge through the morgue service to take photographs, collect samples, imprint bodies on cloth or cast them in plaster, there needs to be an extremely permissive administration. Her art practice owes its existence to the slackness of police



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empreintes de corps sur du tissu ou les mouler dans le plâtre, l'administration doit être extrêmement permissive. Sa pratique artistique doit son existence au laisser-aller des services de police mexicains. Ses œuvres constituent la révélation sincère de leur état actuel, en même temps qu'elles sont le fruit de sa complicité avec ce même système.

Le fait qu'au fil des années, les institutions d'État mexicaines aient activement défendu l'art de Margolles signifie qu'elle a réussi à se dissimuler grâce à des lacunes légales et politiques. Il serait impossible de mettre en question ses méthodes sans dénoncer du même coup les normes singulières de la morgue et du système culturel. En ce sens, le travail de Margolles est défini moins par son caractère transgressif que par l'exposition de l'état d'effritement de la loi. L'espace de tolérance occupé par l'art de Margolles est un don de l'inefficacité et de la complicité institutionnelle.

Bien entendu, cet hiatus symbolique n'est pas la propriété exclusive de Margolles. En novembre 2000, l'artiste Francis Alÿs s'est procuré un Beretta de 9 mm sur le marché noir. Il a chargé le fusil et l'a porté très visiblement dans la main droite pour une promenade au centre de Mexico. Suivant à bonne distance, le caméraman Rafael Ortega captait cette action, de loin la plus dangereuse accomplie à ce jour par l'artiste d'origine belge. Alÿs a marché sans se faire remarquer pendant près de douze minutes, avant qu'une voiture de police n'arrive finalement pour l'arrêter. Il semblerait que le fait de porter une arme en plein jour n'est pas suffisant pour troubler la vie de la métropole, au point qu'un homme exhibant une arme mortelle peut marcher assez longtemps dans un quartier densément peuplé avant que la police ne se sente concernée. Plus tard, Alÿs a rejoué la scène entière pour la caméra avec l'aide des mêmes policiers qui l'avaient arrêté, pour établir une comparaison entre l'action de départ et sa reconstitution conceptuelle à des fins documentaires. Il me semble que cette œuvre (*Reenactment*, 2000) aurait été impossible à réaliser presque partout ailleurs. Si Alÿs avait essayé de faire la même action à Los Angeles ou à New York, non seulement aurait-il été arrêté, mais il aurait aussi été tué. Il semble que c'est seulement au Mexique que le public peut laisser un homme armé marcher dans des rues animées pendant plus de dix minutes, ou qu'un artiste puisse aussi facilement prendre des arrangements avec des com-

services in Mexico. Her works are both a candid exposure of their current state and a product of her complicity with that same system.

The fact that Mexican state institutions have actively promoted her art for years implies that Margolles has managed to hide herself in a legal and political loophole. It would be impossible to question her methods without denouncing also the idiosyncratic standards of the morgue and of the cultural system. In that sense, Margolles' work is less defined by its transgressive character than by mapping the crumbling state of the law. The space of tolerance Margolles' art occupies is a gift of inefficiency and institutional complicity.

This symbolic gap, of course, is not Margolles' exclusive property. Last November 2000, artist Francis Alÿs bought a 9 mm Beretta on the black market. He loaded the gun and carried it clearly visible in his right hand for a stroll through Mexico City's downtown. Following at a convenient distance, cameraman Rafael Ortega recorded in video this act – by far the most dangerous action this artist of Belgian origin has performed to date. Alÿs walked totally unnoticed for almost twelve minutes before a police car finally arrived and arrested him. It would seem that the fact that somebody is carrying a weapon in broad daylight is not enough reason to disturb the life of the metropolis, to the point that a man flaunting a lethal weapon could walk for blocks in a densely populated area before the police were felt needed. Later on, Alÿs re-enacted the whole scene for the camera with the aid of the same policemen who arrested him in order to create a comparison between the initial action and its conceptual re-enactment for documentation purposes. It seems to me that the whole piece (*Reenactment*, 2000) would have been impossible to realise in almost any other place. Had Alÿs tried to do the same action in Los Angeles or New York he probably would not have only been arrested, but also shot. It seems that only in Mexico would the public allow a man to walk busy streets with a gun for more than ten minutes, or could an artist so easily make previous arrangements with police commanders for his own release[31] and, if that isn't unusual enough, finally receive help from his own captors. The whole action and its documentation is, thus, a remarkable testimony of the laxness of the security forces in Mexico City, and the ability of artists to opportunistically take advantage of their historical situation.

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missaires de police pour sa propre libération[31] et pour finir, comme si ce n'était pas déjà assez inhabituel, qu'il puisse recevoir de l'aide de ceux qui l'ont capturé. Cette action et sa documentation sont donc un témoignage remarquable du laxisme des forces de sécurité à Mexico, et de la capacité des artistes à profiter de leur situation historique d'une manière opportuniste.

À bien des égards, la zone permissive délimitée par ces œuvres décrit également en des termes plus généraux le domaine d'activité de l'art contemporain mexicain. Le radicalisme de ce travail était principalement dû au manque d'intérêt de l'État et du secteur privé. En outre, sa dérogation au style général de la culture professionnelle locale a été rendue possible par le dédain qu'en avaient la plupart des auteurs et des intellectuels établis, ce qui a libéré l'art contemporain des compromis avec les idéologies officiellement sanctionnées de la culture nationale. Maintenant, comme en témoigne cette publication, un tel manque de visibilité tire à sa fin. Il est difficile de prévoir comment les pratiques en art contemporain vont changer à Mexico, une fois qu'elles auront été totalement acceptées sur les plans mondial et local.

In many ways, the permissive zone mapped through those works also describes in more general terms the sphere of action of contemporary art in Mexico. The work's radicalism was in great part possible through the lack of interest of state and private interests. In addition, its departure from the general style of local professional culture was made possible by the disdain that most established writers and intellectuals felt for it, which freed contemporary art from compromises with the officially sanctioned ideologies of national culture. Now, as this publication attests, such lack of visibility is coming to an end. We cannot foresee how contemporary art practices in Mexico City will change once they are fully accepted globally and locally.

Cuauhtémoc Medina est critique d'art. Il a abondamment écrit sur l'art contemporain du Mexique et de l'Amérique Latine. Il a été conservateur en art contemporain du Carrillo Gil Museum, membre de l'équipe de *Curare: Critical Space for the Arts* et est présentement chercheur à l'Institut de Recherches Esthétiques à l'Université nationale de Mexico. Il a récemment publié «Recent Political Forms: Radical Pursuits in Mexico», *TRANS>arts.cultures.media*, n° 8, 2000 et *Graciela Iturbide* aux éditions Phaidon.

Traduit de l'anglais par Denis Lessard.

Cuauhtémoc Medina is an art critic who has written widely on contemporary art in Mexico and Latin America both in catalogues and magazines. He was Contemporary Art Curator at the Carrillo Gil Museum, member of the staff of *Curare: Critical Space for the Arts* and is currently researcher at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the National University of Mexico. Among his recent publications are "Recent Political Forms: Radical Pursuits in Mexico," *TRANS>arts.cultures.media* #8 and *Graciela Iturbide* (Phaidon Press).

NOTES

1. J'aimerais remercier Jenifer Paparato, du Instant Coffee à Toronto, qui a généreusement accepté de réviser et corriger la version originale anglaise de ce texte.
2. Dans son étude sur le tatouage en Polynésie, l'anthropologue Alfred Gell affirmait qu'il était erroné de faire une séparation définitive entre les valeurs polynésiennes originales liées à l'ornementation de la peau, et les valeurs des Occidentaux qui ont choisi ces formes de mutilation corporelles comme moyen de défier les goûts «civilisés» avec leur apparente «barbarisation». En Polynésie, le tatouage imposait une barrière entre les humains et les dieux,

1. I would like to thank Jenifer Paparato from Instant Coffee in Toronto for her generosity in revising and correcting the English version of this text.
2. In his study of tattooing in Polynesia, anthropologist Alfred Gell argued that it was mistaken to draw a hard and fast divide between the original Polynesian values involved in skin ornamentation and those of the Westerners that choose those forms of body mutilation as a means to challenge "civilised" tastes with their apparent "barbarisation." In Polynesia, tattooing imposed a barrier between humans and gods, reinforcing a "social skin" separating social and cosmological

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renforçant la «peau sociale» qui séparait les ordres social et cosmologique. Cette fonction symbolique ne serait pas différente de l'auto-marginalisation des marins, des criminels, des prostitué-e-s et des gangs qui affirment leur marginalité par le tatouage. Ces analogies sont renforcées par l'épidémie actuelle de tatouage. Gell conclut: «Ainsi, il n'est pas tout à fait erroné de déceler un degré d'affinité entre les excès à la fois affirmés et paranoïaques du tatouage transmis par la politique polynésienne, et l'élément d'opposition du tatouage sub-culturel, qui exprime en termes de classes un ressentiment que les Polynésiens n'éprouvaient pas envers la classe dominante, mais envers les dieux, ultimes arbitres de la condition humaine.» Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Image: Tattooing in Polynesia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 8-20, 244-262, 296-315. [Traduit de l'anglais.]

3. À cet égard, les statistiques sont floues et contradictoires. Selon le quotidien *La Jornada*, 1 400 000 crimes sont dénoncés annuellement. La police ne détient des suspects que dans treize pour cent des cas, mais seulement dix pour cent des accusés sont condamnés par les tribunaux. (Alberto Najar, «Inseguridad pública, de Zedillo a Fox. La terrible herencia y las primeras incongruencias», *La Jornada*, dimanche 13 août 2000.) Selon un rapport largement publicisé en 2000, plus de quatre-vingt-quinze pour cent des crimes restent impunis au Mexique. («México Unido contra la Delincuencia A. C. [Guillermo Velasco Arzac *et al.*], La Seguridad Publica y El Sistema de Justicia Penal en México.» Propuesta para el Plan de Gobierno Federal 2000-2006. ‹http://www.mexicounido.org/propuesta.html›).
4. À part Margolles, Arturo Angulo et Carlos López qui ont formé le noyau du groupe à différentes époques, Juan Manuel Pernás, Juan Luis García Zavaleta, Victor Basurto, Antonio Macedo, Anibal Peñuelas et Mónica Salcido ont fait partie de SEMEFO. Seule Margolles a participé à des expositions et à des événements à titre individuel.
5. Voir l'interview avec SEMEFO dans le mémoire de licence de Dulce María de Alvarado Chaparro: «Performance en México (Historia y desarrollo)», *Tesis para obtener el título de Licenciada en Artes Visuales*, Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, Mexico, 2000, p. 321.
6. En fait, elle venait de décider de faire don des cercueils à un établissement de soins pour personnes âgées.
7. Il existe un catalogue pour cette exposition: *Escultura Mexicana. De la Academia a la instalación*, Conaculta-INBA-Landucci Editores, Mexico, 2000, 454 p. *Tongue*, l'œuvre de Margolles, est reproduite à la page 375.
8. On trouvera une description de ces actions par les membres de SEMEFO dans l'interview de 1993 par Renato González Mello publié dans le mémoire de Dulce María de Alvarado, *op. cit.*, p. 327-333.
9. Mary W. Shelley, *Frankenstein ou le Prométhée moderne*, trad. Joe Curvost, Marabout [Belgique], 1997 [1978], p. 57-58.
10. Je m'approprie ici l'interprétation de Sade et de Frankenstein par Philippe Ariès, dans un livre fréquemment utilisé par SEMEFO comme source de référence pour ses premières œuvres: *L'Homme devant la mort*. Seuil, coll. Univers historique, Paris, 1977, p. 382-385.
11. Il s'agissait de l'exposition *Lavatio Corporis* au Musée Carrillo Gil de Mexico (mai-juillet 1994). Pour cette exposition, SEMEFO a pris comme point de départ une des œuvres de José Clemente Orozco sur la conquête du Mexique (*Teules IV*, 1947), qui représente un cheval mort sur un tas de décombres,

ranks. This symbolical function would not be unlike the self-marginalisation of those sailors, criminals, prostitutes and gangs that assert their marginality through tattooing. These analogies are reinforced in the current epidemics of tattooing. Gell concludes: "Thus it does not seem wholly wrong to detect a degree of kinship between the assertive and at the same time paranoid excesses of tattooing in devolved Polynesian politics, and the oppositional element in subcultural tattooing which expresses in class terms a resentment which Polynesians directed not towards the dominant class, but towards the gods, the final arbiters of the human condition." Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Image: Tattooing in Polynesia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 8-20, 244-262, 296-315.

3. Statistics in this respect are obscure and contradictory. According to the newspaper *La Jornada*, 1,400,000 crimes are denounced every year. The police only detain suspects in thirteen percent of them, but only ten percent of those accused are condemned by the courts (Alberto Najar, "Inseguridad pública, de Zedillo a Fox. La terrible herencia y las primeras incongruencias," *La Jornada*, Sunday, August 13, 2000). According to a well publicised report in 2000, more than ninety-five percent of crimes remain unpunished in Mexico. ("México Unido contra la Delincuencia A. C. [Guillermo Velasco Arzac *et al.*], La Seguridad Publica y El Sistema de Justicia Penal en México." Propuesta para el Plan de Gobierno Federal 2000-2006. ‹http://www.mexicounido.org/propuesta.html›).
4. Apart from Margolles, Arturo Angulo and Carlos López who were the core of the group at different times, SEMEFO was joined by Juan Manuel Pernás, Juan Luis García Zavaleta, Victor Basurto, Antonio Macedo, Anibal Peñuelas and Mónica Salcido. Of them, only Margolles has had individual participation in exhibitions and events.
5. See the interview with SEMEFO in Dulce María de Alvarado Chaparro's B. A. dissertation: "Performance en México (Historia y desarrollo)," *Tesis para obtener el título de Licenciada en Artes Visuales*, México, Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000, p. 321.
6. In fact, she had just decided to donate the caskets to a care institution for the elderly.
7. There is a catalogue of this show: *Escultura Mexicana. De la Academia a la instalación*, México: Conaculta-INBA-Landucci Editores, 2000, 454 pp. Margolles' *Tongue* is reproduced on p. 375.
8. A description of those actions by the members of SEMEFO is included in a 1993 interview by Renato González Mello, in Dulce María de Alvarado's dissertation, *op. cit.*, pp. 327-333.
9. Mary W. Shelley, *Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981, pp. 63-64.
10. I am appropriating here Philippe Ariès' interpretation of Sade and Frankenstein in a book that SEMEFO used frequently as a reference source for its early works: *El hombre ante la muerte*, Madrid: Taurus, 1983, pp. 326-328.
11. This is the *Lavatio Corporis* show at the Carrillo Gil Museum in Mexico City (May-July 1994). In this exhibition SEMEFO departed from one of the works by José Clemente Orozco about the Conquest of Mexico (*Teules IV*, 1947) that represents a dead horse in a pile of rubble, so as to produce a series of "sculptures" consisting of dead horses attached to metal structures, animals cut in sections and preserved in acrylic blocks and even a merry-go-round made with unborn fœtuses of horses. (See the catalogue of the show: *Lavatio Corporis*, curated by Edgardo Ganado

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afin de produire une série de «sculptures» composées de chevaux morts fixés à des structures métalliques, des animaux coupés en quartiers et conservés dans des blocs en acrylique, et même un manège fait à partir de fœtus de chevaux. (Voir le catalogue de l'exposition: *Lavatio Corporis*, organisée par Edgardo Ganado et Luis Gallardo, Museo Carrillo Gil INVA, Mexico, 1994) Le Musée a produit une vidéo qui documente les débuts du groupe. (SEMEFO, vidéo, 16 min, Museo Carrillo Gil, 1994, réalisation de Elías Levin.) J'aimerais remercier le Musée Carrillo Gil de m'avoir donné accès à la documentation relative à cette exposition en provenance de sa bibliothèque.

12. Ces œuvres ont été exposées dans deux espaces indépendants ayant joué un rôle important pour les arts alternatifs dans leurs villes respectives: La Panadería à Mexico et El Ojo Atómico à Madrid, en Espagne, dont certains des membres (Tomas Ruiz-Rivas et Santiago Sierra) ont émigré à Mexico à la fin des années 1990.
13. Dans le cadre de l'exposition «Así está la cosa», constat sur l'art contemporain latino-américain organisé par Kur Hollander en 1997, pour le Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo de Mexico. Toutefois, la participation de SEMEFO n'est pas documentée dans le catalogue.
14. Margolles a longtemps gagné sa vie en vendant des livres aux étudiants et aux professeurs de la faculté des sciences humaines de l'Université nationale. Grâce à ce commerce, elle a acquis une remarquable érudition en philosophie contemporaine, en littérature militante et en études culturelles.
15. Dans leurs premières interviews, les membres de SEMEFO niaient catégoriquement toute motivation politique. Ils affirmaient que les interprétations politiques qu'on leur attribuait étaient des moyens permettant au public de nier son goût pour les scènes morbides qu'ils créaient. (Voir l'interview par Mello, *op. cit.*, p. 331.)
16. Michel Foucault, «Des espaces autres», *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité*, octobre 1984. (Notes pour une conférence donnée en mars 1967.)
17. Federico Navarrete, «SEMEFO», *Poliester*, vol. 8, n° 2 (printemps 2000), p. 24.
18. Elia Espinosa a étudié cet aspect *maudit* de la pratique de SEFEMO dans sa communication «Las aboliciones de SEMEFO», dans *La Abolición del Arte. XXI Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, Alberto Dallal (dir.), Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, Mexico,1998, p. 621-638.
19. *Anden*, 1999, Cali, Colombie. Dans le cadre du programme de résidences d'artistes Mexique/Colombie subventionné par le Ministère colombien de la culture et le Fonds national pour les arts (FONCA) du Mexique.
20. Pour d'autres œuvres mexicaines ayant recours aux conditions sociales et esthétiques du tiers-monde pour mettre en question l'esthétique minimaliste, voir Cuauhtémoc Medina, «Recent Political Forms: Radical Pursuits in Mexico/Formas políticas recientes: búsquedas radicales en México/Santiago Sierra. Francis Alÿs. Minerva Cuevas», *TRANS>arts.cultures.media*, n° 8, New York, É.-U./São Paulo, Brésil, 2000, p. 146-163.
21. Cette performance faisait partie de «Extramuros», une programmation indépendante d'artistes mexicains organisée par Taiyana Pimientel durant la première semaine de la Biennale de La Havane. Au cours de son action, Margolles a failli être arrêtée par la police cubaine qui trouvait son action suspecte, mais elle a été relâchée immédiatement lorsque la police a constaté qu'elle était une étrangère, et grâce au fait que son action était trop obscure pour être comprise par la police.

and Luis Gallardo, México: Museo Carrillo Gil INVA, 1994.) There is a video produced by the Museum that documents the early outlook of the group (SEMEFO, video, 16 min., Museo Carrillo Gil, 1994, directed by Elías Levin). I would like to thank Museo Carrillo Gil for allowing me access to the materials related to this show in its library.

12. These works were exhibited in two independent spaces that played a major role in the alternative arts of their cities: La Panadería in Mexico City and El Ojo Atómico in Madrid, Spain, some of whose members (Tomas Ruiz-Rivas and Santiago Sierra) migrated to Mexico City in the late 1990s.
13. Included in "Así está la cosa," the Latin American contemporary art survey curated by Kur Hollander in 1997 for the Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo in Mexico City. However, SEMEFO's participation is not documented in the catalogue.
14. For a long time Margolles made a living selling books to students and professors in the humanities faculty of the National University. Through her trade, she acquired a remarkable erudition in contemporary philosophy, radical literature and cultural studies.
15. In their early interviews, the members of SEMEFO were quite adamant in denying any political motivations. They argued that political interpretations attributed to them were means by which the audience denied their taste for the morbid scenes they created (See interview by Mello, *op. cit.*, p. 331).
16. Michel Foucault, "Of Different Spaces" (1967) in *Æsthetics, Method and Epistemology*, James D. Faubion, ed., New York: The New York Press, 1998 (*Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. 2), pp. 175-185.
17. Federico Navarrete, "SEMEFO," in *Poliester*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Spring 2000, p. 24.
18. This *maudit* aspect of SEFEMO's practice was studied by Elia Espinosa in her paper "Las aboliciones de SEMEFO," in *La Abolición del Arte. XXI Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, Alberto Dallal, ed., México: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1998, pp. 621-638.
19. *Anden*, 1999, Cali, Colombia. This was part of the Mexico/Colombia artist in residency program financed by the Cultural Ministry in Colombia and the National Fund for the Arts (FONCA) in Mexico.
20. For other works in Mexico that used the social and æsthetic conditions of the Third World to challenge minimalist æsthetics, see Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Recent Political Forms: Radical Pursuits in Mexico/Formas políticas recientes: búsquedas radicales en México/Santiago Sierra, Francis Alÿs, Minerva Cuevas," in *TRANS>arts.cultures.media* #8, New York, U. S. A./São Paulo, Brazil, 2000, pp. 146-163.
21. The performance was part of "Extramuros," an independent program of Mexican artists curated by Taiyana Pimientel during the first week of the Havana Biennial. In the process of her action, Margolles was almost arrested by the Cuban police who found her action suspicious, but was immediately freed when the police found she was a foreigner thanks to the fact that her action was too opaque for the police to understand fully.
22. Doug Harvey, "Yuck! Tongue and Blood at ACE Gallery. Plus, Adrian Piper at MoCA," *L.A. Weekly*, September 1-7, 2000.
23. On the most famous of them, *Alarma!* magazine, see Cuauhtémoc Medina, "*Alarma!* Crimen y circulación. Crime & Publishing," in *Poliester*, Vol. 2, No. 6, Summer 1993, pp. 18-27.
24. In this, I disagree entirely with Federico Navarrete who in a recent article about SEMEFO for the final issue of *Poliester* magazine, argues: "Proof of its marginal

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22. Doug Harvey, «Yuck! Tongue and Blood at ACE Gallery. Plus, Adrian Piper at MoCA», *L.A. Weekly*, 1er au 7 septembre 2000. [Traduit de l'anglais.]
23. Au sujet du plus célèbre d'entre eux, le magazine *Alarma!*, voir Cuauhtémoc Medina, «*Alarma!* Crimen y circulación. Crime & Publishing», dans *Poliester*, vol. 2, n° 6 (été 1993), p. 18-27.
24. À ce sujet, je suis en désaccord complet avec Federico Navarrete qui affirme, dans un article récent sur SEMEFO pour le dernier numéro du magazine *Poliester*, que: «La preuve de son caractère marginal, c'est le fait qu'après pratiquement dix ans d'activité, SEMEFO n'a vendu qu'une seule pièce, puisque leurs matériaux et leur contenu empêchent la mise en marché de leur travail.» (Navarrete, *art. cit.*, p. 25.) [Traduit de l'anglais.]
25. «Je ne suis pas spécialement choqué par l'esthétisation de parties démembrées du corps. Ce qui est difficile, c'est la troublante politique de négociation qui transporte l'organe préservé d'un pauvre petit Mexicain dans une salle d'exposition de riches Blancs pour la décoration intérieure.» (Harvey, *art. cit.*)
26. La révision des moments de radicalisme esthétique de cette période, depuis l'esthétique «panique» d'Alfredo Jodorowsky jusqu'aux collectifs («grupos») légèrement surfaits des années 1970, reste encore à faire.
27. À ce sujet, voir Osvaldo Sánchez, «El cuerpo de la nación. El neomexicanismo: la pulsión homosexual y la desnacionalización», *Curare*, n° 17 (janvier-juin 2001), p. 137-146, Cuauhtémoc Medina, «Irony, Barbary, Sacrilege», dans Trisha Ziff (dir.), *Distant Relation: Chicano, Irish, Mexican Art and Critical Writing*, Smart Art Press, Santa Monica, 1995, p. 89-101.
28. C'est ce qui relie, à mon avis, les différents espaces indépendants du début des années 1990 à Mexico, depuis les activités du groupe Temistocles, de 1991 à 1994, jusqu'à La Panaderia (1994 à ce jour) et même les critiques et commissaires de la secte spontanée *Curare* (1991 jusqu'à aujourd'hui).
29. Ce n'est que récemment que les classes supérieures et les hauts rangs de la hiérarchie culturelle ont réalisé le potentiel symbolique de l'acquisition ou de la présentation de l'art contemporain. L'apparition de la collection JUMEX et l'ouverture de ses nouveaux locaux constituent peut-être le premier indice d'un processus de redéfinition de la relation entre la pratique de l'art contemporain et la culture d'élite.
30. Toutefois, l'artiste affirme que sa pratique est protégée par la loi mexicaine qui permet le don d'organes provenant d'un cadavre, à condition qu'aucune vente ne soit en cause. Courrier électronique de Maria Teresa Margolles adressé à l'auteur, 25 mai 2001.
31. La possession d'armes est en principe interdite au Mexique, excepté pour les fusils de 22 mm, dont l'achat requiert des permis spéciaux. En temps normal, il aurait été emprisonné pour avoir porté un Beretta – ou pour avoir acheté les policiers qui l'avaient capturé! Bien entendu, le trafic d'armes est monté en flèche au Mexique, ces dernières années.

character is the fact that, after almost ten years of work, SEMEFO has only sold a single piece, as their materials and subject matter impede the merchandising of their work" (Navarrete, *op. cit.*, p. 25).
25. "I'm not particularly shocked by the æstheticisation of leftover body parts. But the queasy politics of the negotiation that brings a poor Mexican child's pickled organ into a rich, white, home-decoration showroom is... difficult" (Harvey, *op. cit.*).
26. The revision of the moments of æsthetic radicalism in the period, from Alfredo Jodorowsky's "panic" æsthetics to the slightly overrated "grupos" collectives in the 1970s, is still to be done.
27. In that respect, see Osvaldo Sánchez, "El cuerpo de la nación. El neomexicanismo: la pulsión homosexual y la desnacionalización," *Curare* #17, January-June 2001, pp. 137-146, and Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Irony, Barbary, Sacrilege," in Trisha Ziff ed., *Distant Relation: Chicano, Irish, Mexican Art and Critical Writing*, Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 1995, pp. 89-101.
28. This, in my view, connects the different independent spaces of the early 1990s in Mexico City, from the Temistocles group activities from 1991 to 1994, to La Panaderia (1994 to date) and even the art critics and curators of the self-fashioned sect *Curare* (1991 to the present).
29. It is not until recently that high classes and the high ranks of the cultural hierarchy have noticed the symbolic potential in purchasing or showing contemporary art. The emergence of the JUMEX collection and its new premises opening are, perhaps, the first indication that the relationship between contemporary art practice and high class culture might be in the process of a deep redefinition.
30. However, the artist argues that her practice is protected by the Mexican law that allows organ donations from a corpse on the condition that no sale is involved. Email from Maria Teresa Margolles to the author, May 25, 2001.
31. Gun ownership is supposedly forbidden in Mexico, except for 22 mm guns which need special permits to be purchased. In normal circumstances he should have been imprisoned for carrying a Beretta – or have bribed the policemen who caught him! Of course, illegal weapons trade has surged in Mexico in the past years.

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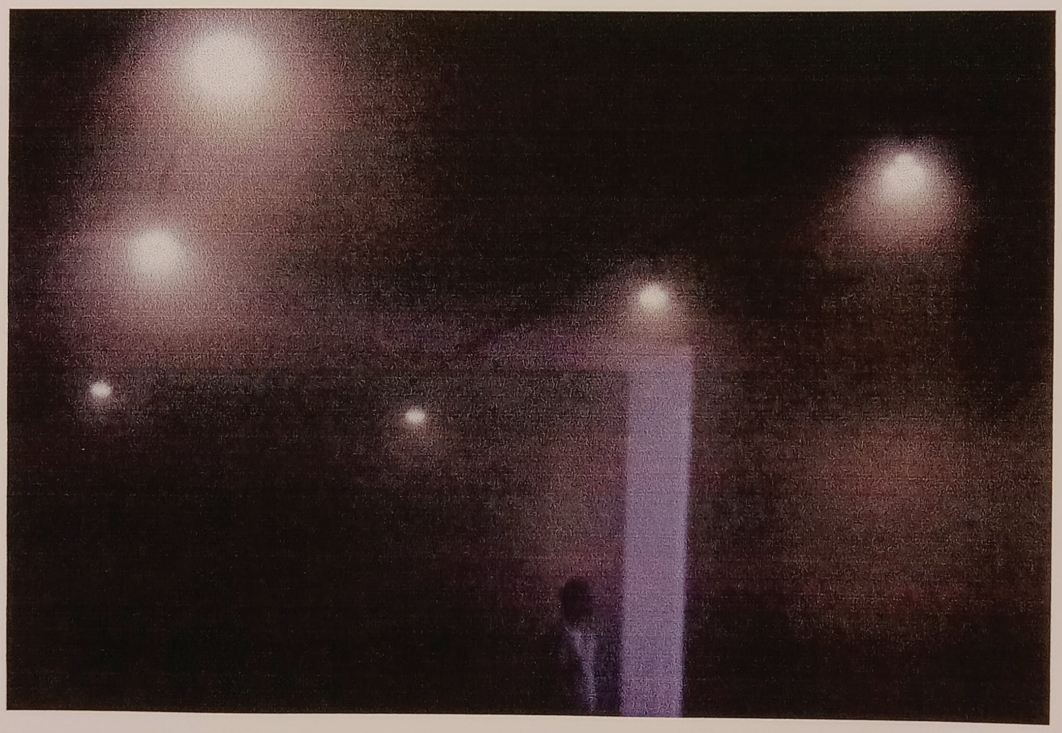

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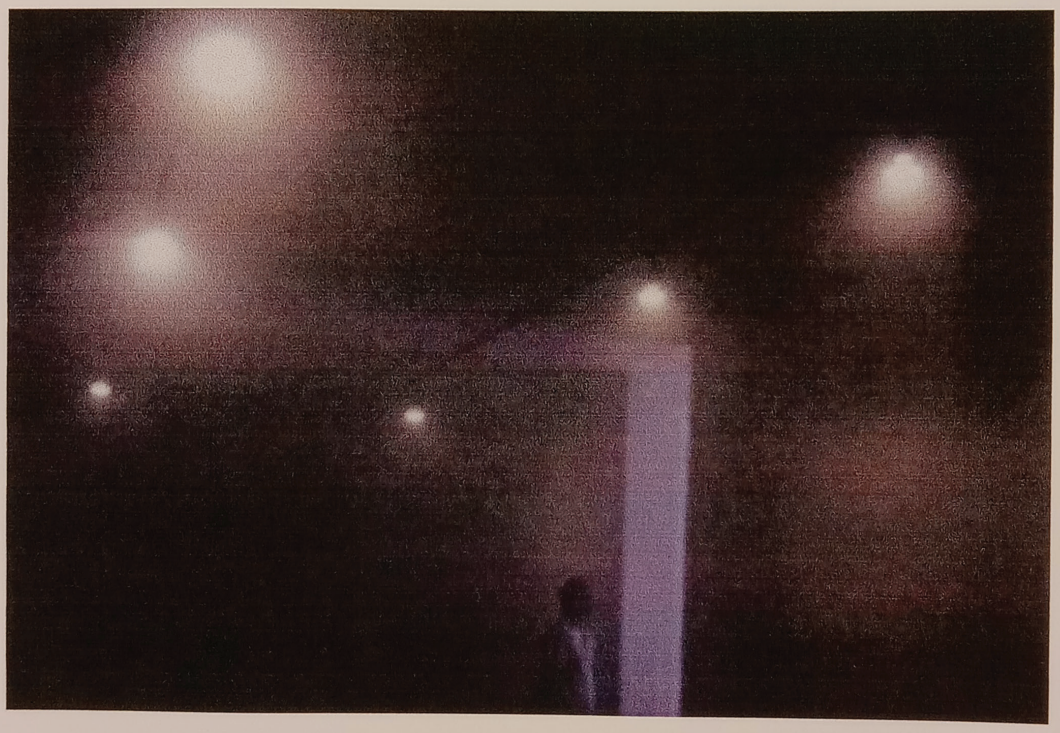

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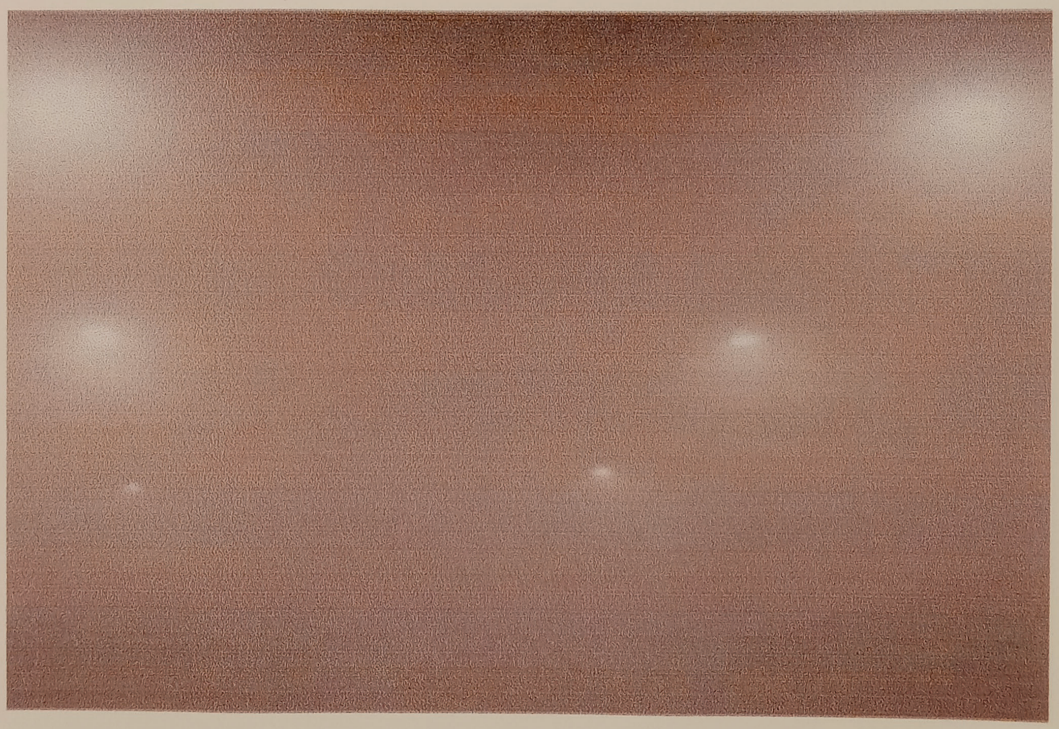

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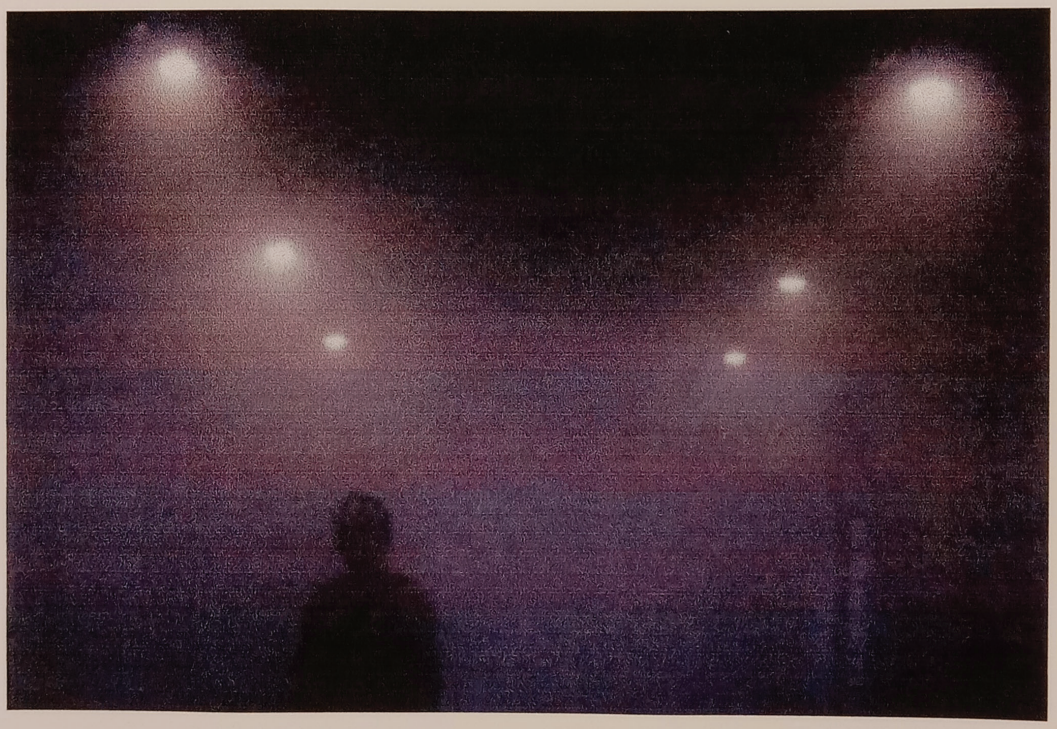

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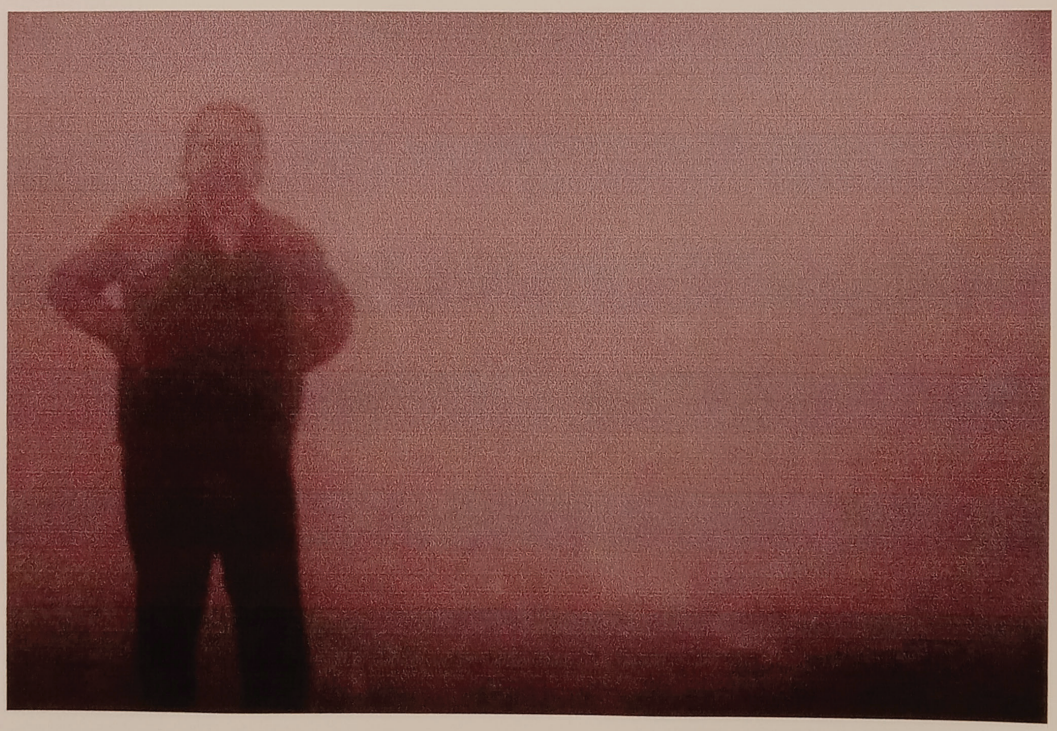

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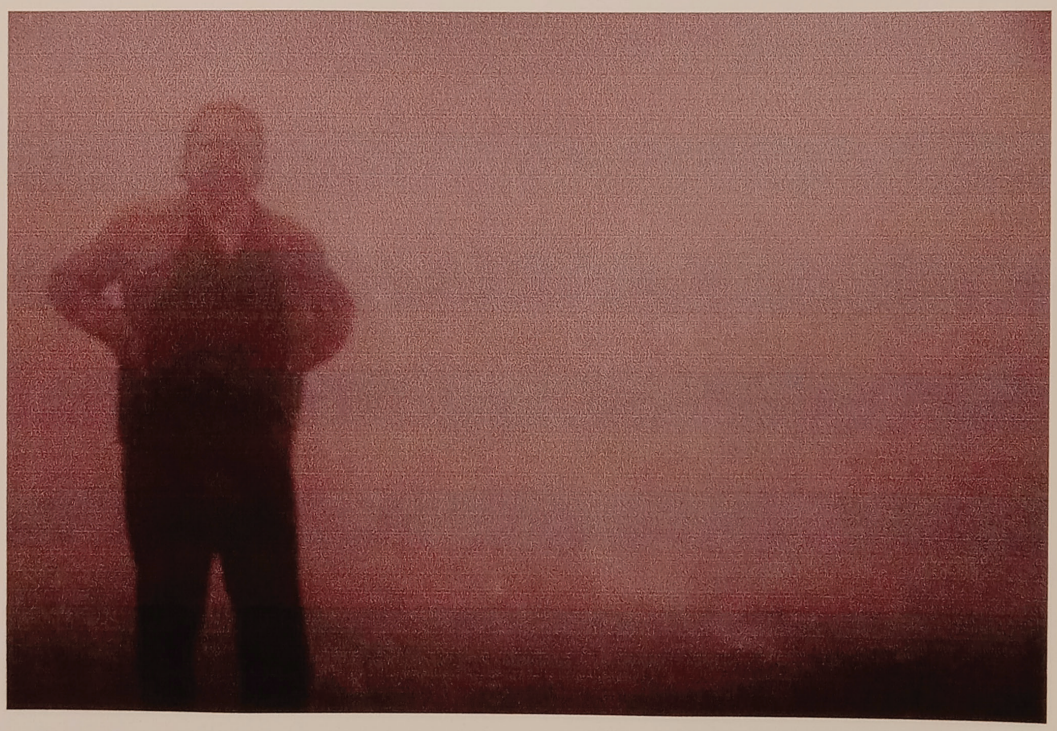

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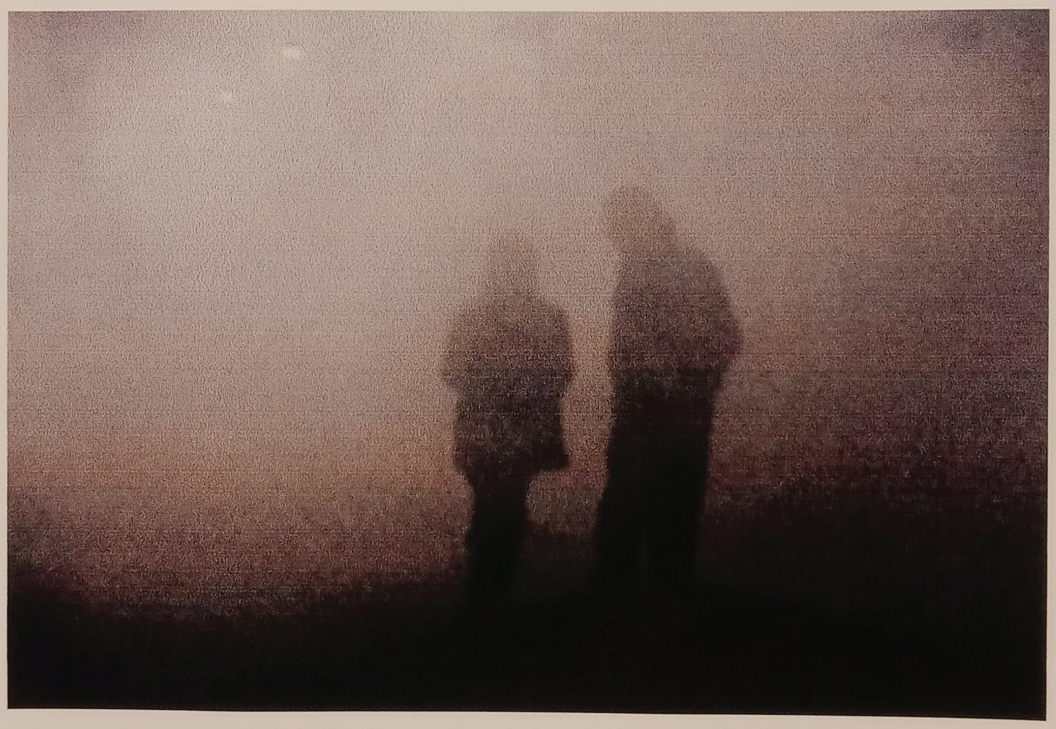

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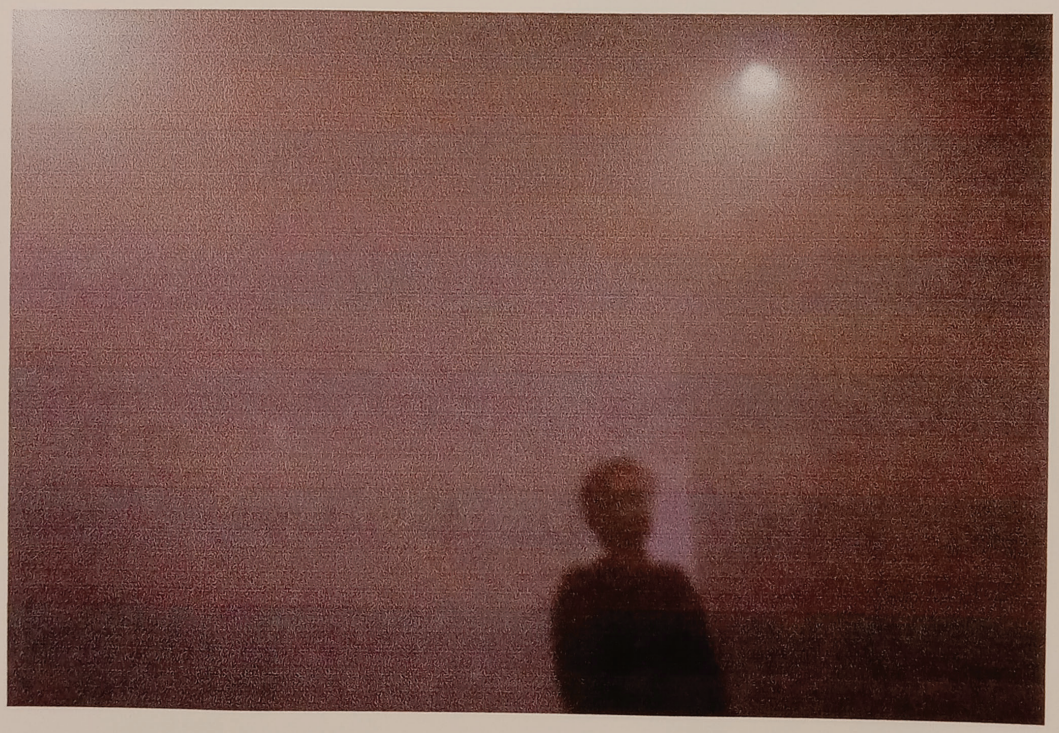

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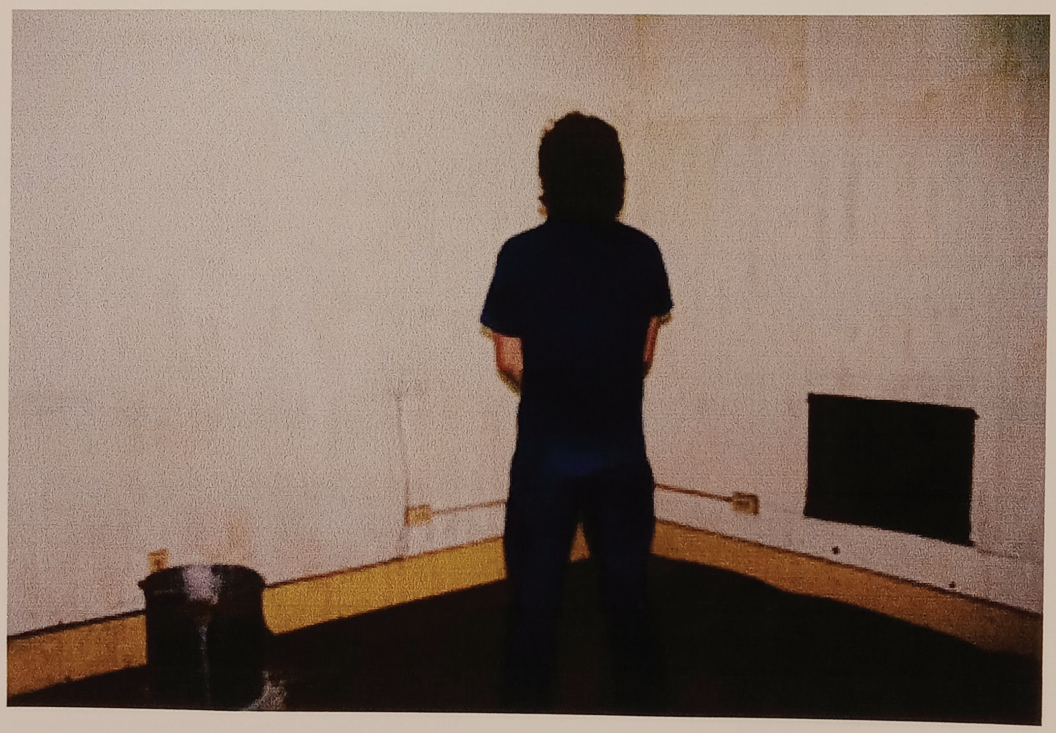

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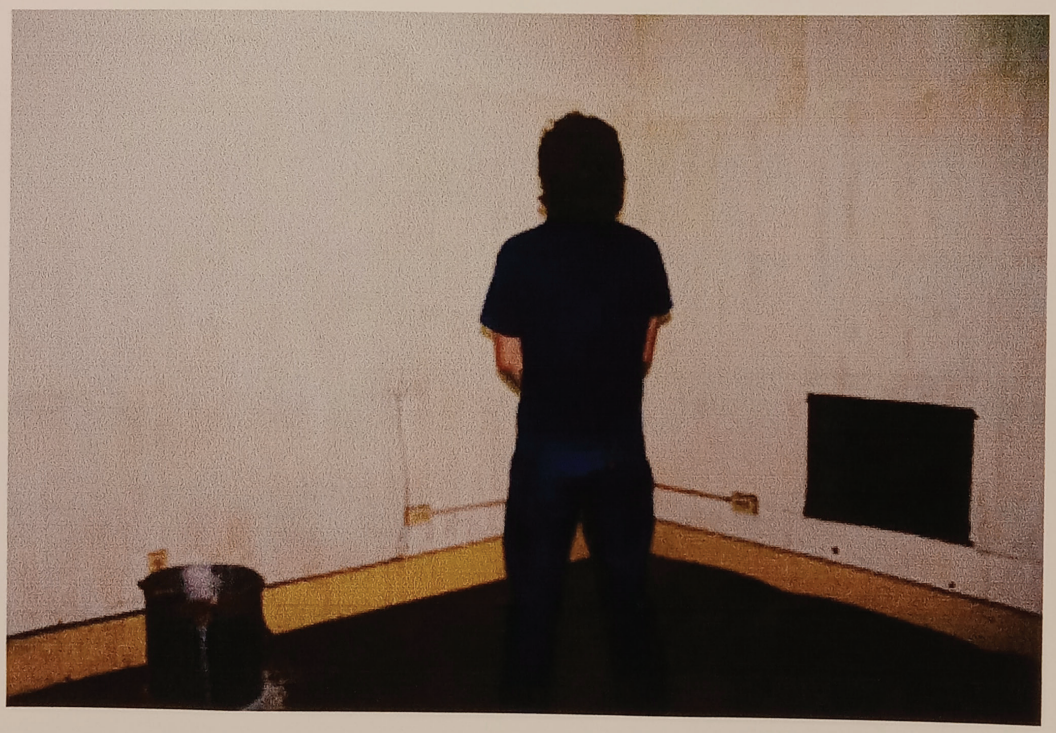

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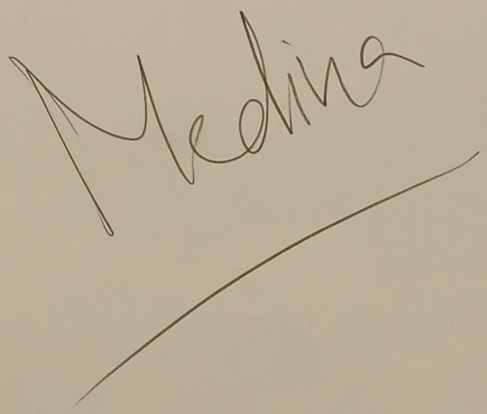

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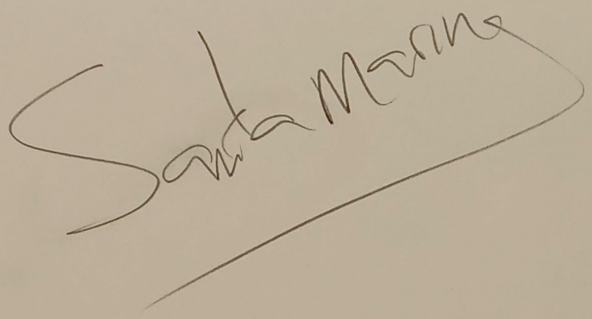

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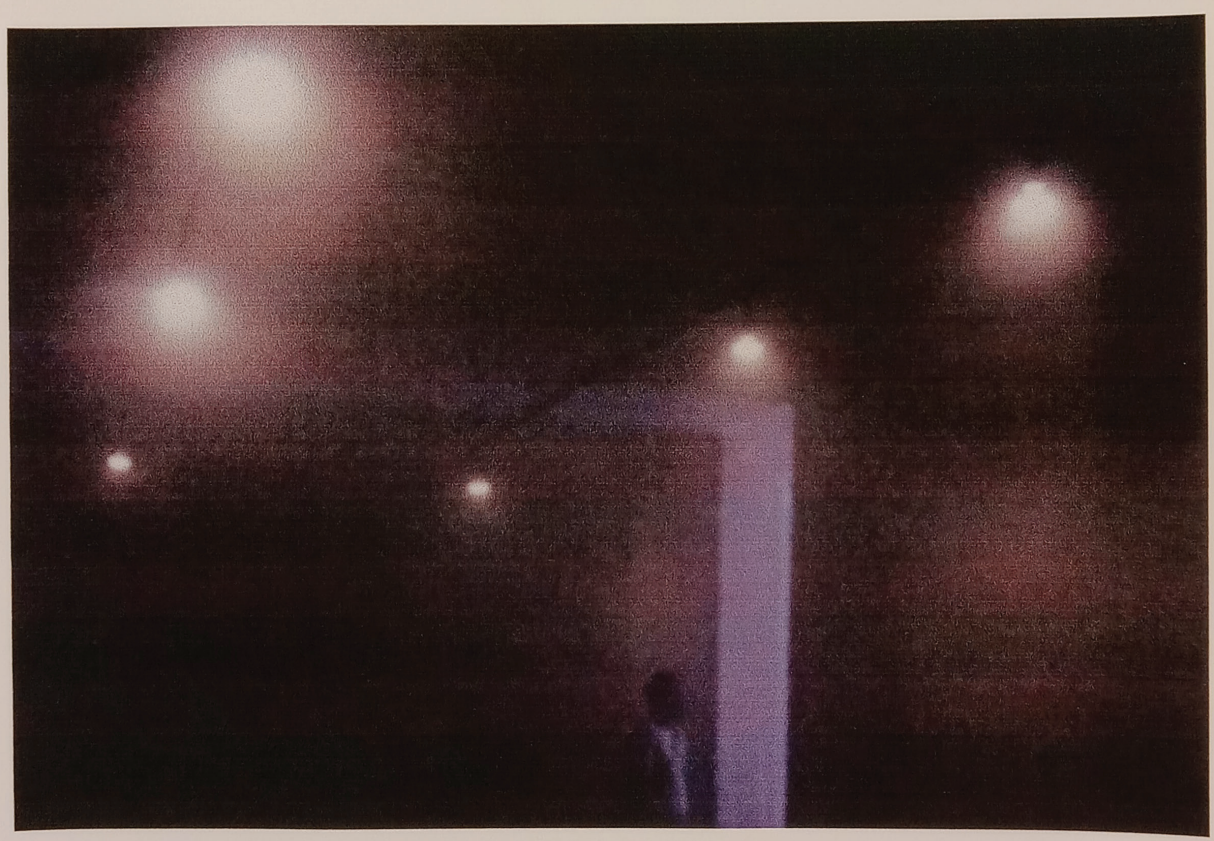

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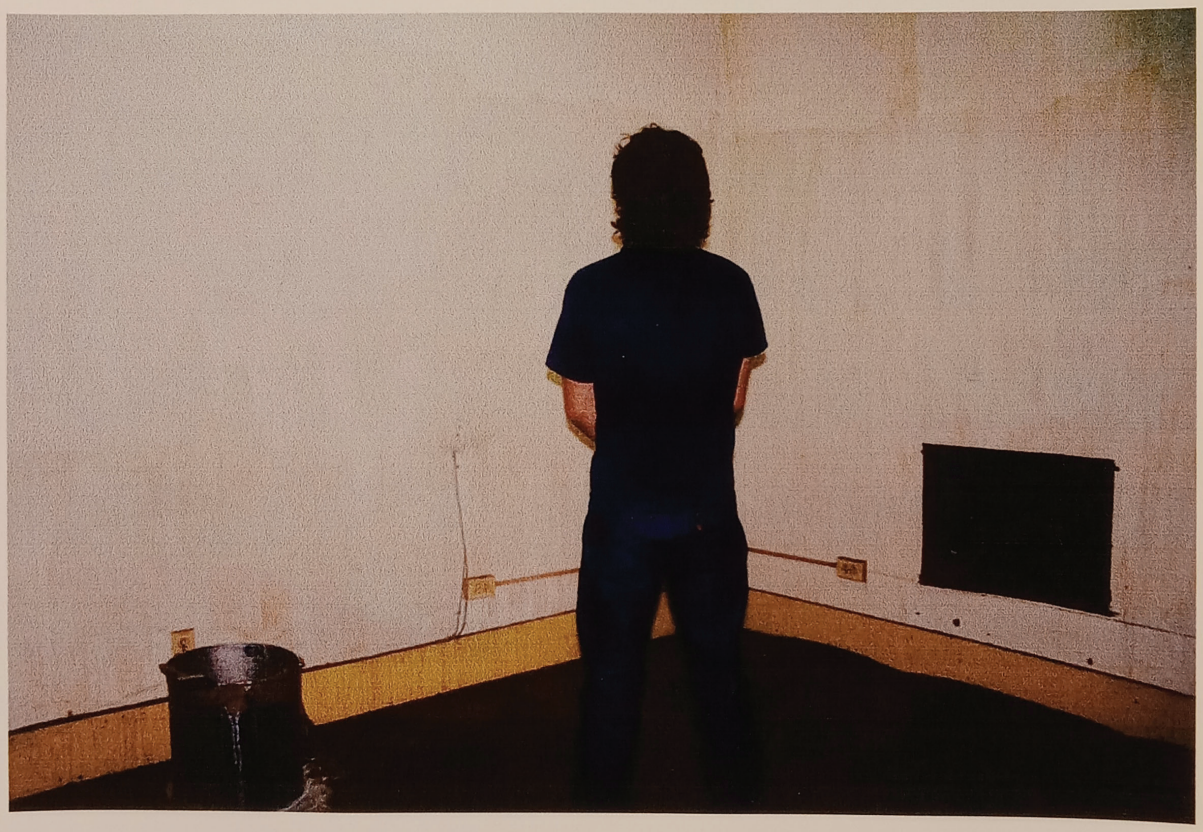

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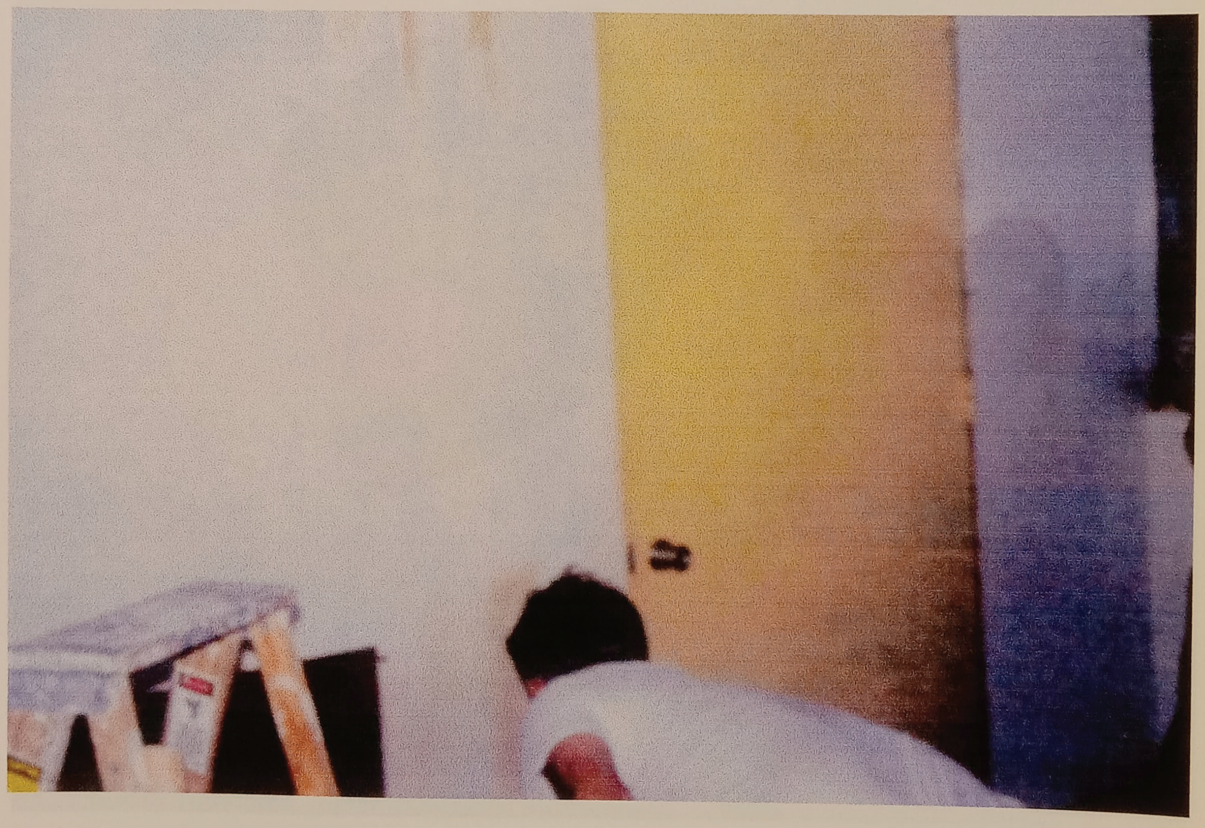

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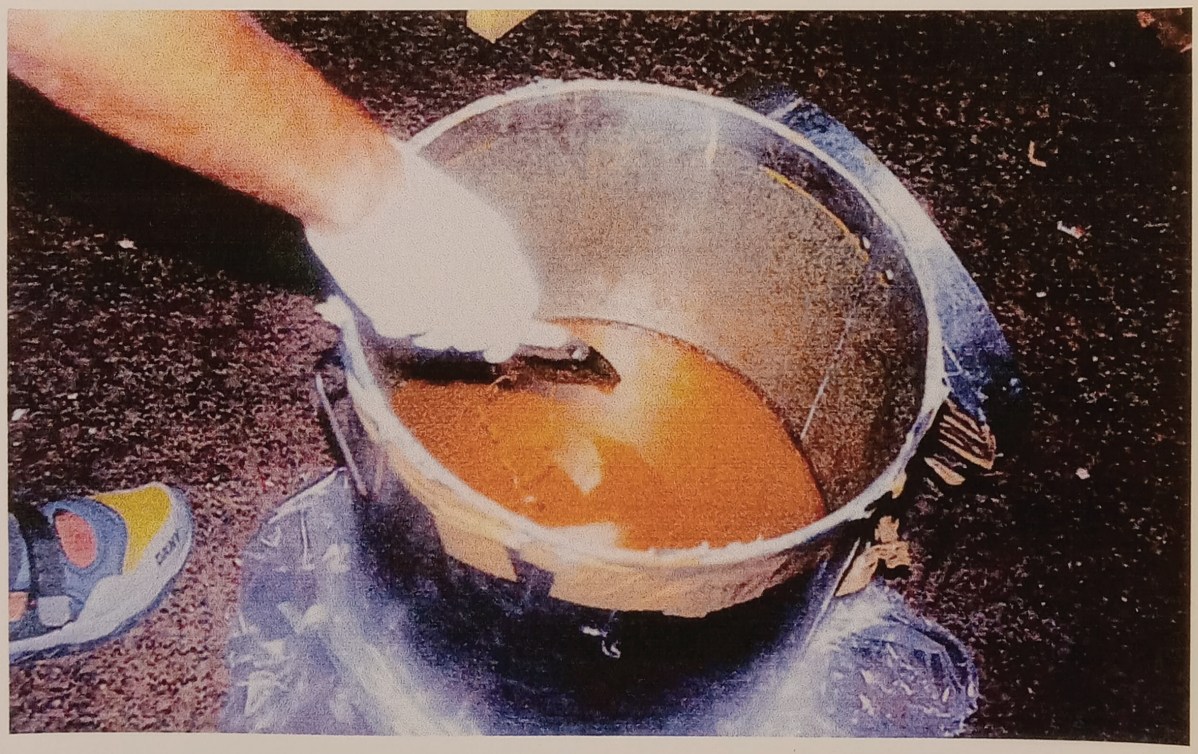

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BACK

Disturbing Images But My Mind No Longer Says "Ahhhh"

I revisit the Ace Gallery in Los Angeles again and saw some disturbing art. I'm sure there's more disturbing stuff out there. After all, we live in a pretty twisted world where some twisted people descend into the underworld of decadence, risk-taking, drugs, booze, and "ladies" of ill repute. They party hardy in an orgy of licentious living foreign to a saint like yours truly.

Of course, some of these twisted people have a poetic soul and vision that they want to share with others, so their soul and vision manifest themselves into high art, or artifacts of cultural importance. And for the price of not even a penny (that's why I cover the art scene), losers like me can entertain ourselves in viewing the images of insanity, living vicariously for 15 minutes or less, in the seduction of evil.

Prostitution for Art's Sake?
The first works I see when I enter the gallery are the black and white photos of this Spanish guy named Santiago Sierra who's based in Mexico City. Based on his artworks displayed at Ace, he seems to have a major problem with aggression. I wouldn't want to be in the same room with him, that's for sure. The images he depicts are like a theater of cruelty. He would totally have a space thrashed -- and photograph the damage.

One of his photos shows 6 young adults in Cuba standing side by side like criminals with their shirtless back towards us. Most of these men have their head down, like in shame. All of them are abject because they are subjects of this photo. The point to this photo is that they have a horizontal line permanently carved in their flesh. So, as they stand side by side, there's a single line across their bare backs. Santiago Sierra paid these men only $30 each to have their back tattooed with this line, which is a pretty large tattoo since it covers from side to side. I guess since those men are unemployed, poor Cubans, Santiago Sierra felt justified to totally dehumanize them by permanently damaging their bodies for only a small sum of dough so that he can document this act and have it displayed at a blue chip gallery. I should have asked the gallery assistants how much this "art" costs. At any rate, you think that's despicable? Wait until you hear about the tongue…

More Exploitation
The Mexican artist Teresa Margolles paid a poor Mexican woman enough money to buy a casket for her dead, teenage son. In return, we got art.

As I walked into a small room, the size of a closet, there was this thing sticking out of the white wall. Just that one object in this room. About three feet away with my very myopic vision, it looked like a rabbit's tail. But closer up, it looked like a stone with a silver ball pierced through it. Actually, it's plaster or something like that -- a cast of an actual tongue, the tongue of that dead teenage son. It was gray colored but black underneath, and it looked pretty large for a human tongue. I guess because it was a plaster cast, as opposed to a rubber cast, it didn't duplicate the tongue realistically enough. So, it looked more like a piece of stone than a tongue.

Teresa Margolles got an actual tongue in return for her paying the mom enough money for probably some cheapo pine casket. In the little explanation sheet (at Ace, they put explanation sheets for all the exhibitions, since apparently we can't think for ourselves), Margolis asked the mother either for the teenager's penis or tongue. The mother chose to give away the tongue, which had a silver ball spiked through it. Apparently the tongue was tattooed. I find that hard to believe. Of course, if someone can actually tattoo his/her tongue, I don't want to see it. Some things are just too gross for even me.

Hard-core Goth
China Adam's current works are the most goth art I've ever seen, I think. I've seen her earlier works at Ace and they've always been conceptual with a weird, sick sense of fancy art school type of humor. Oftentimes they involve notary statements from the state of California acknowledging the validity of this action or that object. You know whom she copied this idea from? Eleanor Antin, obviously. So when you see her works at Ace, you see documents - in the forms of notary statements, photographs, objects and at this one exhibition from a few years ago a recorded

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conversation -- of the weird antics she's gotten herself in, it seems.

At this current exhibition, she shows how gross she can get. She drank a glass of blood taken from her loved ones each day for nine days straight. Of course, this could all be a lie. Nobody has to tell the truth in his/her artist's statement. So probably she phonied up the whole thing, you know?

At any rate, she shows large color photographs of people she allegedly drank blood from -- and they're like professional studio portraits -- very slick and attractive-looking, like head shots, and most of the individuals look conservatively normal, some almost like bona-fide preps in their J Crew-like fashion. Except for one -- the woman with the very short hair bleached platinum blond and wearing red fur. You know she's an oddball. And the other woman -- an adult woman with a childish clip on her hair. She must be bizarre too. They're all photos of women except for one man in his late 20s or early 30s and an elderly man who has the same last name as the artist, so he must either be her old man or her grandfather or her husband or something. Even though he looks like a dignified philosophy professor, he must be some weirdo too for being related to the artist in some way. You know how these things run in the family? But the weirdest of the lot must be the really conservative looking preps: For these photos they made themselves out to look like the epitome of respectability but in reality, they're probably freaks in rubber and plastic, hooked on ecstasy, and spend their weekend with a pacifier in their mouth and a teddy bear behind their back. You know the sort.

So right next to each of these framed photos, she has a tiny metal shelf to the right which holds an empty glass cup with blood stain on it. Above the cup there's a notary form, also carefully framed, testifying that she actually drank the glass of blood. As if.

Conclusion
Not all the works at Ace last week when I went there were disturbing. But the works of these three artists can, I guess, be praised for pushing the envelope for being so unflinchingly perverse. They may not be the most perverse art around, though. They're the kind of curios I can imagine seeing at the Museum of Jurassics Technology down near Venice, which is like a really boring place full of crap. Of course, if they were shown at a phony museum like the Museum of Jurassics Technology, then these artists wouldn't be enviable artists or maybe even art stars but no-name eccentrics, weirdos and psychotics. I think they were smart and aggressive enough to market their questionably creative leanings into artworks for the upper echelon of the art world. So, at the end, it's all about marketing, I guess.

September 13, 2000

BACK

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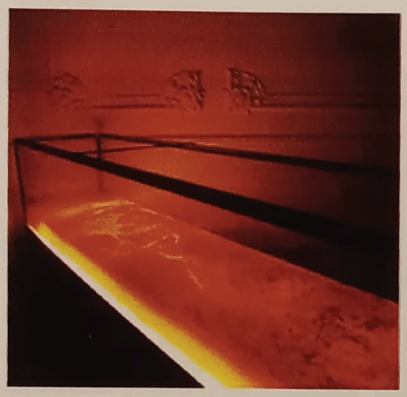
medios alternativos



Fluids , 1996

270 liters of chemistry-organic matter recovered of morgue

Installation

M eresa aría T M argolles S ierra

Culiacán, Without.



I nició their artistic activity in the Direction of Promotion of the Regional Culture in Culiacán, and later studied the race of Sciences of the Communication in the UNAM. It has participated in diverse photographic, individual and collective exhibitions, and in 1994 it obtained the first place in the Hall the Plastic Sinaloense. Its work has been published in magazines as the Guillotine, the Witches, Generation, Free Time and the Day. It is charter member of the group of conceptual art and performance SEMEFO, with which it has made performances, facilities, videos and comic strips, among other activities.

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LA WEEKLY BOOKS People are raving about them

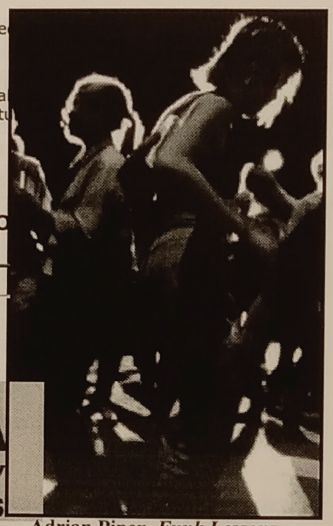
·ART * FEATURE· September 1 - 7, 2000·

Yuck! art

Tongue and blood at ACE Gallery. Plus, Adrian ~~Piper at MOCA.~~

by Doug Harvey

I have to start with the tongue. Protruding from the wall of one of ACE's broom-closet side galleries, Teresa Margolles' *Tongue* first appears to be one of the art world's * * * plethora of oral casting sculptures, differentiated only by the stainless-steel ball piercing it. But, oh them text panels turns out the tongue was cut from the corpse of a teenage Mexican junkie in exchange for money for his family to buy the rest of him a coffin, then formaldehyde preserved to be presented as a work of art. Difficult. As a longtime fan of the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia (a collection of medical anomalies), I'm not particularly shocked by the aestheticization of leftover body parts. But the queasy politics of the negotiation that brings a poor Mexican child's pickled organ into a rich, white, home-decoration showroom is . . . difficult.



Adrian Piper, *Funk Lessons* (1983)

Which is, of course, the entire meaning of the work. Margolles, a street-wise native of Mexico's slums, specializes in works that incorporate parts of murder victims, though *Tongue* is the only piece ACE has been able to import so far. When actually shocked by art, it's best to get some distance before making any pronouncements, so I'll pause to look at a body of work that also relies on its power to disturb — in at least as visceral a manner, ultimately.

By any reasonable criteria, I should hate the work of Adrian Piper — it's formally sparse, politically didactic,

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almost militantly rationalistic, and made by someone with a Ph.D. in philosophy. Having gained fame at a very young age in the early '70s, Piper has gone on to produce increasingly confrontational and politically specific multimedia work, culminating in such discomforting pieces as *Cornered* (1988), in which the black artist, unctuously authoritarian in her nice-lady costume, needles hypothetical white museum-goers about their statistically probable octoroon status. Elsewhere, Piper viciously satirizes the defensive inner voice of the uncomfortable bourgeois viewer, embedding images chosen for their racial and political import in a soundtrack swirl of cliché-ridden liberal cocktail chatter. ("Don't I see enough of this in real life? Art is supposed to be uplifting!")

The effect of Piper's twisting of the institutional questionnaire and voicing of stereotyped defensive rationalizations is to trigger scrutiny by the viewer of whatever rationalizations arise *within* the viewer. From "I'm Canadian, we don't have racism" to "Wait a minute — I'm black!" all strategies of avoidance, watertight as their internal logic may be, are called into question. Much of the discomfort results from the deliberate, even formalist use of mammalian fear triggers, most notably eye contact. Interesting and important as the ideas expressed in the verbal content of the work may be, the real meaning — and place of artistic action — in her work lies in Piper's familiarity with, and articulation of, the almost sculptural space defined by the immediacy of the art experience and in the potential for the expansion of our models of reality during states of acute self-consciousness.

Several works exemplifying this approach are on view in MOCA's "MEDI(t)Ations: Adrian Piper's Videos, Installations, Performances and Soundworks, 1968–1992" (in spite of its abominable sound design, a rewarding cross section of the artist's electronic works). *Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma* , which curdles the tidy pedantics of audio-tour museology just enough, is a standout. The monumental *What It's Like, What It Is #3* (1991) situates the viewer in the bleachers of an overlit white cube-cum-arena. From the four sides of a central rectangular column, a black talking head slowly rotates, facing out in turn from each of four monitors, reciting a litany of negation — "I am not lazy," "I am not shiftless," etc. — that sucks the otherwise unbreached institutional security from the room. Other works are less confrontational. The early sound works toy more directly with the audience's perception of time. Some pieces, such as the dorky installation *The Big Four-Oh* (1988), get by on a highly idiosyncratic poeticism, while the 1983 video *Funk Lessons* , in which Piper instructs a mostly white crowd of UC Berkeley students in the theory and practice of booty shaking, is both

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disarming and revelatory, pointing to the underlying corporeality of her oeuvre.

The bottom line in Piper's art is its physicality. The relentless shaming in her "pseudo-rationalization mimicry" pieces is not about communicating the *idea* that your inner chatter is preventing you from experiencing the work directly, but rather it uses shame's ability to arrest the mind and awaken the endocrine system into a heightened state of self-awareness. The artist deliberately invokes an analogue of the brain-freezing immediacy of great art, so that while she does take the opportunity to plant some sociopolitical evolutionary depth charges, the main lesson is How To Look at Art.

Although it's difficult for me to share Piper's faith in the power of humanity's rational resources to save the species, her work exemplifies what riches of humor, complexity and spirituality a rigorous and academically unfashionable intellect can offer in the form of art. At the same time, she shows just how high the bar has been raised to make academic illustrators and pseudo-conceptual mannerists accountable for their lousy art and lousy thinking. Most of what passes for "conceptual" these days is watered-down pap, rooted neither in a wide-ranging interdisciplinary curiosity about the science and humanities nor in a familiarity with traditional art theory and practice. Instead, it apes those stylistic cues that most reliably evoke the intellectual intimidation attributed (usually mistakenly) to earlier "conceptual art."

But not always. I've followed China Adams' peculiar career since she was snatched by ACE from UCLA's undergraduate program on the basis of her auto-cannibalism piece, where she ate a cubic millimeter of her own flesh in front of a notary and displayed the resulting document. If I recall correctly, Adams insisted that the work was not about sensationalism, but rather an investigation of the crossing over between categories of noncannibal and cannibal. While her subsequent shows have occasionally explored some very odd byways — who can forget the roomful of tape loops of Adams working as ã a phone-sex operator ("Say you're Picasso, baby! Oh my panties are so wet! Tell me about Cubism!") displayed with the wonky geometric canvas forms she sewed while talking to her telephonic johns — they've been generally redeemed by their humor, sensuality and surprise.

This holds true for Adams' latest project, *Blood Consumption* . Opening simultaneously with several interesting shows (including Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film, which I'll hold off on until the Center for Land Use Interpretation unveils its new exhibit about earthworks and entropy), Adams' new work stands out

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immediately as practically the only dose of color in a museum-size space full of outsize black-and-white photos and monstrous off-white paintings. Warm-toned 5-foot-high head shots of nine of Adams' friends gaze benignly out at the viewer, creating a mildly disturbing mix of cozy intimacy and animal alertness. On closer inspection, each portrait is accompanied by a drinking glass coated with a brownish scum, and a notarized statement that Adams subsisted for an entire day on the subject's blood. The bleedings were carefully orchestrated, so that Adams went nine days straight on her plasmic diet, thus qualifying her as a vampire. As usual, Adams' work is a little too vulgar and funny to fit in with contemporary faux conceptualism, and is rendered impure by weird filigrees. The notary testimonials, for example, are completely deadpan, except one. After drinking the blood of Joe Daniel on September 21 last year, Adams noted in the third person, "It is without hesitation that she confirms experiencing a heightened sense of élan coupled with a dynamic sense of vivacity." Flirting with the tabloid fodder of teen goth vampire cults that surfaced a couple of years ago, Adams nevertheless again denies sensationalist motives, emphasizing instead "the fulfillment of unsexualized love" implicit in the act. Whatever. The work is strong enough to make an impression even if you're not grossed out.

Which brings us back to the tongue.

It's not much to look at, but it makes you think. What are the differences of attitude in Mexican culture regarding the sanctity of remains? What is the attitude of Mexicans toward bodily sacrifice on the pyramid of economic inequity? Does the sanctity of the pristine American art institution cover such extreme dislocations? If not, then why does that of the (open to the general public) Mütter? Most goth art is sort of annoying in its finicky depiction of cartoonish horrors — some geek laboring over a drawing board while "The Compleat *Hellraiser* Saga" spools on auto replay is my idea of everlasting torment. At least Margolles is operating in the world her work describes, edging one step in over-the-top theatrical Catholicism toward the nonconsensual third-party bodyworks of Manson et al. Ultimately lacking the subtlety of Piper's manipulations of the complicities and denials that well up in response to provocation, *Tongue* seems flat and binary by comparison — it either works or it doesn't, leaving only a few marginally interesting ethical questions in the wake of its initial charge. But I can't say it didn't move me, and I'll be curious to see a full show if ACE director Doug Chrismas can manage to convince the Border Patrol that NAFTA covers this kind of thing.

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On Saturday, October 14, at 2 p.m., in MOCA's Ahmanson Auditorium, Adrian Piper will deliver a talk explaining her concept of the "indexical present" and revealing her artwork's secret meaning in the context of Ashtanga yoga. $10. Reservations required; for information, call (213) 626-6828.

MEDI(t)Ations: Adrian Piper's Videos, Installations, Performances and Soundworks, 1968–1992 | Museum of Contemporary Art at California Plaza, 250 S. Grand Ave., Downtown | Through November 5

TERESA MARGOLLES' TONGUE; CHINA ADAMS' BLOOD CONSUMPTION; OTHERS | ACE Gallery Los Angeles, 5514 Wilshire Blvd. Through October

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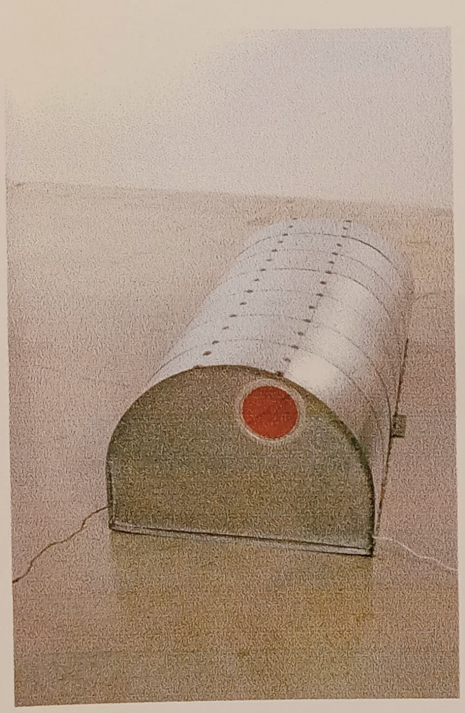



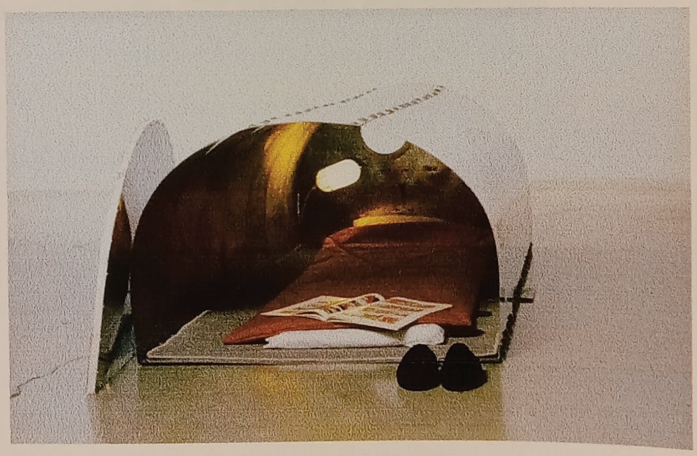

damián ortega
Aterrizaje en la Luna, 1994
Lamina galvanizada, habitat interior, colchon, almohada, quinque, pantunflas, revista (Tin-Tin)
200 x 90 x 70

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
Batalla, 1996
Serie de 5 fotografías
20 x 24" cada fotografía
Edición de 5

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Damián Ortega
Pico Cansado/Tired Pickaxe
1997

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Damián Ortega
Patito Lijador (Sanding Duck), 1997
lijadora, madera, pintura, sensor
sander, wood, paint, sensor

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Damián Ortega
Obelisco con rueditas, 1996
Metal, ruedas. 300x60x60 cms.

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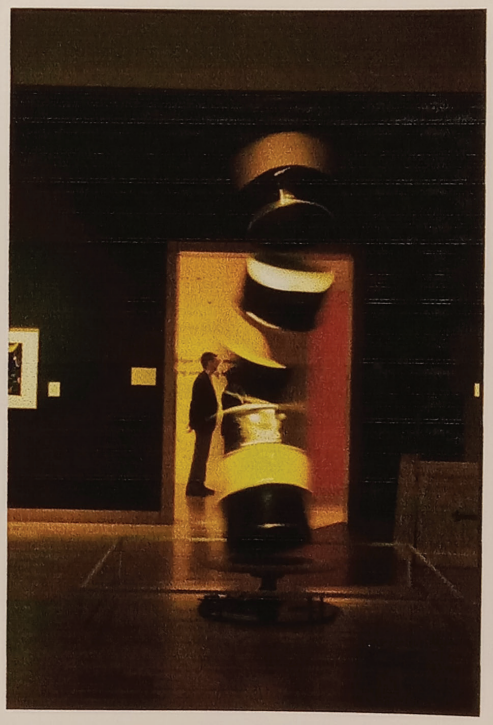

Damián Ortega
Movimiento en falso (Estabilidad y crecimiento económico), 1999
Tres barriles de petróleo y base giratoria

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damián ortega
módulo de construcción con tortillas, 1998
(Tortilla construction modules)

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damián ortega
módulo de construcción con tortillas, 1998
(Tortilla construction modules)

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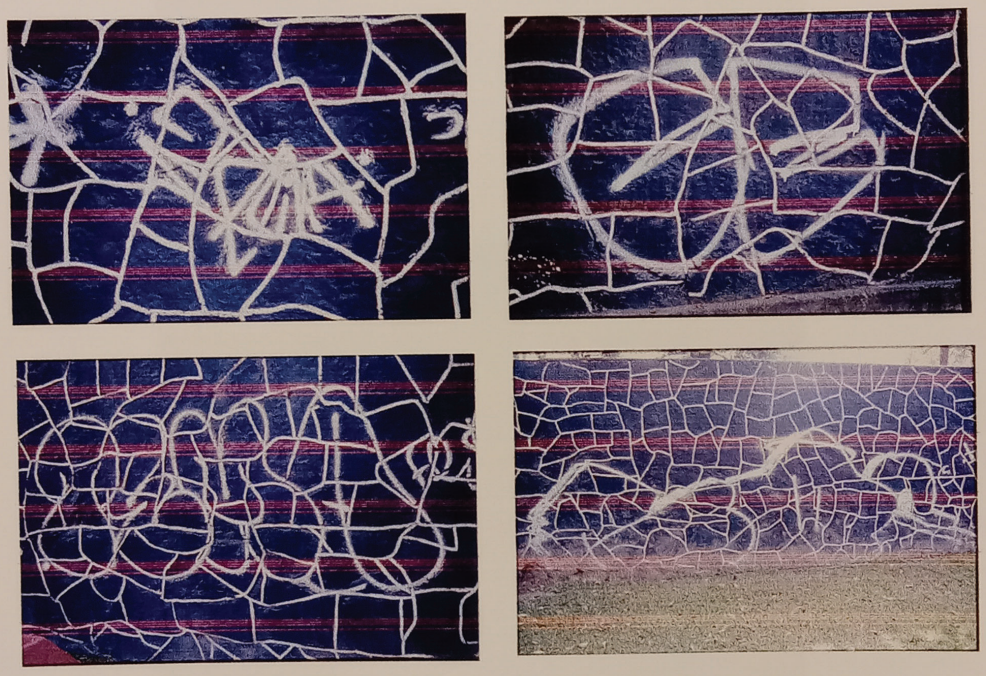

damian ortega
Linea blanca (White line), 2001
4 C-prints 16 x 20"

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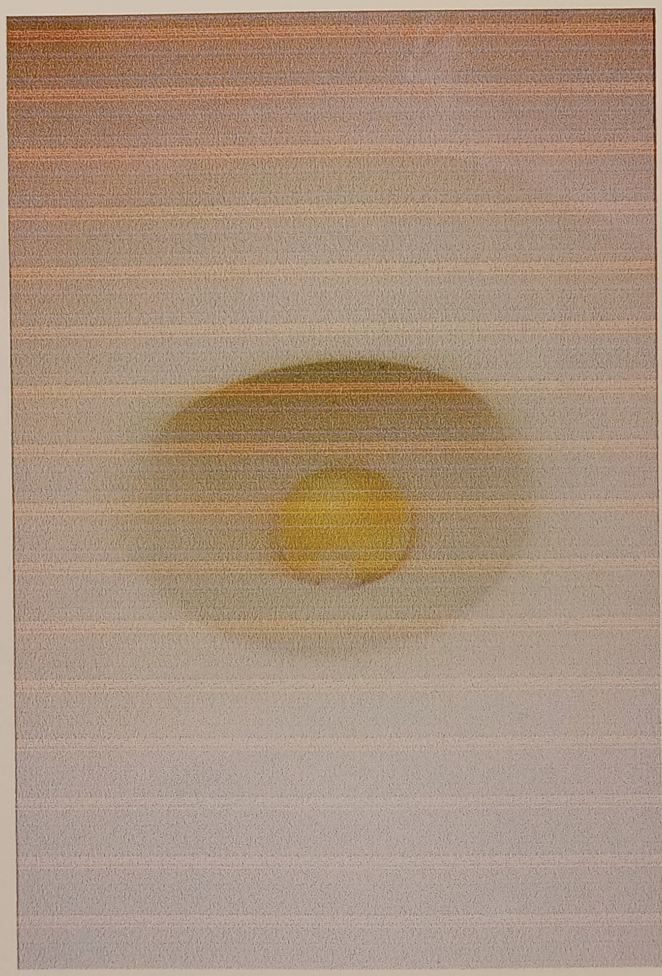

Damian Ortega
Sin Título (WC con yema de huevo), 1997
C-Print ilfochrome
16x20"
Ed 5 + 2 ap

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damián ortega
Homos, 1998-1999
20 fotografías, repisa objetos varios

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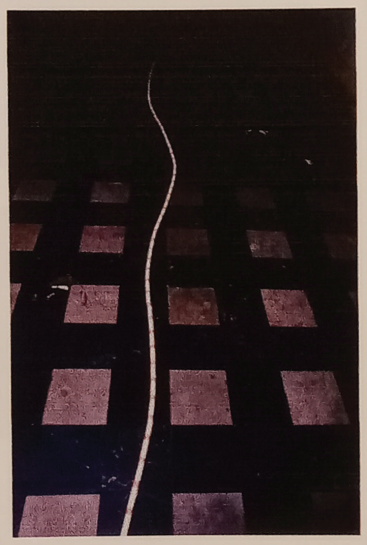



damian ortega, 100 dólares de dieta, 2000
100-dollar expense allowance changed in ten thousand pennies
joined up vertically to form a 15-metre long intestine
Installation view at Puerto Rico'00 (Paréntesis en la "Ciudad")

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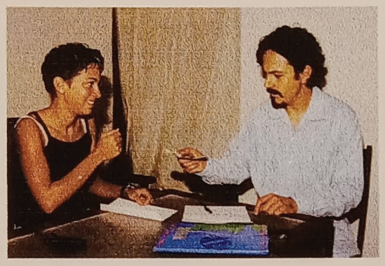

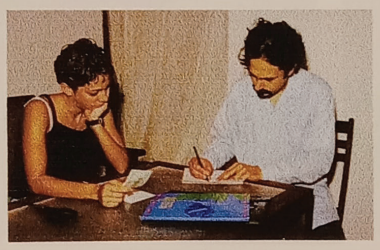



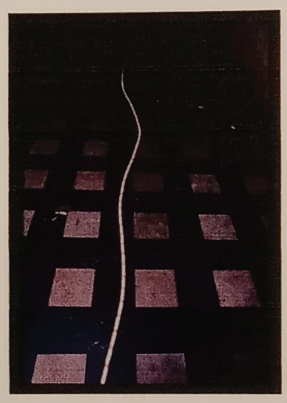

damian ortega, 100 dolares de dieta, 2000

I left Mexico City for San Juan in Puerto Rico, taking only the clothes I had on, three tins of "charro" beans, a couple of bags of Japanese chili-seasoned peanuts, which the Department of Health recommends to the population of Mexico as an extremely nutritional product, and a few chocolate-coated granola bars. I had no money on me. When I arrived in Puerto Rico I was given a 100-dollar expense allowance provided by the organisation of the event and accomodation in a hotel room, where I could stay during the exhibition.That week I employed a number of different tactics of accumulation and trying not to spend resources or waste any energy.
During the week I tried to heat my food in the sun, rest, wash clothes and leave it to dry all night with the intention of following strategies of economy of famous misers. At night I went out to events where sandwiches and refreshments were served. I was also invited out to lunch and for a beer a few times.
For the montage I went to a bank to change the total sum of the allowances. I had been given for little coins of one cent, forming a 15-metre long intestine with ten thousand pennies joined up vertically, extended throughout the gallery.

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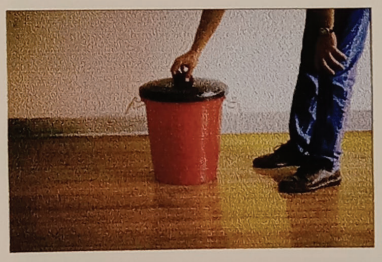





DAMIAN ORTEGA
Desocultamiento, 1996
Serie de tres fotografías
20 x 24" cada una - Edición de tres

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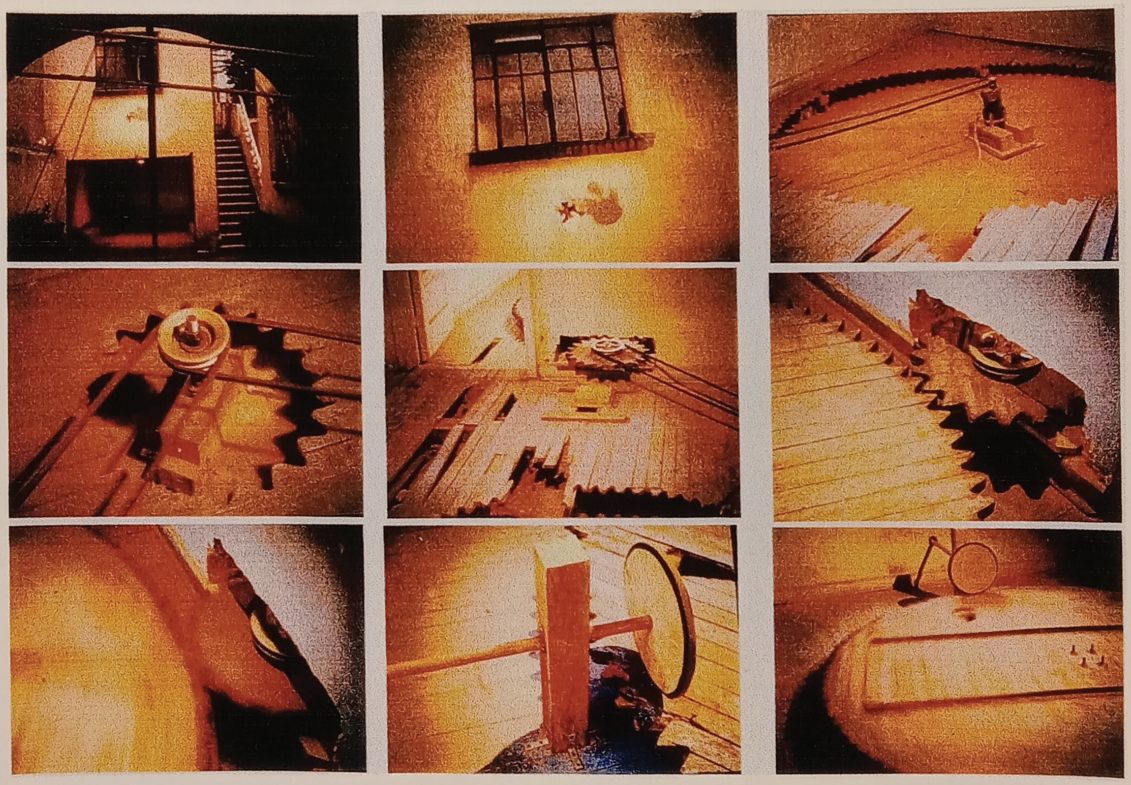

damián ortega
Cuarto de juego, 1995 (game room)

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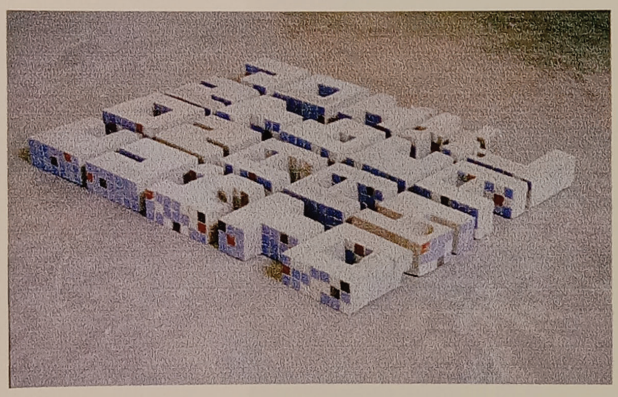



Damián Ortega
Conjunto Habitacional, 1999
Cemento, azulejos

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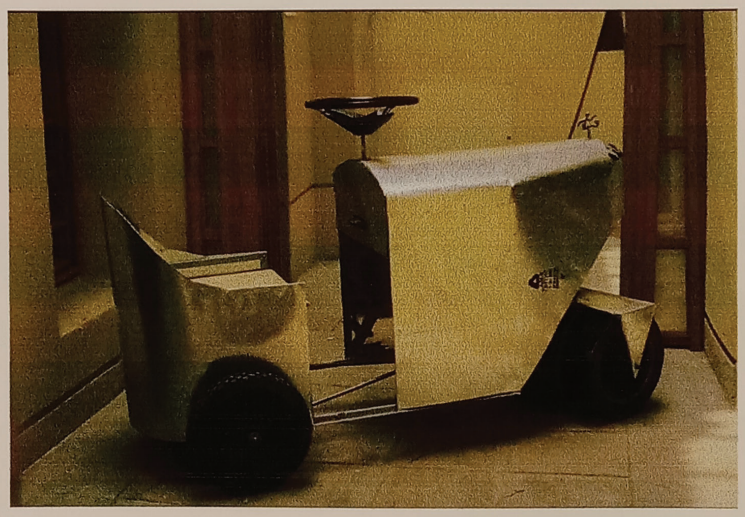

DAMIAN ORTEGA
***Carrito Aplanadora*, 1991**
Vehículo de uso personal
Aluminio galvanizado, llantas
volante, escudo
150 x 120 x 90 cm

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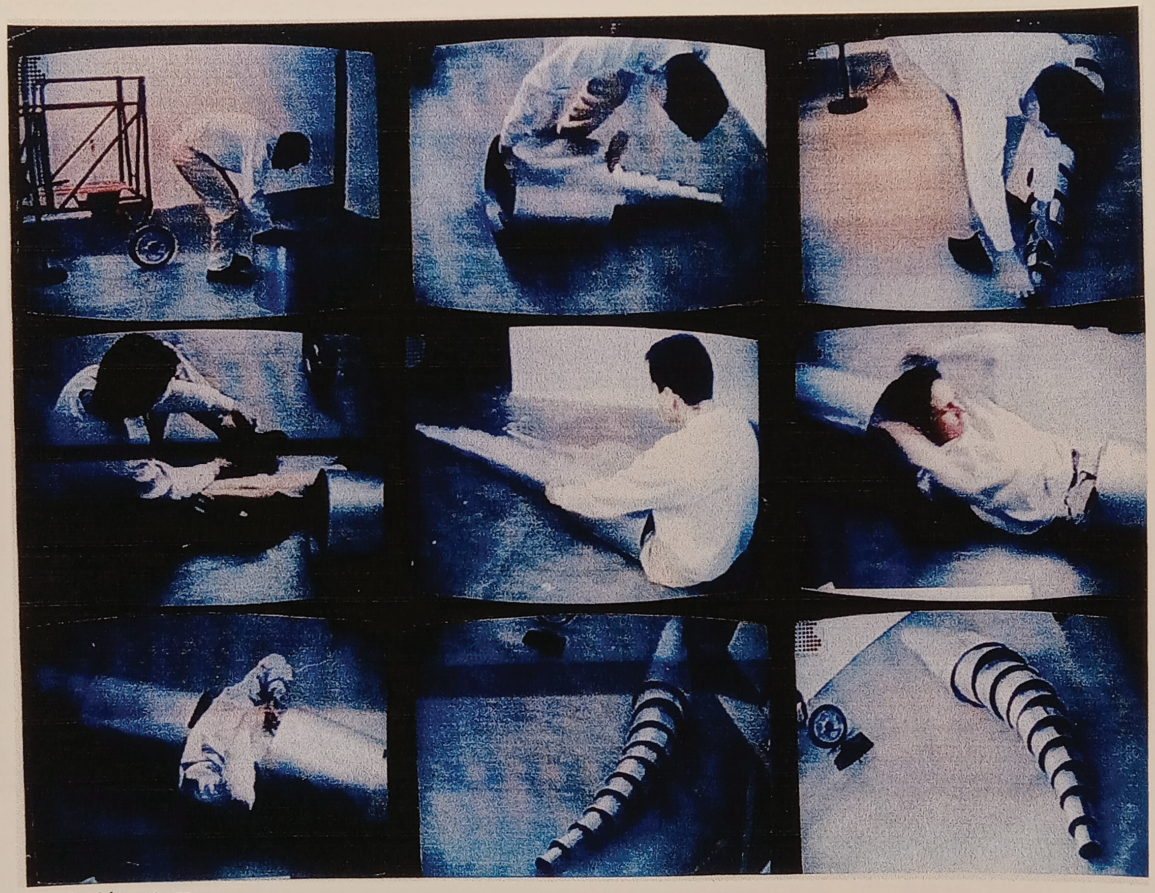

damián ortega
Capullo, 1991 (Cocoon)
Hi 8 Video 12 min
Galvanized metal sculputure 250 x 60 x 60 cm

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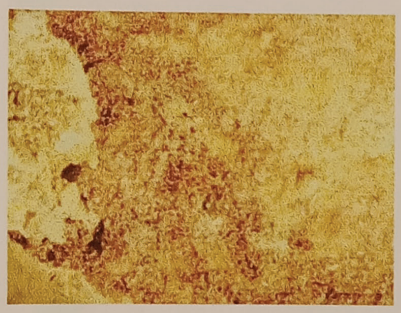



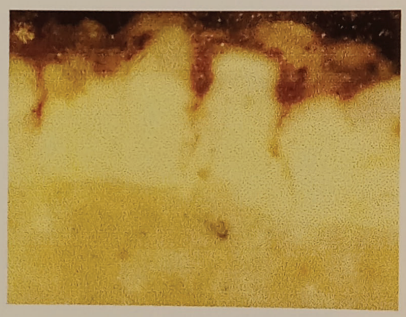

Damián Ortega
Capas Pictóricas, 1997
fotografías de vista al microscopio

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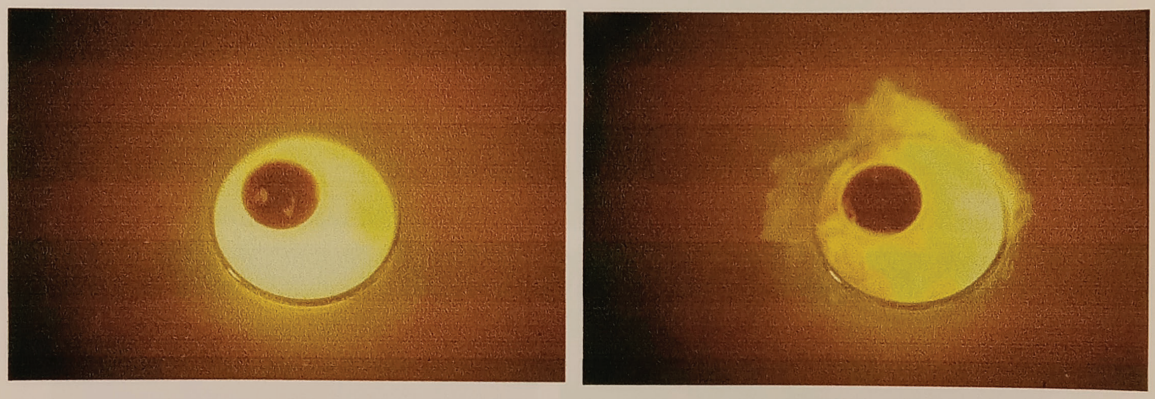

Damian Ortega
Cafe con Leche, 1997
2 C-Prints
16x20"
Ed. 5 + ap

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
***Brotes*, 1999**
Serie de 4 fotografías
16 x 20" cada fotografía
Edición de 3

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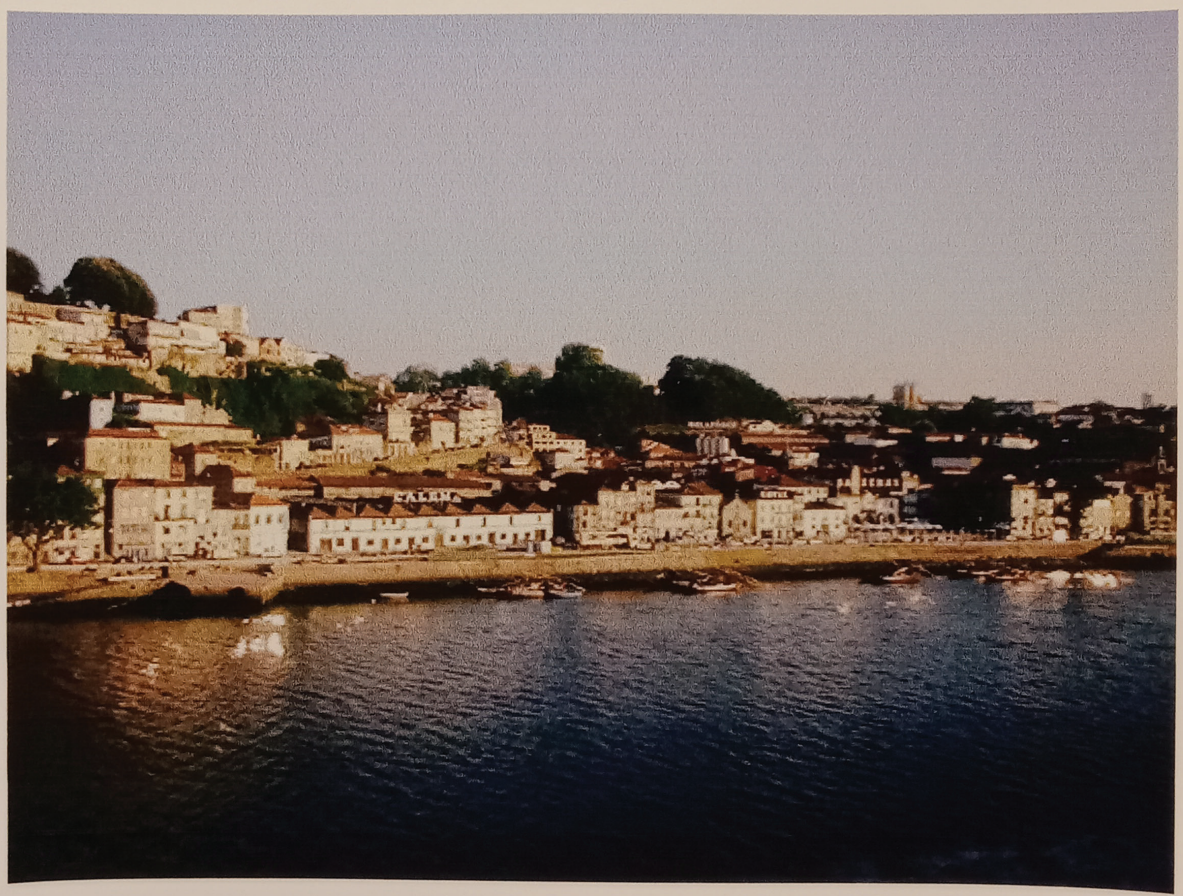
- Alguem me soleta



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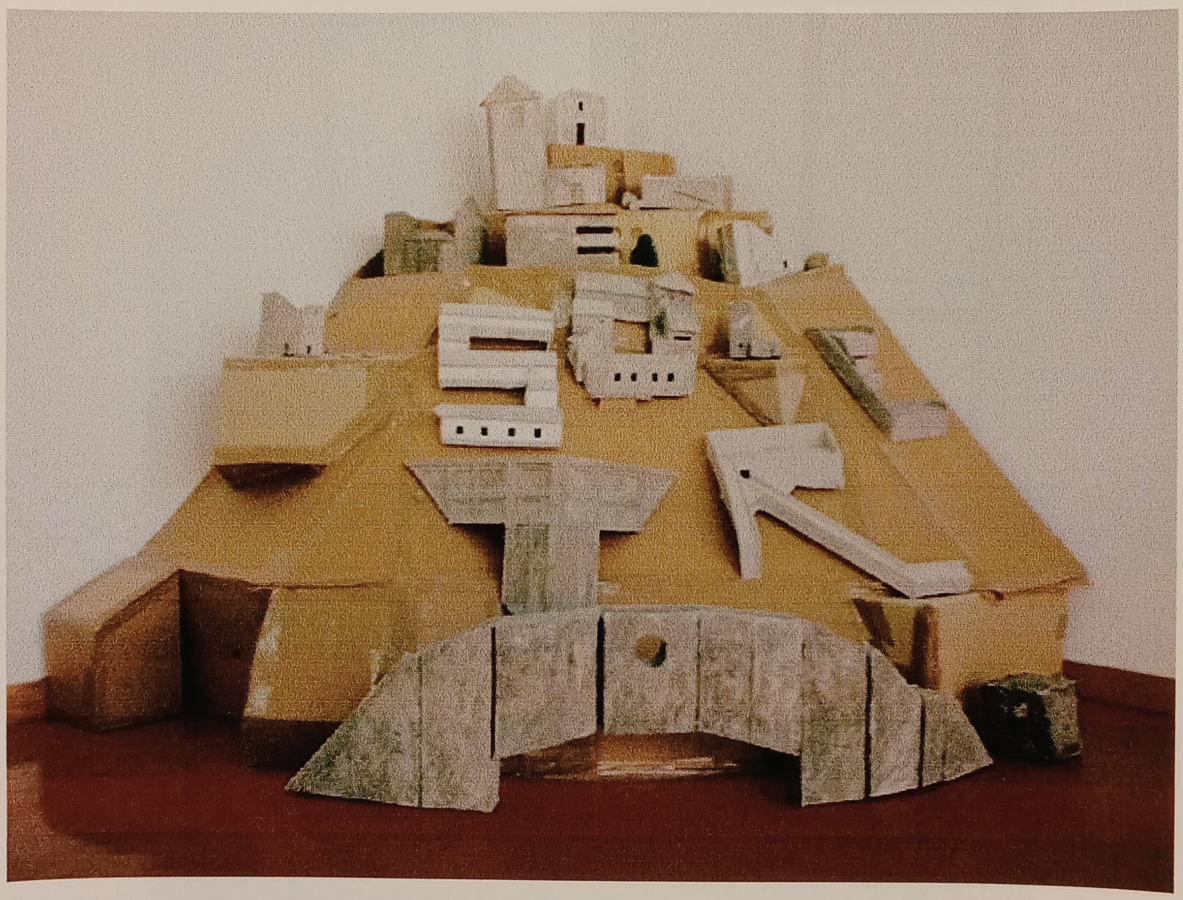

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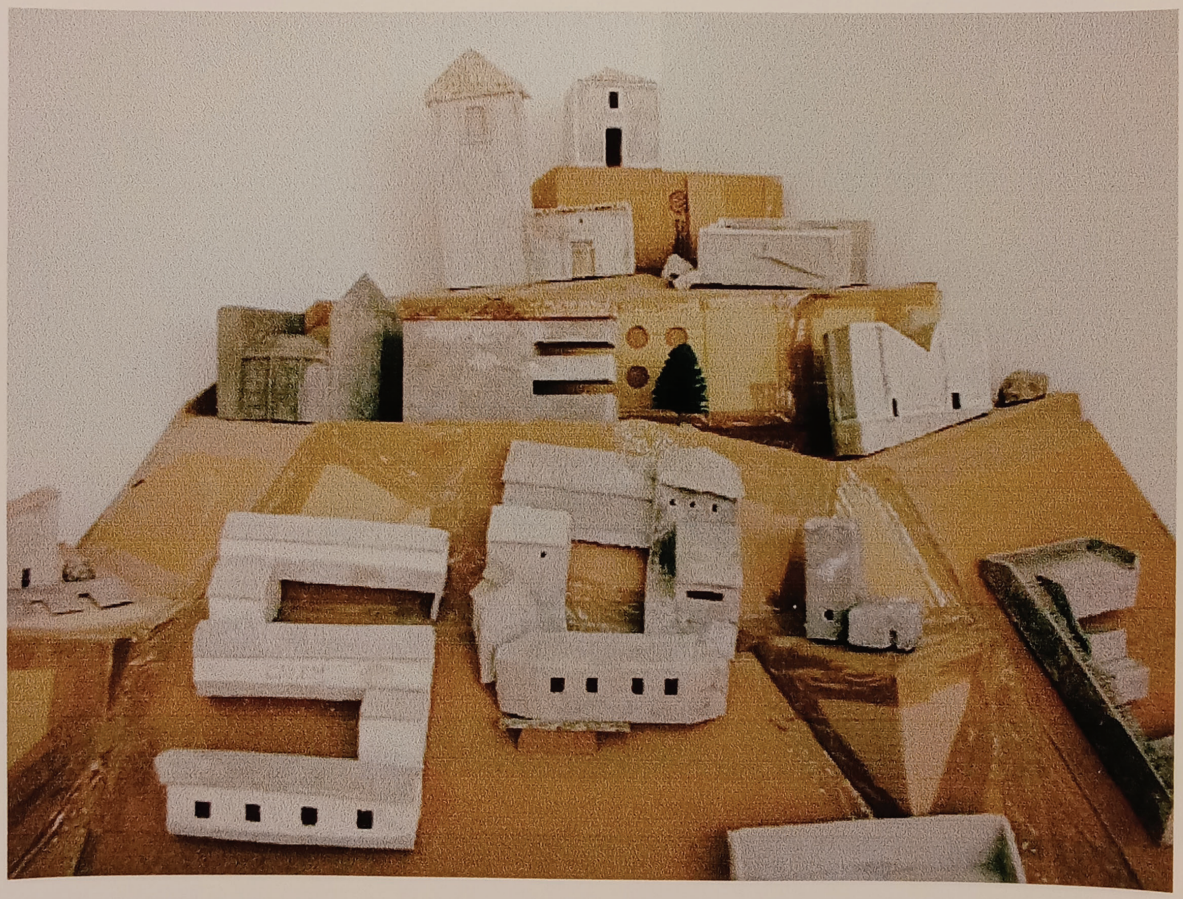

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
***Puentes y Presas*, 1997 (autoconstrucción)**
Extensión, Contensión, Puente, Obstáculo
Serie de 4 fotografías

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
Puentes y Presas 1997 (autoconstrucción)
Extensión, Contensión, Puente, Obstáculo
Serie de 4 Fotografías

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
***Puentes y Presas*, 1997 (autoconstrucción)**
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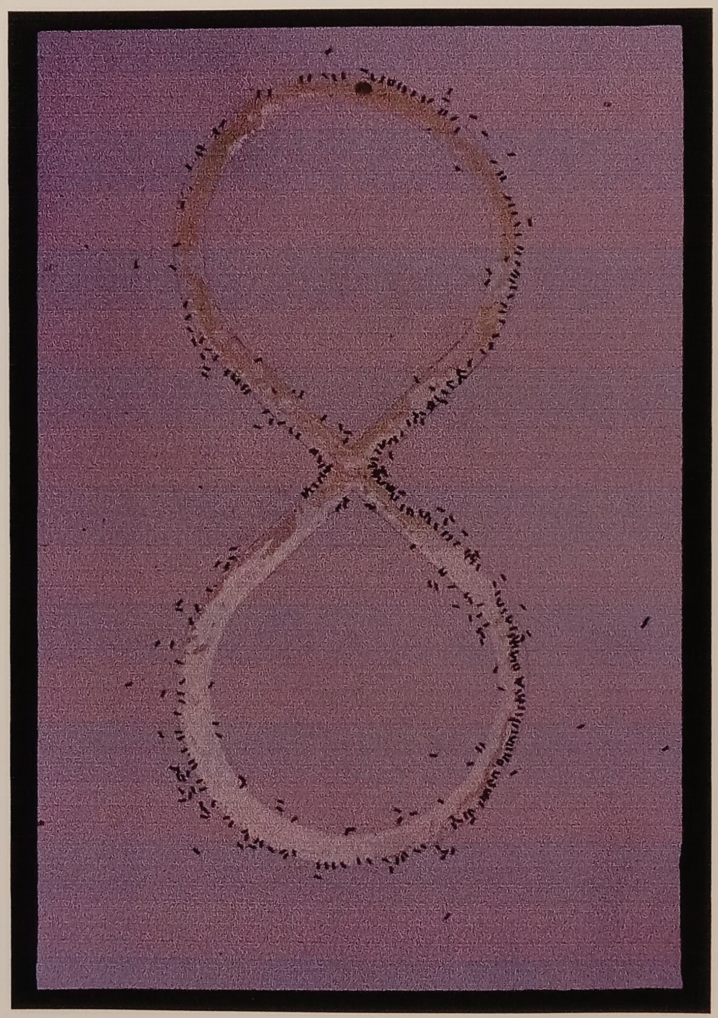

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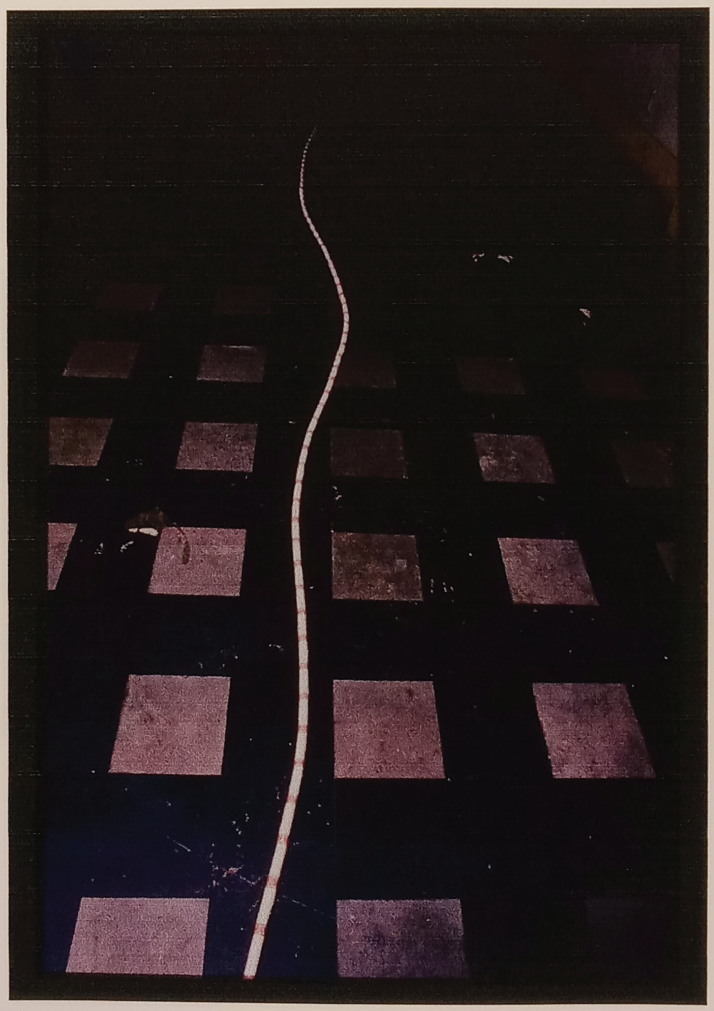

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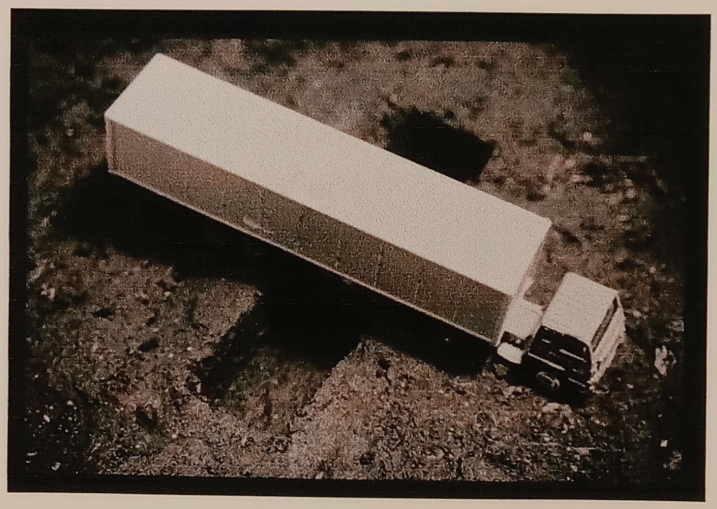

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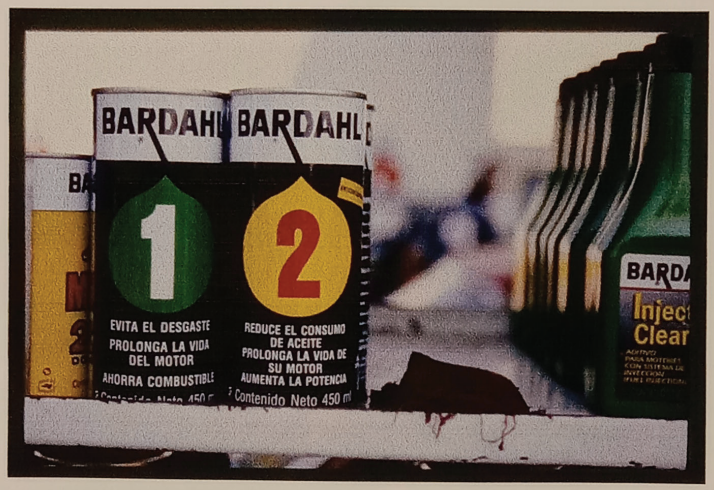

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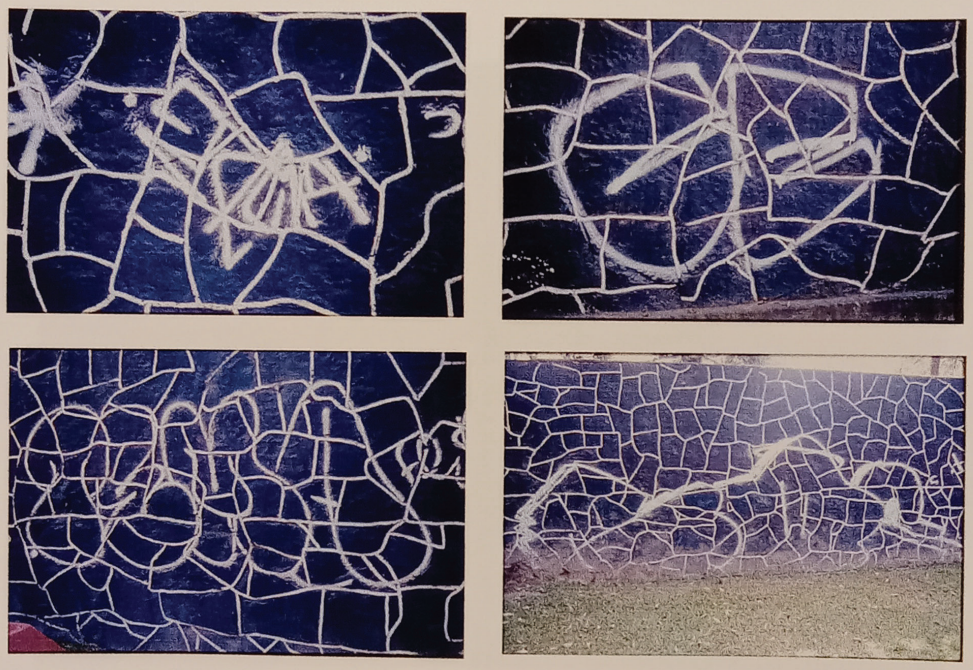

damian ortega
Linea blanca (White line), 2001
4 C-prints 16 x 20"

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
Salinismo/Stalinismo, 1993
letras de hierro
100 x 30 x 5 cm

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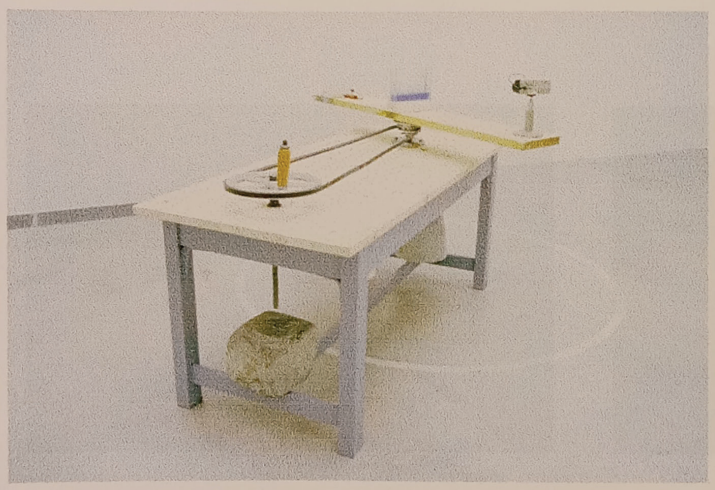



Damián Ortega
Unión-Separación, 2000
Mesa, poleas, pecera, cámara de video, proyección de video

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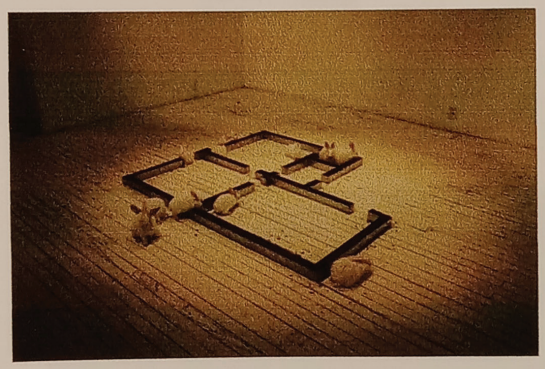
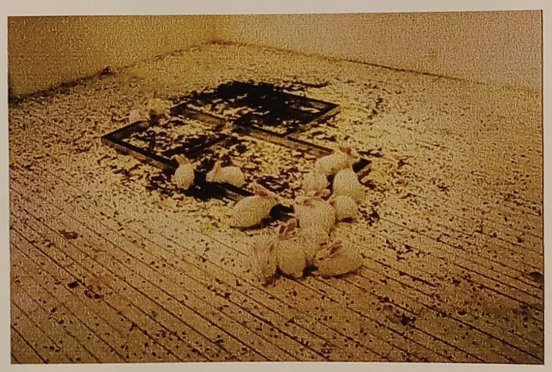
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	MoMA PS1	I. A. 3066



DAMIAN ORTEGA
***Reglas e Instintos*, 1997**
Instalación en Art&Idea
Conejos - planta del espacio en metal galvanizado con alimento para conejos y agua



Vista de la instalación 15 días después

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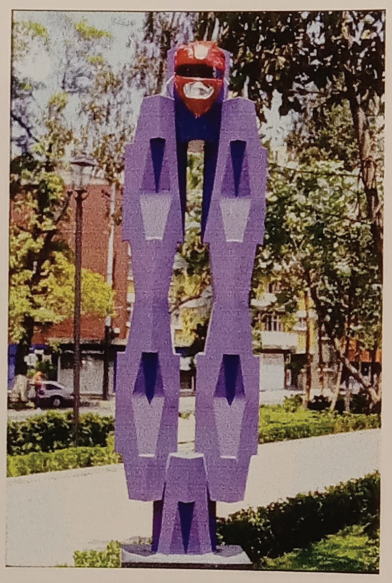

DAMIAN ORTEGA
Power Rangers, 1996
Serie de tres fotografías
16 x 20"

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
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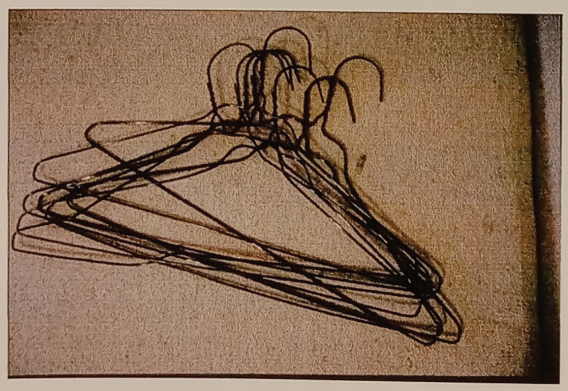

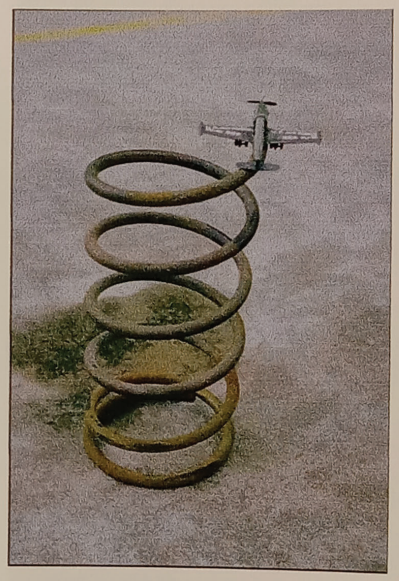

DAMIAN ORTEGA
Visión Simultanea, 1991-99
(Simultaneous Vision)
3 C-Prints
16 x 20"
Ed. 3 + 2ap

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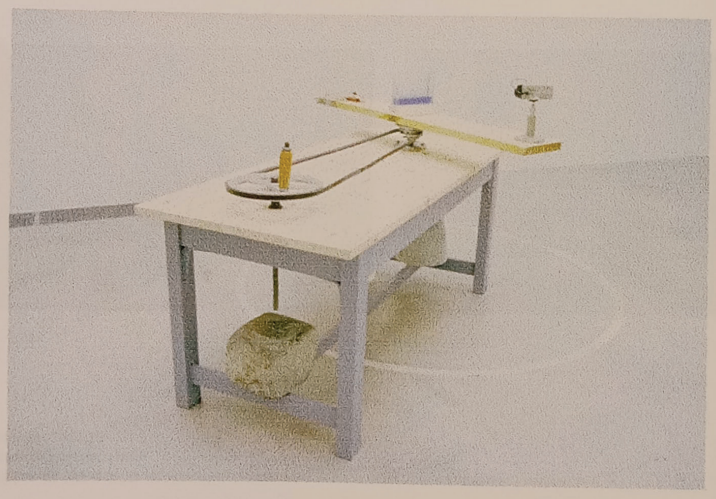

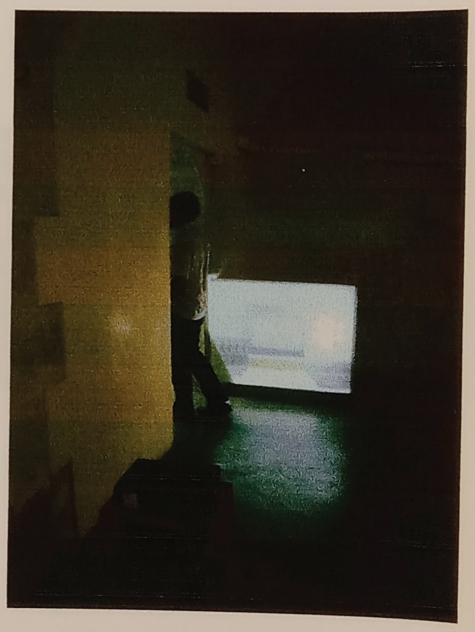

Damián Ortega
Unión-Separación, 2000
Mesa, poleas, pecera, cámara de video, proyección de video

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
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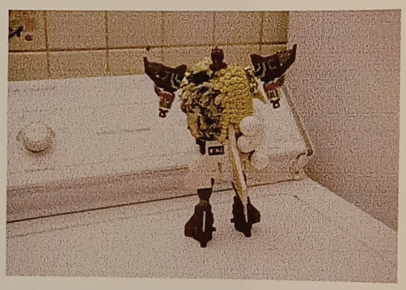

Damián Ortega
Transformers, 1999
robots de plástico, productos perecederos

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
Salinismo/Stalinismo, 1993
letras en fierro
100 x 30 x 5 cm

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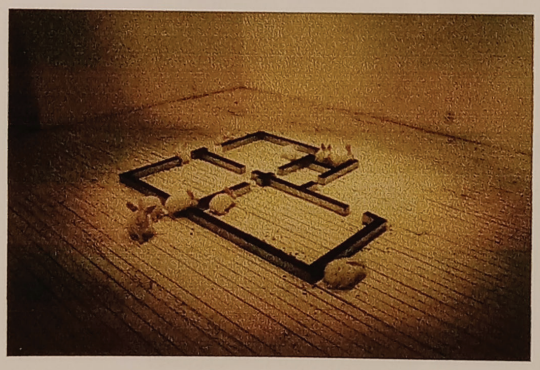

DAMIAN ORTEGA
***Reglas e Instintos*, 1997**
Instalación en Art&Idea
Conejos - planta del espacio en metal galvanizado con alimento para conejos y agua



Vista de la instalación 15 días después

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	MoMA PS1	I. A. 3066



DAMIAN ORTEGA
América Nuevo Orden, 1996
Serie de 6 fotografías
16 x 20" cada fotografía
Edición de 5

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	MoMA PS1	I. A. 3066



DAMIAN ORTEGA
***Aterrizaje en la luna*, 1994**
Lamina galvanizada, habitat interior-quinque, colchón, almohada
200 x 90 x 90 cms

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	MoMA PS1	I. A. 3066

kurimanzutto
t/f (5255) 5256.2408
tel (5255) 5553.0665
cel 04455.2128.7631
info@kurimanzutto.com

Damián Ortega

BIOGRAPHY

Mexico D.F. 1967
Lives and works in Mexico City

Solo exhibitions

2002 **DOT IT!.** Artist project for Frieze Magazine, March April issue

2001 **ALGUEM ME SOLETRA.** Artist in Residence, Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal.

1997 **REGLAS E INSTINTOS.** Galería Art & Idea, México D.F.

1991 **FUERZA VIVA.** Galería ETNIA, México D.F.

Group shows (selection)

2002 **GAWNJU BIENNALE.** Gwanju, South Korea.
DAMIAN ORTEGA. Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia.

2001 **ANIMATION.** P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York.
SQUATTERS. Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal.
SQUATTERS. Museum Witte de With, Roterdam, Holland.
ARS 2001. Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland.
DO IT! Museo de Arte Carrilo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico
TIRANA BIENNALE. Albania
ESCULTURA MEXICANA. De la Academía a la Instalación. Palacio de Bellas Artes, México, D.F.
MUTATIONS. LA VIDEO MEXICAINE ACTUELLE. Palais des Arts, Toulouse. Iconoscope, Montpellier, Francia.
COMO ES QUE LOS AUTOS NO VUELAN AÚN. Centro de las Artes, Monterrey, Mexico.
METROPOLIS MEXICA. Musée de Picardie; Amiens, Francia.

2000 **GABRIEL OROZCO INVITE À LA GALERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL**
LA GALERIE KURIMANZUTTO. Paris, Francia.
TORINO PRIZE. FONDAZIONE SANDRETTO RE REBAUDENGO PER L'ARTE, Torino, Italia.
PERMANENCIA VOLUNTARIA. Galería kurimanzutto. Cinemanía, Plaza Loreto, México D.F.

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SUPERMODERNISMO (IMPROVISADO). Ex Teresa Arte Actual, México, D.F.
PUERTO RICO 00 (Paréntesis en la Ciudad), Puerto Rico.
VIDEOARTE DE LA NUEVA GENERACION. Generalli Foundation, Suiza.

1999 **YO Y MI CIRCUNSTANCIA** Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Canada
B.I.F. BIENAL INTERNACIONAL DE FOTOGRAFIA. Centro de la Imágen, México D.F. Salón de Invitados
ECONOMIA DE MERCADO. Galería kurimanzutto. Mercado de Medellín, México D.F.
DOBLES VIDAS
Taller General (Abraham Cruzvillegas, Gabriel Kuri y Gabriel Orozco). Museo Barbier-Mueller d´Art Precolombí/ Museo Textil I d´Indumentaria, Barcelona, España
PROJECT ROOMS
Feria Internacional de Arte Contemporaneo ARCO Madrid, España
LA SALA DEL ARTISTA. Galería Kurimanzutto. México D.F.

1998 **YESTERDAY BEGINS TOMORROW: IDEALS, DREAMS AND CONTEMPORARY AWAKENINGS**
Center for Curatorial Studies and Contemporary Art & Culture.Bard College. Nueva York, EUA
PREPOSITIONS II
Musée Departamental d´Art Contemporain, Palace du Rochechouart. Francia

1997 **LINES OF LOSS.** Artists Space, Nueva York, EUA
INSTALACIONES. Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, MACO - Oaxaca, México
CREACION EN MOVIMIENTO. Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Carrillo Gil, México, D.F.
MERCURIO, COMUNICACION Y DINERO. Galería de Arte Contemporáneo. Guadalajara, Jalisco

1995 **NUEVAS PRACTICAS COLECTIVAS.** Galería Arte Contemporáneo. Guadalajara, Jalisco
(EN TRANSITO) SEÑALES PRESENTES. Intercambio artístico. México, D.F., Buenos Aires Argentina.
DEUX EX MACHINA. Museo Universitario del Chopo México, D.F.

1994 **BEELDEN BUITEN 1994.** Tuin de Brabandere - Tielt Tielt, Bélgica
TENTO ONSTELLING. Galería C.D. Tielt, Bélgica
CRONOLOGIAS. Temístocles # 144, México, D.F.

1993 **INSTALACIONES LICENCIADO VERDAD.**

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Other activities

co-editor and collaborator of casper magazine

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DAMIAN ORTEGA
América Nuevo Orden, 1996
Serie de 6 fotografías
16 x 20" cada fotografía
Edición de 5

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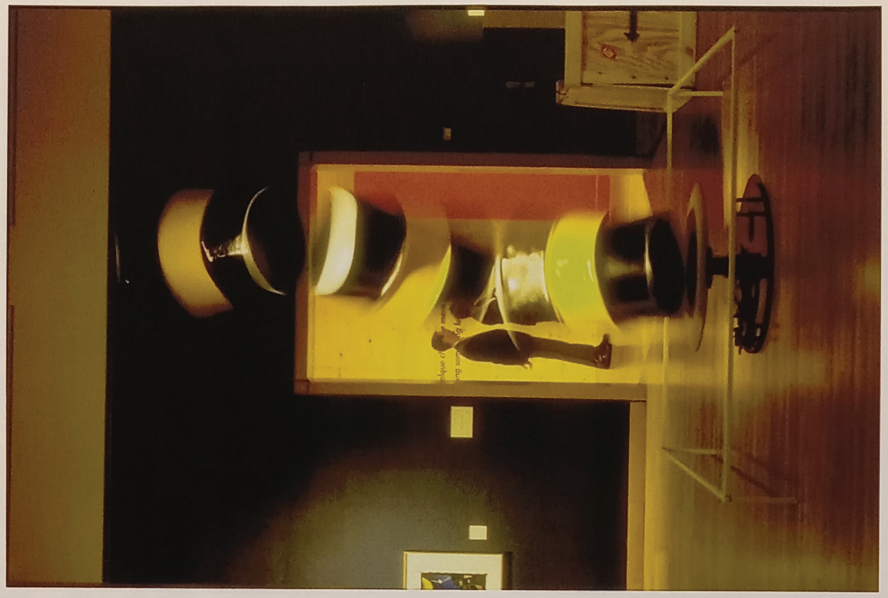



Damián Ortega
Movimiento en falso (Estabilidad y crecimiento económico), 1999
Tres barriles de petróleo y base giratoria

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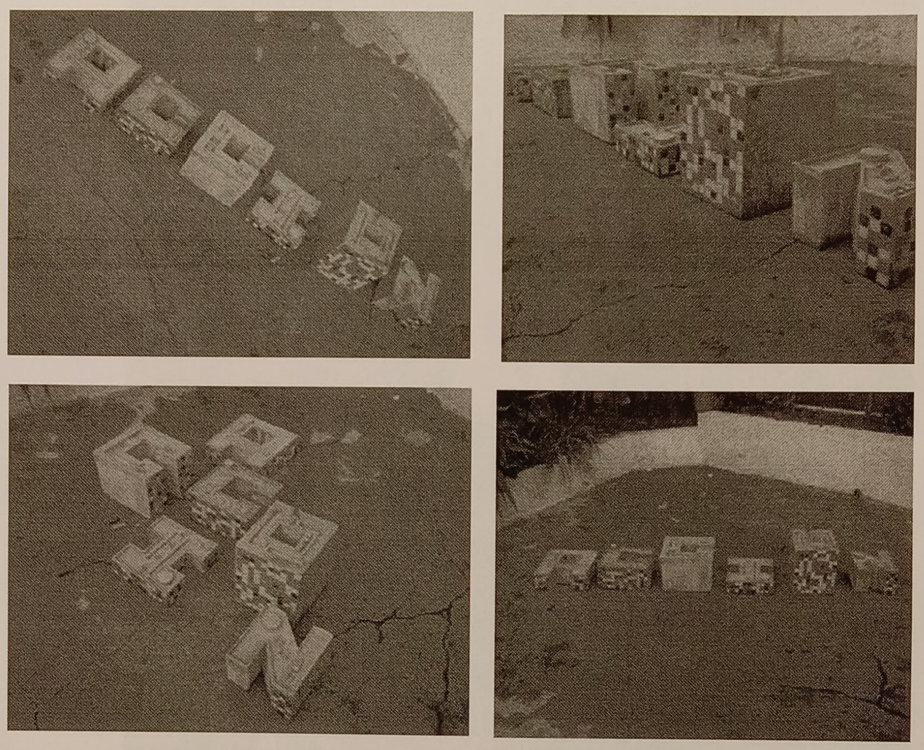

Damián Ortega
Acción, 2000
Cement, tiles, toys 120 x 30 x 40 cm

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[redacted]

América Letrina, 1997
C-Print
16x20"

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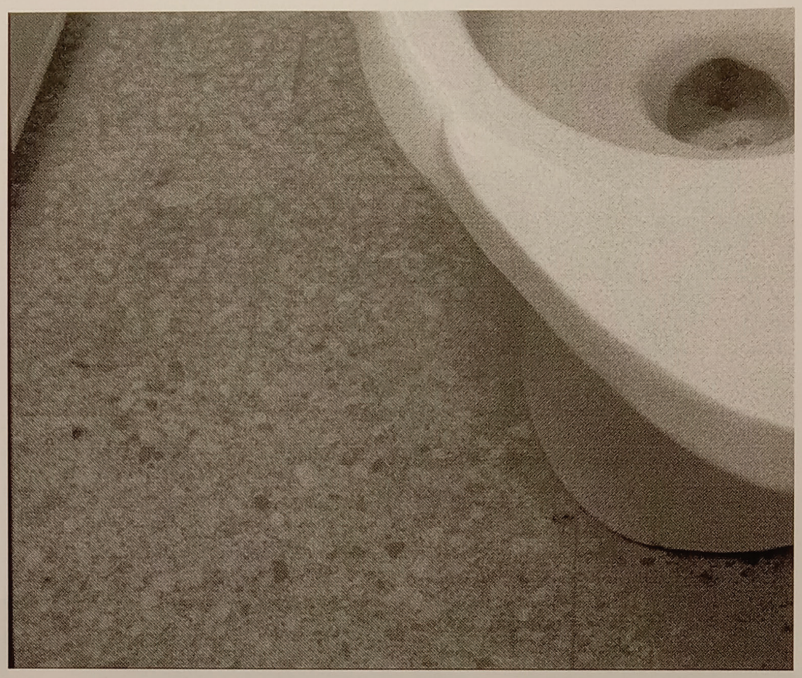
	MoMA PS1	I. A. 3066



Damian Ortega
América Letrina, 1997
C-Print
16x20"
Edition 5 + 2 AP

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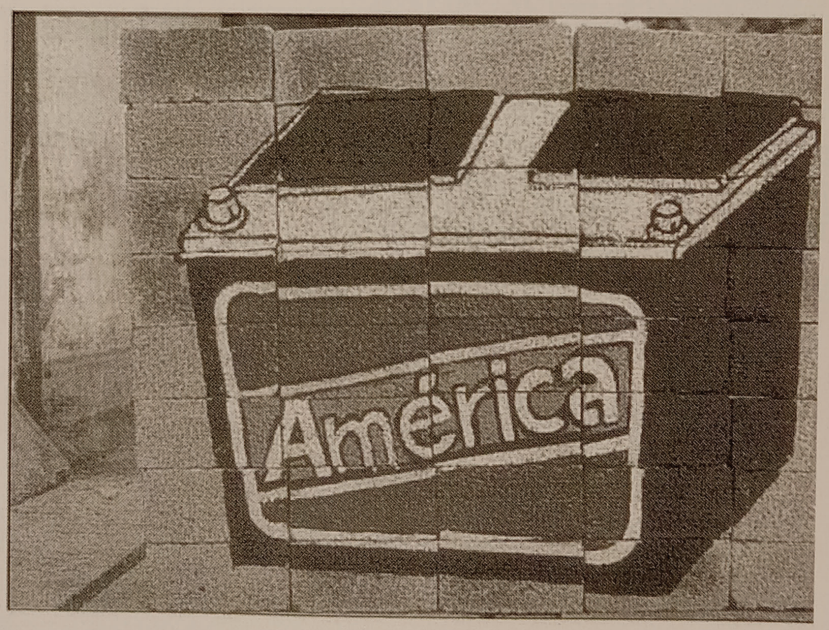

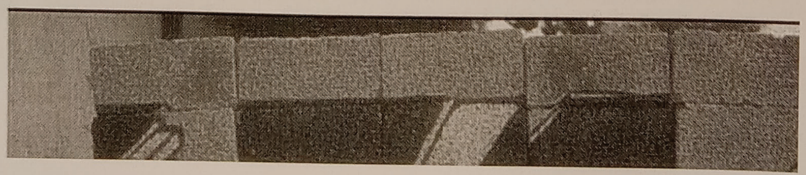

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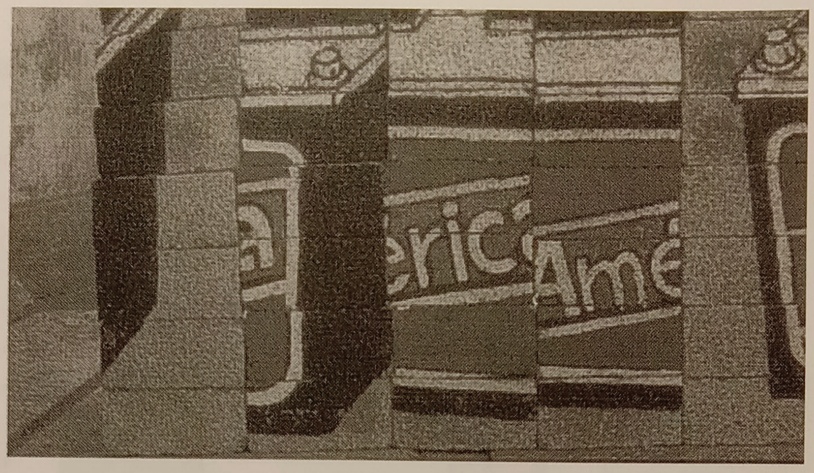

Damian Ortega
América, Nuevo Orden, 199(
Sculpture
40 painted building blocks
Unique piece

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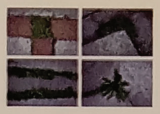
D'AMELIO TERRAS

Polly Apfelbaum
Erica Baum
Delia Brown
Tony Feher
Joanne Greenbaum
Glenn Ligon
John Morris
Rei Naito
Rika Noguchi
Damián Ortega
Miguel Rio Branco
Karin Sander
Joe Scanlan
Yoshihiro Suda

Click on image for details



Conjunto Habitacional, 2000
cement, tiles, toys



Brotes, 1999
4 c-prints



Tortilla Module, 1998
tortillas



American Toilet, 1997
c-print



Self-Construction, Extesion, 1997
construction with chairs and table tied up



Self-Construction, Bridge, 1997
chairs



Sanding Duck, 1997
sand, wood, paint, sensor



Pico Cansado (Tired Pickax), 1996
c-print



Obelisk on Wheels, 1996
metal, wheels

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D'AMELIO TERRAS

Polly Apfelbaum
Erica Baum
Della Brown
Tony Feher
Joanne Greenbaum
Glenn Ligon
John Morris
Rei Naito
Rika Noguchi
Damián Ortega
Miguel Rio Branco
Karin Sander
Joe Scanlan
Yoshihiro Suda

Work | Biography | Bibliography | Press | Off-site

Damián Ortega
by Angeline Scherf

Originally appeared in ARS 01, published by the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, 2001.

In addition to fantasy and the possible illusions created by forms, Damián Ortega nevertheless seeks to subtly alter the syntax or everyday objects and their signification. He is inspired by everyday objects, such as pick-axes, golf balls, tortillas or bricks. He deconstructs the mechanisms by which they are interpreted, and alters them, revealing hidden, implicity, different and symbolic components and creating hybrid forms. He has taken upon himself the task of redefining our way of reading the world.

He thus disturbs the codes of sculpture by transforming a Mexican monument into a giant Power Ranger (Power Rangers, 2001) or by placing a commemorative monument on wheels (Obelisco con ruedritas, 1996). He also creates a model for futurist sculpture (Vision Simultánea, 1991-1999) by lining up supermarket trolleys according to the dynamics of movement. In Pico Cansado (Tired Pick-Axe) he breaks down into parts the idea of a sculptur as an intangible, "heroic" material, making it a live, physical and human one – "introducing weakness" as he says. In this manner, he approaches Marcel Duchamp's proposition of "making a sick painting".

Damián Ortega's approach to art consists of incursions – incursion into the domain of the image which he disturbs, into social behaviour which he repeatedly revisits, and into objects which he questions again and again. He pushes signs beyond their dimension of "product" – a dimension always preceding the sign in the symbolic and market economy. A desire for irreverence continually incites him to inscribe art into a dynamic and transformable system.

Damián Ortega
by Octavio Zaya

Originally appeared in Fresh Cream, published by Phaidon Press, 2000.

At the core of Damián Ortega's art lies a consistent desire to play tricks with our expectations. In his sculptures, installations and videos, he translates this urge through the actions he confers on familiar objects and living beings, such as animals and organic items, toys, furniture and all types of tools, gadgets and instruments of everyday life. These actions carry out a mischevious process of transformation and dysfunction that builds up our hopes a if we were waiting for Godot, only to leave us empty-handed. The very nature of the objects uses is short-circuited from the functional and utilitarian to the inadequate and useless.

The performative syntax of Ortega's aesthetic languages and mechanisms draws upon a tradition of cultural assault that ranges from Dada to the Situationists, from Bunuel to Conceptual art. It is also influenced by Ortega's previous occupation as a political cartoonist (profession that has been highly respected as an intellectual activity in Mexico since Jose Guadalupe Posada established it as a transgressive tradition in the 1870s); its bittersweet perversity gives a tongue-in-cheek flavour to his work.

Ortega displays few subjective emotions in the process of his actions, always balancing a que for pleasure with a certain skepticism. And yet his work encourages torrents of feelings from the viewer, ranging from curiosity and enjoyment to frustration and indifference. For Ortega selects his objects, actions and ideas precisely for their polyvalent potential, undermining fixe notions, eschewing any single reading, and always leaving a margin for speculation and unexpected thrills.

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Exhibitions D'AMELIO TERRAS

Past
Future
Off-site

Back to Artist's Page | All Offsite Exhibitions by Year

DAMIÁN ORTEGA

Animations
October 14, 2001 - Mid January, 2002
Group Exhibition
P.S. 1, Long Island City, NY
http://ps1.org

Do It
November 14, 2001 - February 10, 2002
Group Exhibition
Curated by Hans Ulrich-Obrist
Museo De Arte Carillo Gil
http://www.macg.inba.gob.mx/

Solo Exhibition
2002
Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
http://www.icaphila.org

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Damián Ortega

ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

1997 Galería Art & Idea, Mexico City, *Reglas e Instintos*
1991 Galería ETNIA, Mexico City, *Fuerza Vivai*

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

2001 P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, *Animations*
Museo Serralive, Porto, Portugal, *Squatters #1*, traveled to Museum Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, Holland
Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland, *ARS 2001*
Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, *Escultura Mexicana: de la Academia a la Instalación*
Palais des Arts, Toulouse, *Mutations: Contemporary Video from Mexico*, traveled to Iconoscope, Montpellier, France

2000 Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, *Gabriel Orozco invites kurimanzutto gallery to Galerie Chantal Crousel*
Galería kurimanzutto at Cinemanía, Plaza Loreto, Mexico City, Mexico *Permanencia Voluntaria*
Ex Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City, Mexico *Permanencia Voluntaria*
Puerto Rico '00 (Paréntesis en la Ciudad), Puerto Rico
Generalli Foundation, Vienna, Switzerland, *New Generation Video*

1999 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada, *I, and My Circumstance: Mobility in Contemporary Mexican Art*
Centro de la Imágen, Mexico City, Salón de Invitados, *B.I.F. Bienal Internacional de Fotografia*
Galería kurimanzutto at the Mercado de Medellín, *Market Economy*
Museo Barbier-Mueller d'Art Precolombí and the Museo Textil I d'Indumentaria, Barcelona, Spain. *Dobles Vidas*, organized by Taller General (Damían Ortega, Abraham Curzvillegas, Gabriel Kuri and Gabriel Orozco)
Project Room, ARCO International Contemporary Art Fair, Madrid, Spain
Galería kurimanzutto, Mexico City, Mexico, *La Sala del Artista*

1998 Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, *Yesterday Begins Tomorrow: Ideals, Dreams and Contemporary Awakenings*
Musée Departamental d'Art Contemporain, Palace du Rochechouart, France, *Prepositions II*

1997 Artists' Space, New York, NY, *Lines of Loss*
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, MACO - Oaxaca, Mexico, *Instalaciones*
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Garrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico, *Creacion en Movimiento*
Galería de Arte Contemporáneo, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, *Mercurio, Comunicacion y Dinero*

1995 Galería Arte Contemporáneo, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, *Mercurio, Comunicacion y Dinero*
Artist exchange, Mexico City, Mexico, and Buenos Aires, Argentina; *(En Transito) Señales Presentes*
Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico, *Deux ex Machina*

1994 *Beelden Buiten 1994*, tuin de Brabandere and Tielt, Belgium
Galería C.D. Tielt, Belgium, *Tento Onstelling*
Temístocles #144, Mexico City, Mexico, *Cronologias*

1993 *Instalaciones Licenciado Verdad*, Mexico City, Mexico

GRANTS, SCHOLARSHIPS AND PRIZES:

2000 Torino Prize, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo per L'Arte, Turin, Italy
1995 Jóvenes Creadores FONCA
1991 Jóvenes Creadores FONCA

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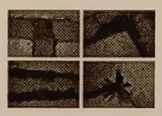
D'AMELIO TERRAS



Conjunto Habitacional, 2000
cement, tiles, toys



Brotes, 1999
4 c-prints



Tortilla Module, 1998
tortillas



American Toilet, 1997
c-print



Self-Construction, Extesion, 1997
construction with chairs and table tied up



Self-Construction, Bridge, 1997
chairs



Sanding Duck, 1997
sand, wood, paint, sensor



Pico Cansado (Tired Pickax), 1996
c-print



Obelisk on Wheels, 1996
metal, wheels

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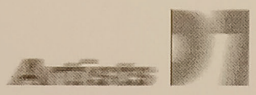

D'AMELIO TERRAS

Polly Apfelbaum
Erica Baum
Delia Brown
Tony Feher
Joanne Greenbaum
Glenn Ligon
John Morris
Rei Naito
Rika Noguchi
Damián Ortega
Miguel Rio Branco
Karin Sander
Joe Scanlan
Yoshihiro Suda

ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

1997 Galería Art & Idea, Mexico City, *Reglas e Instintos*

1991 Galería ETNIA, Mexico City, *Fuerza Vival*

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

2001 P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, *Animations*

Museo Serralve, Porto, Portugal, *Squatters #1*, traveled to Museum Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, Holland

Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland, *ARS 2001*

Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, *Escultura Mexicana: de la Academia a la Instalacion*

Palais des Arts, Toulouse, *Mutations: Contemporary Video from Mexico*, traveled to Iconoscope, Montpellier, France

2000 Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, *Gabriel Orozco invites kurimanzutto gallery to Galerie Chantal Crousel*

Galería kurimanzutto at Cinemania, Plaza Loreto, Mexico City, Mexico *Permanencia Voluntaria*

Ex-Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City, Mexico *Permanencia Voluntaria*

Puerto Rico '00 (Paréntesis en la Ciudad), Puerto Rico

Generalli Foundation, Vienna, Switzerland, *New Generation Video*

1999 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada, *I, and My Circumstance: Mobility in Contemporary Mexican Art*

Centro de la Imágen, Mexico City, Salón de Invitados, *B.I.F. Bienal Internacional de Fotografia*

Galería kurimanzutto at the Mercado de Medellin, *Market Economy*

Museo Barbier-Mueller d'Art Precolombi and the Museo Textil I d'Indumentaria, Barcelona, Spain. *Dobles Vidas*, organized by Taller General (Damian Ortega, Abraham Curzvillegas, Gabriel Kuri and Gabriel Orozco)

Project Room, ARCO International Contemporary Art Fair, Madrid, Spain

Galería kurimanzutto, Mexico City, Mexico, *La Sala del Artista*

1998 Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, *Yesterday Begins Tomorrow: Ideals, Dreams and Contemporary Awakenings*

Musée Departamental d'Art Contemporain, Palace au Rochechouart, France, *Propositions II*

1997 Artists' Space, New York, NY, *Lines of Loss*

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, MACO - Oaxaca, Mexico, *Instalaciones*

Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Garrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico, *Creacion en Movimiento*

Galería de Arte Contemporáneo, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, *Mercurio, Comunicacion y Dinero*

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1995 Galeria Arte Contemporáneo, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, *Mercurio, Comunicacion y Dinero*

Artist exchange, Mexico City, Mexico, and Buenos Aires, Argentina; *(En Transito) Señales Presentes*

Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico, *Deus ex Machina*

1994 *Beelden Buiten 1994*, tuin de Brabandere and Tielt, Belgium

Galeria C.D. Tielt, Belgium, *Tento Onstelling*

Temístocles #144, Mexico City, Mexico, *Cronologias*

1993 *Instalaciones Licenciado Verdad*, Mexico City, Mexico

GRANTS, SCHOLARSHIPS AND PRIZES:

2000 Torino Prize, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo per L'Arte, Turin, Italy

1995 Jóvenes Creadores FONCA

1991 Jóvenes Creadores FONCA