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**Curated by**

Germaine Koh, SAW Gallery

23 March – 22 April 2000

Ottawa

**Artist-Run**

Galia Eibenschutz
Daniel Guzmán
Jonathan Hernández
Gabriel Kuri
Mejor Vida Corp.
Yoshua Okón
Luis Felipe Ortega

**SAW Gallery**

SE BUSCA RECOMPENSAS (Seeking Reward), 1996

Why extraordinary that the world exist!

Galia Eibenschutz (b. 1970, Mexico City)

Daniel Guzmán (b. 1964, Mexico City)

Jonathan Hernández (b. 1972, Mexico City)

Gabriel Kuri (b. 1970, Mexico City)

Mejor Vida Corp. (Minerva Cuevas, b. 1975, Mexico City)

Yoshua Okón (b. 1970, Mexico City)

Luis Felipe Ortega (b. 1965, Mexico City)

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through daily fare. Another fibreglass facsimile, of a large stone apparently laboriously chiseled with the phrase "La brevadad posible" (as soon as possible — no. 5), makes concrete the intuition that every day, and in this case for a far larger, elementalizing bit of time. His Plan de San Lunes (Plan for Sunday Monday) project focuses on the emotional interval between the leisure and feasting of Sunday and the productivity and good vibrations of Monday, imagining a kind of hibernation for the city, that private-yet-collective moment of melancholic waiting experienced at the close of each weekend. An earlier piece in this quietly grand mode linked nothing less than human existence and the forces of nature, via the barrel, packages of aerodynamically designed fish pieces discreetly labeled with a summary of the evolution of aviation.

Luis Felipe Ortega’s work also muses upon the collective meaning of public structures. He has focused on particular types of usually-unremarked spaces that exist in all large cities and have become ever more private, collectivizing, and waiting, non-places. One project is an archive of photos of all kinds of public places around the world, taken and sent to him by friends. The fact that he absorbs these places through others’ eyes emphasizes that one’s understanding of such spaces is somehow always shared and maybe already familiar. Certain of his works even point to the tenuousness of individual effort within the built environ- ment. In the series Los objetos míticos (The mythical objects) Ortega figures a adaptor figthing itself to various unrulying urban markers: trees, a partner of plantiers, or a sculptural sphere that this would-be Sisyphus trees but cannot budge from its position. It is a case of all-too-human force encountering the immovable objects of its own making. In the photograph La distancia necesaria (The necessary distance — no. 9) a figure is depicted simultaneously arriving at and arising from a stone bench, a transient image of a particular historic legacy slipping away in the flux of this apparatus. Ortega proposes a sort of inversion of gravity, assigning a specific weight to places of dislocation, and wave-like energy to the bodies who pass through them.

In contradiction to Ortega’s theoretical mode, Yoshua Okón operates within the everyday difficulties of the city. He is a provocateur who uses his own presence to catalyze various pressures—class, race and power relations—that drive the city. In the video Poliester (no. 7) his simple action of confronting a police officer with a camera, representing both privilege and scrutiny, draws out a barrage of insults and resentments on the part of this authority figure. Another video records Okón paying the bribe requested by the police who arrested him as he was producing a piece for which he had paid another policeman to be filmed in a compromising position. He and Miguel Calderón once presented a sculpture of 100 stolen car stereos along with a video of them stealing one. Okón confronts existing social divisions and then witnesses those particular historic legacy slips away in the flux of this apparatus. Ortega proposes a sort of inversion of gravity, assigning a specific weight to places of dislocation, and wave-like energy to the bodies who pass through them.

Daniel Guzmán is best known for brushy paintings and drawings that speak in the violently decadent vernacular of popular culture, yet there is also a quietly poetic aspect to his work. In one instance, standard-five-gallon utility buckets printed with the phrase “tengo 3 pesos y un murderingo” — “I have 3 pesos and a murderingo” — are working with a regard for both the everyday culture and the living history of the place. Beginning in the 1970s diverse artists such as Felipe Ehrenberg, Marcos Kuryz and Carlos Aguirre and a number of collective groups variously produced street performances, Fluxus-related ephemera, and assemblies of impassioned and recuperated materials. It is possible that current tendencies such as “object art,” conceptualism and “alternative media” have also arisen at least in part in reaction to the reductions of the medium. Stanley Marcus did express, while their prevalence may also be related to their being institutionally defined and officially named within systems of support for the arts. One might be tempted to speculate that the particular strains of quotidian, street-based work now issuing from the D.F. are directly due to the influence and example of like-minded artists such as Gabriel Orozco or Francis Alys, to the presence of many foreign and foreign-trained artists, or to the general embrace of global artistic currents — all of which have fired the contemporary Mexican scene. However, it is perhaps telling that the 1997 pan-Latin-American show “Así estan los lugares” curated by Polester editor Kurt Hollander, was criticized for tying object-art from Mexico to international conventions. This reaction would seem to suggest that there is a will to transcend the commercial boundaries of the local. Indeed, the artist-activist, Abraham Cruzvillegas points to a moment in the collective history of the city — the 1980s earthless movement — rather than any artistic movement as a critical turning-point for the energy of the art community (as well as being a catalyst for wider social changes).1 Similarly, in an article recently tracing the work of Gabriel “Garage & Art in Mexico” up to Orozco and Alys, José Springer also suggests that the use of low materials is a constructive response to the country’s social circumstances. If we could speak of an artistic current or tendency that has, since the 80’s, provided an alternative to the iconographic and pictorially—representative art for which Mexican artists have gained a certain renown in other countries, we could define such a tendency as an impetus and an interventionality, of two-dimensional, three-dimensional, disposable materials. Once recycled and placed in another context, these materials become more ado for an era which has destroyed the myths and tenets of the past, yet needs to create new rituals upon which to construct the present.

The works in this exhibition continue this impetus to deal with the present. Taking their cues directly from the predicaments of a local culture but avoiding any sort of national identification, they display a sure commitment to engaging with and intervening in these realities. Among these actual conditions are social divisions that render art-making a de facto privileged domain, to a far greater extent than it is in Canada, for instance. The problem, as Francis Alys has put it, is that “When working in a zone of poverty, the sense of being an artist is never far away.” This incongruity contributes to the burden of speech that conscientious artists such as these have assumed, so that their work might on one hand take the form of direct interventional subversion, but on the other, commit to exploring the potential of conceptual propositions as another form of social engagement. “Poetical activism,” in the terms of Gabriel Orozco has used to describe Gabriel Kuri. And really, one could consider that a rarefied discourse about public issues has hardly ever been the characteristic mode of both artistic avant-gardes and conscientious objection. Thus the socio-poetic effect, if you will, of Kuri’s chicharrón is generated in the emotional distance between its impeccable craftsmanship and the banasseness of its reference; and the “utility” of Galia Eibenschutz’s stool is actually our recognition of its unadulterated artistic ventures. These types of organizing activity indicate a valuation of debate, a generosity of spirit, and a real sense of community obligation. Ortega has been a curator at the alternative community forum El Lienzo and has written and theoretical seminars that included Minerva Cuevas, Jonathan Hernández and Galia Eibenschutz. Gabriel Kuri was part of a discussion workshop led by Gabriel Orozco from 1987 to 1991. More recently, Ortega, Kuri and Gustavo Soto by this clearly “improper” miscegenation. They can also be unexpect-