

# MELANIE SMITH

la Biennale di Venezia

54. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

Partecipazioni nazionali

RED SQUARE IMPOSSIBLE PINK

MELANIE SMITH

RED SQUARE IMPOSSIBLE PINK  
MELANIE SMITH

PUBLISHER  
Turner  
Ekaterina Álvarez Romero

ARTIST  
Melanie Smith

CURATOR  
José Luis Barrios

EDITORIAL COORDINATION  
Ekaterina Álvarez Romero

EDITORIAL DESIGN  
Cristina Paoli · S consultores en diseño

TEXTS  
José Luis Barrios  
Tatiana Cuevas  
Helena Chávez Mac Gregor  
Paola Santoscoy

ENGLISH / SPANISH TRANSLATION  
Jaime Soler Frost

SPANISH / ENGLISH TRANSLATION  
Christopher Fraga

CORRECTION AND PROOFREADING  
Jaime Soler Frost

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Oliver Santana  
Rodrigo Valero  
Hugo Vázquez

COLOUR SEPARATION  
Espiral Servicios Creativos  
y Comunicación, S. L.

PRINTING  
Artes Gráficas Palermo, S.L.

BINDING  
Ramos

Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes  
Reforma y Campo Marte s/n  
Col. Chapultepec Morales Polanco  
Del. Miguel Hidalgo  
11560 México D.F., México

First Edition, 2011  
©: Melanie Smith, 2011  
Edition copyright ©: Instituto Nacional  
de Bellas Artes / Turner, 2011  
Texts copyrights ©: the authors, 2011

ISBN: 978-84-7506-984-5 (Spanish)  
978-84-7506-985-2 (English)

[www.turnerlibros.com](http://www.turnerlibros.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this  
publication may be reproduced, dis-  
tributed, altered, or publicly commu-  
nicated, in any form or by any means,  
without prior written permission from  
the publishers.

The publication of this book has been  
possible thanks to the support of:

Gobierno del Estado de San Luis  
Potosí, Fundación Televisa, Colección  
Isabel y Agustín Coppel, Fundación /  
Colección Jumex y Aimée Servitje.

DISTRIBUTED IN THE U.S.  
AND CANADA BY:  
D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers  
155 Sixth Avenue, 2nd floor  
New York, NY 10013

DISTRIBUTED IN EUROPE BY:  
Idea Books  
Nieuwe Herengracht 11  
1011 Amsterdam RD  
The Netherlands

DISTRIBUTED IN THE U.K. BY:  
Artdata  
12 Bell Industrial Estate  
50 Cunnington Street  
London W4 5HD  
United Kingdom

#### SPANISH EDITION AVAILABLE

DISTRIBUTED IN SPAIN BY:  
A. Machado Libros, S.A.  
C/Labradores, 15, 3-1  
Pol. Ind. Prado del Espino  
28660 Boadilla del Monte-Madrid

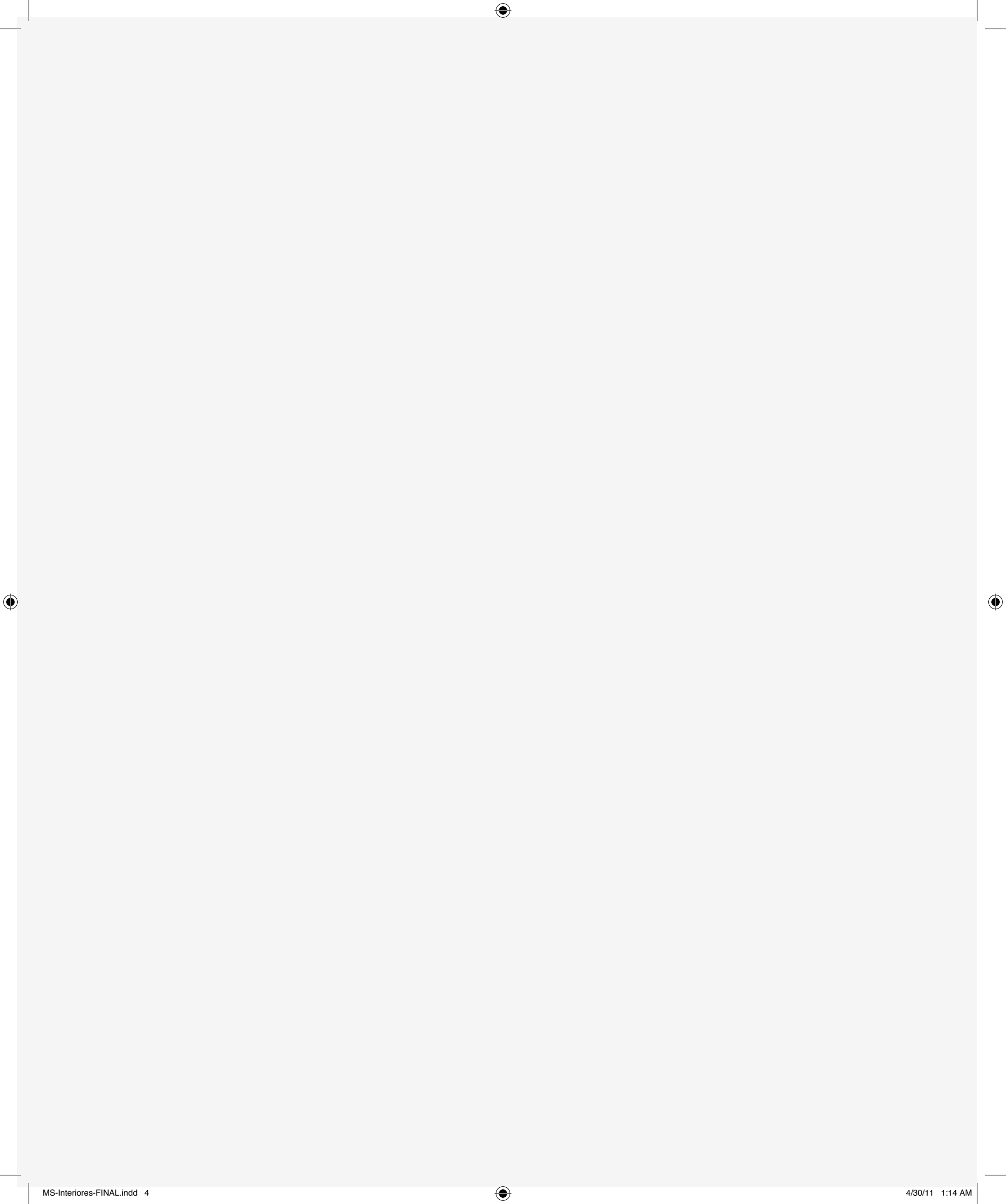
Les Punxes Distribuidora, S.L.  
C/Ardenya, 75-81  
08018 Barcelona

DISTRIBUTED IN MEXICO  
AND LATIN AMERICA BY:  
Océano  
Milanesat, 21-23  
08017 Barcelona



**MELANIE SMITH**

RED SQUARE IMPOSSIBLE PINK



9

**PRESENTATION**

TERESA VICENCIO ÁLVAREZ

15

**RED SQUARE IMPOSSIBLE PINK  
FRAME AND AFFECT: ON THE  
ALTERATIONS OF MODERNITY**

JOSÉ LUIS BARRIOS

25

**THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEvised**

HELENA CHÁVEZ MAC GREGOR

47

**XILITLA**

PAOLA SANTOSCOY

71

**BULTO**

TATIANA CUEVAS

94

**MELANIE SMITH  
CURRICULUM & BIBLIOGRAPHY**

105

**CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

109

**MEXICAN PAVILION 54TH VENICE BIENNALE**

GASTÓN RAMÍREZ FELTRÍN

CREDITS

CONSEJO NACIONAL PARA LA CULTURA Y LAS ARTES

Consuelo Sáizar  
President

Raúl Arenzana Olvera  
Executive Secretary

Fernando Serrano Migallón  
Culture and Arts Secretary

Jaime Francisco Hernández Martínez  
Executive Secretariat

Martha González Ríos  
International Affairs Advisor

INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE BELLAS ARTES

Teresa Vicencio Álvarez  
General Direction

Alejandra Peña  
Deputy General Direction of Artistic Heritage

Efraín Salinas  
Deputy General Direction of Administration

Haydé Zavala  
International Affairs Office

José Luis Gutiérrez  
Communication and Public Relations Office

# MEXICAN PAVILION 54 VENICE BIENNALE

## ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE

Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes  
Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura

### Comisario

Gastón Ramírez Feltrín

## PRODUCTION INSTITUTIONS

Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes  
Italy: Green Spin s.r.l. Vicenza-Venice

## EXHIBITION CREDITS

### Artist

Melanie Smith

### Co-author of film projects

Rafael Ortega

### Curator

José Luis Barrios Lara

### Commissioner

Gastón Ramírez Feltrín - INBA

### Assistant Curators

Edwin Culp  
Alejandra Labastida

### Public Relations

Luis Felipe Canudas

### Editorial Coordination

Ekaterina Álvarez

### Graphic Design

S consultores en diseño

### Assistant to Melanie Smith

Tania Pineda

## PRODUCTION OF THE MEXICAN PAVILION IN VENICE, ITALY

### Production Manager

Emanuele Basso

### General Assistant

Green Spin s.r.l.

### Production Staff

Alessandro Bertoncello, Massimo Cogo, Francesca  
Endregheiti, Luca Volpin, Alessandro de Tomasi.

### Architects

Verlato+Zordan architetti associati Arch. Dino Verlato  
and Arch. Michele Zordan

### Press Office in Italy

Chiara Lunardelli

### Logistics and Guests

Elisa Frasinetti

### Photographic Documentation

Luca Vascon

### Security

Studio Aedes

### Legal Advisor

BS Commercialisti s.r.l.

### Insurance

Itas-Assicurazioni

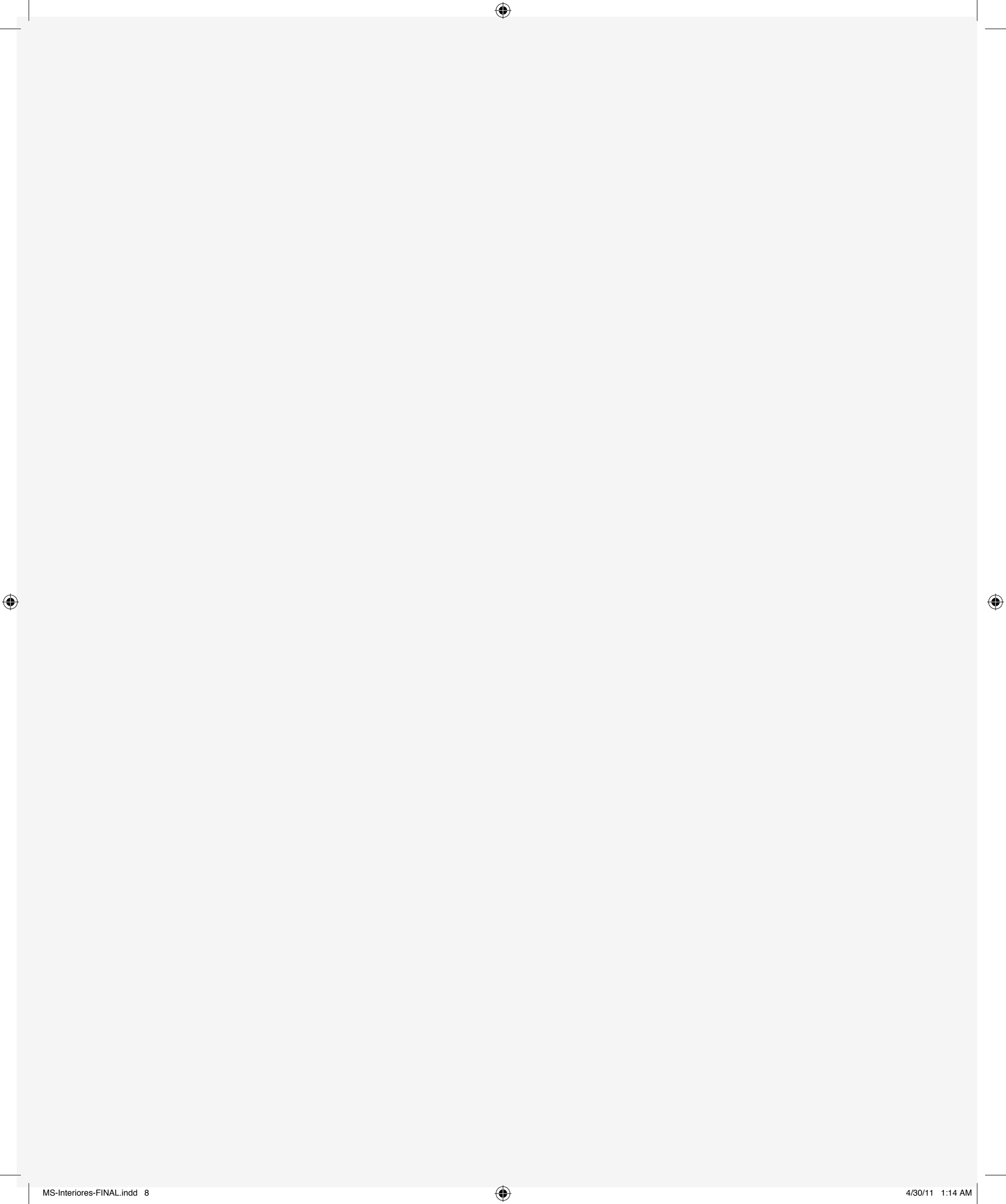
### Materials and Suppliers

Illumeurope s.r.l., Dal Maso Fabio, Adriano Azzalini  
Tessuti Chiarastella Cattana  
Tapezzerie Giusto Eros  
Ferramenta Battistin, Battistin Marco  
Falegnameria Salvagno, Salvagno Alessandro  
Sanipul s.r.l., Lovo Mauro, Battistella Cinzia

### Venue

Palazzo Rota Ivancich, Venice, Italy





## PRESENTATION

One of the primary interests of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), an institution dedicated to conserving, circulating and promoting Mexican art, is to share the most up-to-date expressions of art being produced in Mexico, and to prompt with them a dialogue that embraces different publics and specialists, both domestic and international.

Our country's participation in the Venice Biennale offers the opportunity to show the world the creativity of Mexican artists, the quality of their projects, and the variety of languages with which they construct their work. Likewise, this forum, which brings together the most exceptional contemporary art, allows both public and creators to reflect on, compare and appreciate the art work that is developing around the world.

Mexico participates in the artistic exchange offered by the 54th Venice Biennale with the work of Melanie Smith, who presents three video pieces grouped together under the title *Red square impossible pink*, a concept that brings together three of her most recent works: *Aztec Stadium*, *Xilitla*, and *Bulto*.

The first of these is the visual document of an action carried out in the eponymous stadium (the most important in all of Mexico), whose participants are students in the Mexican public education system, and in which the artist elaborates a visual reflection on the idea of the fatherland and the chaos that accompanies revolutions.

The second, *Xilitla*, is an experimental film shot in 35mm that explores the multiple meanings that a near mythical space in Mexico – a Surrealist garden built in the middle of the Huasteca Potosina by the Englishman Edward James – holds today. And finally, *Bulto* is a piece originally commissioned by the Lima Art Museum (MALI), in which a bundle appears in different public spaces, participating in the widest variety of the city's dynamics.

Although Smith's work finds its primary means of support in painting, throughout her artistic development she has also engaged different languages like photography, video, film and installation with ease, constructing a framework in which these different media interact in order to create heterogeneous structures, rich in meanings, and with which the artist proposes constant re-readings of the notion of modernity and its artistic explorations in Latin America – especially in Mexico – turning a bold, critical, proactive gaze on them. *Red square impossible pink* offers a clear example of this.

The essays that accompany this catalog constitute a critical and interpretive guide through this exhibition's trajectory. The inquiries of José Luis Barrios, who has curated the project in its entirety, and those of Helena Chávez, Paola Santoscoy and Tatiana Cuevas, each of whom analyzes *Aztec Stadium*, *Xilitla* and *Bulto*, respectively, offer a concise frame of reference with which to situate Melanie Smith's work within the international art context, and to understand the vast network of literary, cinematic, historical and artistic references alluded to in the videos that compose *Red square impossible pink*.

It is an honor for the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes to present an artist so integral to the contemporary artistic avant-garde, and to propose her work as the interlocutor that represents our country in the aesthetic dialog opened by the Venice Biennale. We are certain that the ideas behind *Red square impossible pink*, on display in the Palazzo Rota Ivancich, will stimulate a plural reflection among nations.

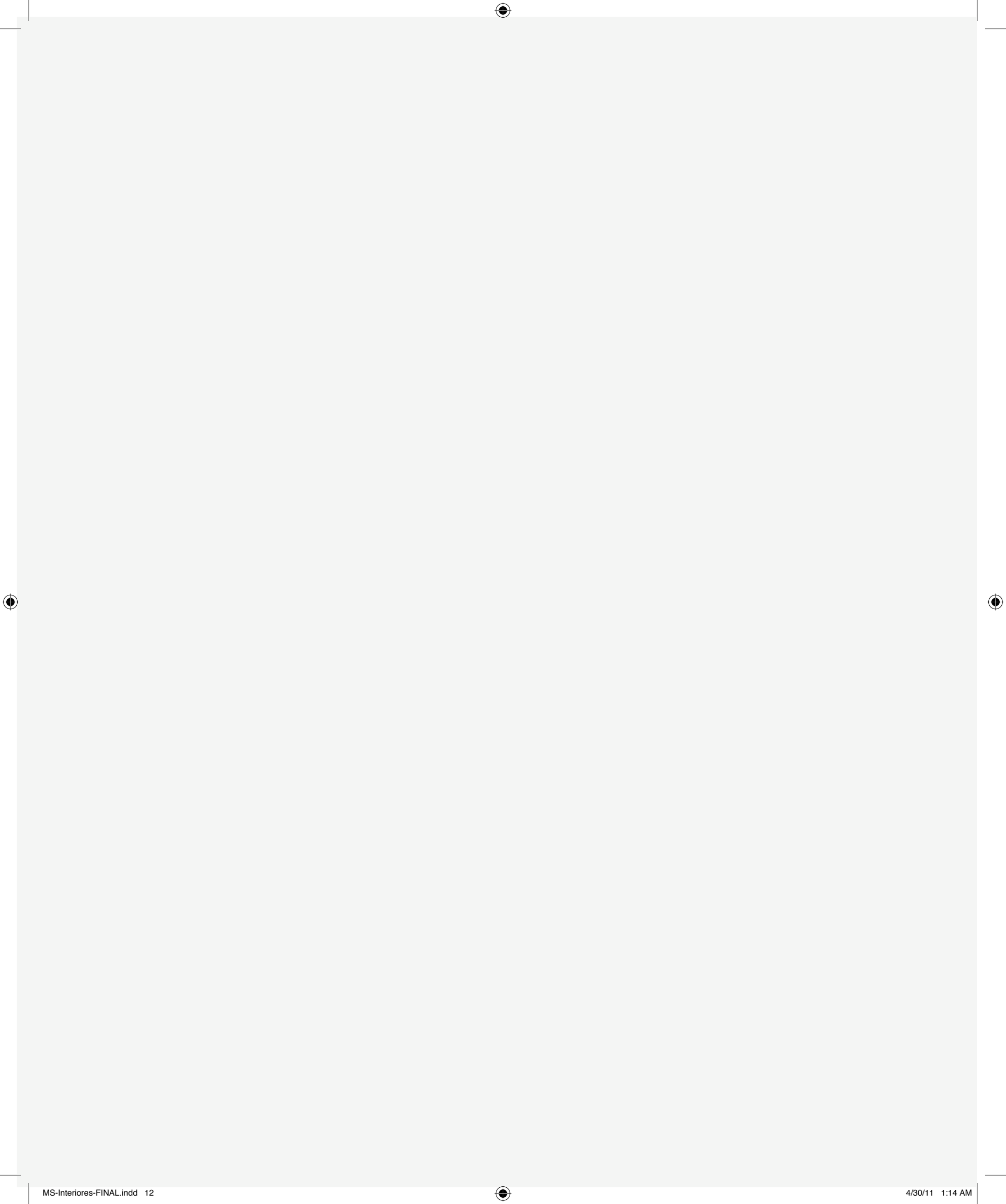
With Melanie Smith's participation, the INBA renews its institutional responsibility to procure a Mexican presence in the most important international forums, supporting and promoting cultural activities that manifest the diversity and the vitality of art in Mexico.

Teresa Vicencio  
General Director  
Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes

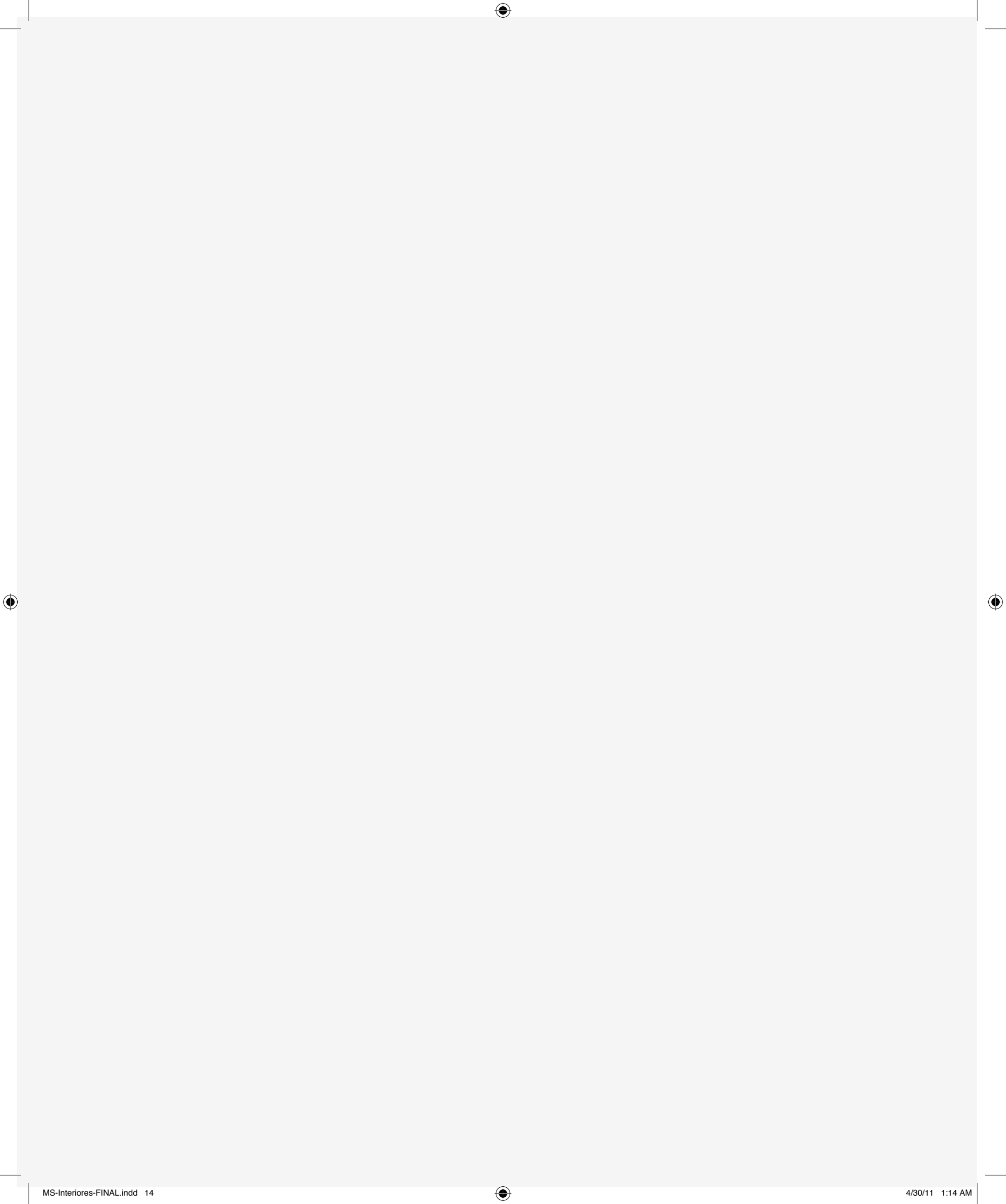
We would like to thank the following persons and institutions for the help provided to make this project possible:

Sarina Álvarez, Francis Alÿs, Salvador Arroyo, María Arroyo, Diana Beltrán, Michel Blancsubé Patrick Charpenel, Agustín e Isabel Coppel, Mireya Escalante, Damian Fraser, Pilar García, Ernesto García Martínez, Daniel Garza Usabiaga, Myriam Garza, Luis Guerrero, Robert Hambleton, Sol Henaro, Mateo Holmes, Doña Irina Ivancich Marchesi, Peter Kilchmann, Eugenio López, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Príamo Lozada †, Mauricio Maillé, Natalia Majluf, Teresa Margolles, Cuauhtémoc Medina, Moisés Micha, Rafael Micha, Fernanda Monterde, Enrique Olvera, Oliver & Mila Ortega Smith, Héctor Pacheco, Bárbara Perea, Paloma Porráz, Dolores Repetto, Araceli Reyes, Francisco Reyes Palma, Francisco Rivera, Mauricio Rodríguez, Roberto Rosolen, Carmen Ruiz, Micol Saleri, Aimée Servitje, Roberto Servitje, Patricia Sloane, Gerardo Suter, Mayte Tojim, Graciela de la Torre, Rodrigo Valero, Teresa Vicencio, Alejandro Villagómez, Claudio X. González, Magdalena Zavala, Daniele Zoli.

Gobierno del Estado de San Luis Potosí, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Universidad Iberoamericana.







# RED SQUARE IMPOSSIBLE PINK<sup>1</sup>

## FRAME AND AFFECT

### ON THE ALTERATIONS OF MODERNITY

JOSÉ LUIS BARRIOS

15

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish title of this project, *Cuadrado rojo, imposible rosa* deliberately inverts the order of the terms pink and impossible. This is an attempt to point out the metaphor of the notion of heterotopia in Melanie Smith's work.

#### APPROACH: ON RED AND PINK

*Red square impossible pink* is a statement and a provocation. Perhaps it is a provocation because it makes a statement, but it could also be the other way around: it might be a statement because it provokes. In any case, the title of this “placement” of Melanie Smith's work is an update of the logics and aesthetics of the avant-garde within the horizon of globalization's failure. Beyond the reactionary dreams of the discursive post-modernity of the 1980's and 1990's, beyond even the globalizing utopias of liberal democracies and their discourses of difference and multiculturalism, it would seem that there exist certain conditions that make it impossible to overcome the categories of modernity themselves. If Malevich's squares were art's revolutionary attempt to withdraw from functionality, utility and narrativity in order to inscribe the “surface” as the place of nothingness and make geometric abstraction into a sort of formal structure for the revolution, this emancipatory operation would seem to be an impossible or at least a problematic enterprise at a moment when what is wanted is *pink*. If the squares *Red on white*, *Black on white* and *White on white* are operations that make painting the pure place of possibility through lack of determination and signification, or that which enunciates the revolutionary potential of art, these are surfaces on which primary colors or the absence or saturation of color enunciate purity: nothingness. What happens to the surface with the impurity of pink? Such seems to be the question and the provocation that Melanie Smith poses.

If in Suprematism the pure space of painting enunciates the possible condition of revolution as a non-place or utopia, *pink*, by contrast, determines the place of the impossible. Is it a matter, then, of a certain dialectic of modernity, of the opposition between the possible and the impossible? If modernity is something more than the pure,



Eurocentric fiction of the relationship between history and utopia, if modernity is above all the history of a colonialist expansion, no doubt the square is something more than the possible and colors are something more than purity. Modernity also signifies the questions of what produces place, what marks a territory, what draws an alteration or perhaps a drift. And modernity is also an exceeding (*desbordamiento*) of the square itself: encrypted there is the *impossible pink*.

If Malevich's square introduced something to the discussion of art, it was no doubt a collapse of the traditional structure of the relationship between gaze and surface in painting. In opposition to the rectangle, the square was supposed to disrupt, at the very least, the spatial datum implicit in all painting: the gaze-landscape relationship, which is nothing else but the surface on which the perspectival gaze is placed, and which defines the pictorial in the history of art. Malevich's square framed without signifying. Further still, the square also supposed removing the frame as painting's mode of framing. Thus, the "enframing" of landscape was disrupted by the square as a surface-possibility, the possible as a revolutionary condition of art. For Suprematism, pure painting does not entail throwing one's lot in with color, but rather with the surface as a space of the pure event, as a utopian space. Beyond representation and figuration, color in Malevich's Suprematism means tracing the place of the possible, the utopian space of society.

Melanie Smith proposes to read this utopian possible from its heterotopic impossible; that is, from *pinkness* as irony and paradox, as an operation of disassembling or dismantling the square, and as a critique of modernity and its geopolitical derivatives. Pink emerges as the impossible place that expresses this artist's quest in her work.

### **(EX)CESSES: RED SQUARE, PINK CHAOS**

If there is anything that has defined Melanie Smith's work, it is a certain re-reading of the formal and aesthetic categories of the movements of the avant-garde and post-avant-garde. This re-reading is intimately related to a certain expanded vision of the notion of modernity, which maintains a relationship both with what this concept means in Latin America – particularly in Mexico – and with its implications for her visual explorations as a moment that is critical of the political-aesthetic structure of modernity and late modernity. The direct reference to Malevich offers a clear key to reading the artist's work, at least since her series of photographs, paintings and video of the Mexican megalopolis that is the Federal District in *Spiral city* (2002), and earlier in installations like *Orange lush I* (1994). In this and other works, Smith establishes a complex strategy of dismantling the frame through conceptual plays on repetition and difference, through which her production is displaced from painting and sculptural practice toward the movement-image as her material medium and potential to "unframe" the frame. In this sense, video is not merely a technical resource, but rather a potential where the artist explores the spatio-temporal conditions of possibility with which to articulate the dialectic of the impossible evoked by the word "pink."

But what does pink evoke? First and foremost, an impure intensity that is improper for art, a sort of affective field wherein the utopian surface, so beloved by Suprematism, is disrupted by a stridency of color that inscribes a differential of the art-life relationship having to do with the dialectic of chaos. Pink is not then a mere color, but a paradox and an irony out of which Melanie Smith articulates the opposition between the possible and the impossible. If the avant-garde, inscribed in the horizon of Western modernity, constructed its aesthetics and its poetics upon the opposition between civilization and barbarism in terms of history, the expanded late modernity – or if one prefers, cultural capitalism – that Smith explores, posits an opposition between utopia

and chaos that puts into play a differentiated register of art's questions: one that has to do with the sociopolitical tension of affect and its symbolizing operation.

From this perspective, pink is an emplacement, a site of enunciation at which the condition of the impossible is configured. In this sense, if Malevich qualifies his square as red (a peasant woman in two dimensions), pink is a subtraction from the "revolutionary future." It is a dissolution of density in exchange for the stridency of intensity that redefines the visual surface as a function of geopolitical emplacements and of determined historical deployments.

*Red square* was painted in 1915. Impossible pink has not been painted but is rather an occupation wherein the overtaking of utopia by chaos operates at the moment when modernity is conceived from its heterotopic place: Latin America. This is Melanie Smith's artistic gesture, which emplaces and is emplaced by a formal impossibility. If red qualifies the square, *impossible pink* asserts something that has no form, something that, as intensity, is not abstracted but rather happens, something that has to do with the attempt to trap – and the failure to do so – the signifier that lies behind the symbols and imaginaries of a modernity that escapes through its seams.

Impossible pink is no doubt like the end of Roberto Bolaño's novel *The Savage Detectives*. If the picto-caligrams in the book mean anything: a Mexican frying an egg or a square that is a window because there is a triangle which is the tip of a star, the final dotted drawing of a square means nothing. There is no response, simply the establishment of a place without meaning.<sup>2</sup> Just as for Bolaño that square announces a place of exception, for Melanie Smith impossible pink means a potential that destabilizes and dismantles utopias in its heterotopias as aesthetic affections of space.

<sup>2</sup> See my unpublished essay "El caligrama o la formalización imposible de la modernidad. A propósito de *Los detectives salvajes* de Roberto Bolaño," 2011.

## MONTAGE AND DISMANTLINGS

Melanie Smith's work has been displaced from plastic art practices toward work with techniques related to the movement-image, particularly video.<sup>3</sup> This displacement is related, at least from my perspective, to a double consideration: firstly, the use of this medium as a strategy for dismantling representation and secondly, the appropriation and transformation of a technology of the gaze that allows her to explore more concisely the relationship between affect, representation and excessiveness. Clearly, in her videos the motif of going beyond the frame becomes apparent again; this does not mean, however, a mere displacement of the motif of the "frame," but rather of the problematization that results from cinematic framing. The latter emerges as a condition of possibility from which to explore different registers of the relationship between utopia and chaos. The clearest point of this displacement is related to the temporality of this kind of work. While it is true that in previous videos the artist was already experimenting with the potential of the formal game produced by the dialectic between framing and a fixed shot (*Parres I*, 2004), in her most recent productions the image has a more "cinematic" character, without this implying an annulment of the formal. In a complex play of relationships between geometric framing and long takes, the pieces she produced in 2010 – *Aztec Stadium*, *Malleable deed*, *Xilitla* and *Bulto* (Package) – continue Smith's investigations on the relationships between affect and representation. The use of the movement-image defines a new aesthetic character related to the temporal unfolding of what appears as a field of formal tensions in other works.

These three video pieces share something at the level of structure: a geometrical framing as an intensive surface of affect. (Of course, the affection is different in each, and they activate differentiated registers of artistic, political and social signification, something to which I return to below.) By geometrical framing I mean the type of image in which the

<sup>3</sup> Melanie Smith co-authored these video works with Rafael Ortega.

presence of an object, people and actions is defined by the placement of the camera as a “frame” of representation. Here the camera determines the movements, the planes of presence and depth. It is not the objects (physical framing) that define the guidelines of movement, placement and shot, but the fixed or mobile framing of the shot that opens a space for actions and presences. To understand the use of this resource requires us to delve into the formal and aesthetic condition from which Melanie Smith carries out her operations of dismantling the imaginary, the spectral and the compulsive<sup>4</sup> in each of the pieces that make up the project *Red square impossible pink*.

Despite the apparent differences between *Aztec Stadium*, *Package* and *Xilitla*, if we are attentive to their video-cinematic structure, we immediately see that in all of them the framing is geometrical. In some measure this produces a “frame” in the pictorial sense: there are planes of presence in which action and image coincide. But why, then, speak of excessiveness? Because the geometrical frame is joined by montage and editing as a temporality of the image and by the off-camera sound as affections to the framings.

In *Aztec Stadium* the relationship between shot and montage is directly proportional; there is a correspondence between the image’s plane of presence, the time of the shot, and the rhythm of montage that defines an “affective plot” in terms of duration, densification and distension of the image. This is perhaps why, between long takes in black and white or the shots of empty spaces at the beginning of the video and the change of speed at the moment when the students move the cards, there is an intensive dialectic founded on the correspondence between shot and montage, and a dialectic that shows the conflict between social affect and the symbolic order implicated in the images.

As a counterpart to this logic of shot/montage, the videos *Xilitla* and *Bulto* are operations of temporal distension on and of the shot. Although the framing in both pieces remains geometrical, it is the duration of the shot that defines the logic of its montage. The almost-still shots or the tracking shots are duration, not action. It is crucial to keep these elements in mind because they determine a good measure of the displacement of affect and meaning in these works, no longer mere narration, but to the field of temporal intensity as an aesthetic frame of mind where places and signs are inscribed. To this one must add off-camera sound, which plays a fundamental role in both pieces: they are elements that dismantle the immediacy of historical, cultural and social references. In *Xilitla*,<sup>5</sup> just hearing the noise of the dimmers after the lights go down is an estrangement of the image that shows the modern structure of the Romantic and Surrealist “fantasy” with which that place was constructed. The same thing happens in an inverse sense in *Bulto*, when we hear the sound of a radio announcer talking about the legal conditions that define the bestowal of power on another person. Something that in the context of the piece functions like an irony of the figure of the contract itself as the foundation of the State and of the political in underdeveloped societies. It happens by changing the meaning of the situation as a function of the tracking shots through spaces of anachronistic coexistence in a single framing, like the one of the restaurant and some pre-Hispanic ruins that coexist in the same real space. It is clear that in these pieces the excesses have to do with this out-of-field space and with the semantic change of the framing and the cinematic shots. Nevertheless, these function differently in each of the pieces. Whereas in *Xilitla* the use of these resources is an estrangement that reveals the deception – or, if one prefers, the “modern” dream – upon which that oneiric landscape was constructed, in *Bulto* the use of these resources produces a distancing through irony and the reduction *ad absurdum* constructed through the incoherence between text and image and on the establishment of anachronistic games of visual signification. Perhaps this is why the multiple placement of this piece in the Palazzo Rota Ivancich in Venice is carried out through the selection of scenes that activate spatialization or

<sup>4</sup> [The Spanish reads *de la (com)pulsión*, a play on the shared etymology of the Spanish words for compulsion and the Freudian use of the term drive (*pulsión*).]

<sup>5</sup> For its presentation in Venice, Melanie Smith operated a disassembling of the original version of *Xilitla* according to the contextualization of the video in the Palazzo Rota Ivancich, which resulted in a different version of the piece, hence the name *Xilitla: Dismantled 1*.

the “sculptural” character natural to *Bulto*, as a performative gesture of intervention in a variety of historical and cultural registers, which transforms anachronism into *anatopia*; that is, into an assumption in space of a variety of referents that function as political-aesthetic interventions from one place into another. This is a compulsive intromission of affect as a political dislocation.

In any case, here it is important to call attention to the functioning of these structural elements in these pieces as operations of aesthetic and syntactical enunciation, by means of which Melanie Smith re-positions her reflection on the frame/framing, but above all establishing the conditions of possibility by displacing her discussion of the frame toward a dismantling of categories, symbols and imaginaries of modernity that operate up to our own time.

## AFFECTS AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

What does it mean then to *dismantle* once we have laid out the structural-aesthetic conditions in Melanie Smith’s work? Two things, at least: an operation of distancing that allows art’s utopias to be stripped, and an operation by which the artist re-routes the imaginary order – which has produced modernity and its current development – toward the territory of affects to show the dialectic between the possible and the impossible as a production of heterotopias.

The operation of distancing that is carried out in each of the pieces opens three different registers of dismantling: the imaginary-symbolic (*Aztec Stadium*), the libidinal-compulsive (*Bulto*) and the spectral (*Xilitla*).

By appealing to a complex symbolic web of significations and signifiers, *Aztec Stadium* is an activation of the relationship between chaos and modernity. In this piece, Melanie Smith plays on symbolic anachronisms, on the affects (*affectūs*) and affections (*affectionēs*) of the social masses, and on the emblems of modernity and contemporaneity. The action is set in one of the places of greatest symbolic meaning in Mexican culture. The Aztec Stadium is a sort of mythological architecture wherein the (forever unrealizable) expectations of a collective desire for the triumph of the national soccer team – bearing in mind that this “colossus” was constructed in 1962 with the prospect of being the principal venue for the football world cup in 1970 – come together with the monumentality of the modernist tradition of Mexican architecture and the symbols of the contemporary society of the spectacle. In this architectural-symbolic placement, Smith carries the dialectic of modernity to its limit by reconsidering the tradition of discipline – on one hand, the Nazi tradition displayed in the military choreographies of Leni Riefenstahl and on the other, on the cards drawn in the 1970’s on Korean sports stadiums – reinscribing them in an exercise conducted by students from high schools and vocational schools administered by the Mexican state. The masses appear, but here, by contrast, they function in terms of chaos, not order. The raw material of this work is the medium by which the symbolic network of the video comes to be displayed: Paul Klee’s *Angelus novus*, Malevich’s *Red square*, the image of the fatherland that served as the cover of official Mexican school-books, photographs from the popular imaginary of national cinema, etc. All of these are articulated as a function of a structural violence of the masses that transfigures symbolic network into a delirious aesthetic affection. Here, the gaze of the Angel of history’s catastrophes, as Benjamin proposed it, enters into dialectical tension with the revolutionary utopia of Malevich’s *Red square*, through the conflict between symbolic-imaginary and social affect that causes the Suprematist red of the utopian dream to explode in a delirious pink of chaos, or the heterotopia of the impossible. This is the other side of modernity: chaos as an affection that gives a location to an anarchic intensity of the

bodies that have been expelled or excluded from history; no longer death, but the political impossibility of subjects and pure affect as an excessiveness that converts symbols into deliria. Delirium is a collapse between the imaginary and the symbolic that makes the imaginary seem real. In this piece, delirium appears in the fury of bodies, those others whose violence reveals the fallacy of modernity, routing the symbols with which it drew its fulfillment toward chaos.

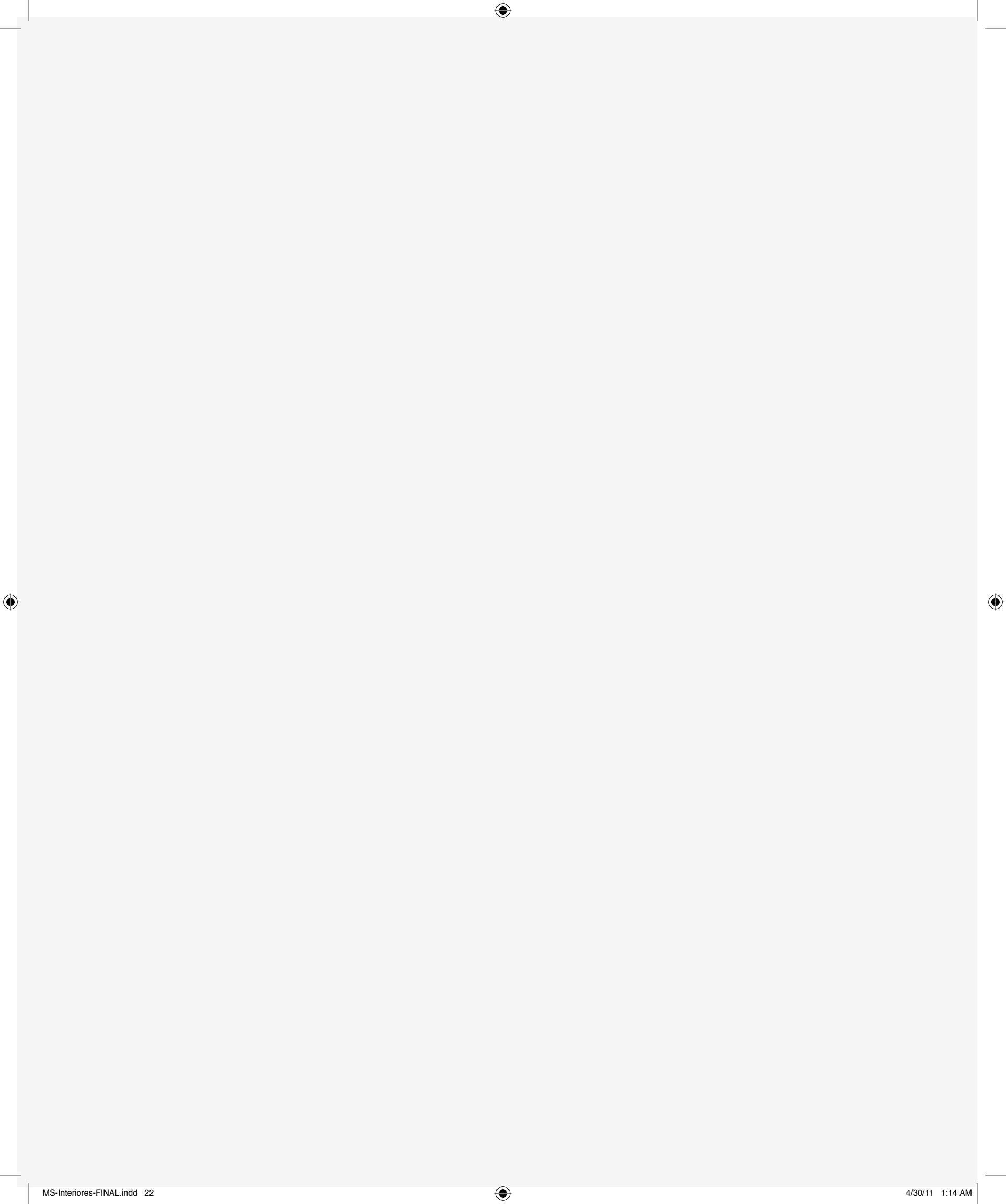
The other place of this dismantling is activated as a compulsion in *Bulto*. In psychoanalysis, compulsion is an affect that is born of a repressed representation that becomes fixated on other representations. The appearance of these representations always intervenes in the subject's field of signification, but they can neither be suppressed nor understood. Furthermore, the subject, according to Freud, is conscious of the bizarreness of this mode of signification. Here it is important to underscore idea of fixation: *Bulto* is a "compulsive drive;" that is, an affective mass that is fixated at different symbolic orders to disrupt, interrupt and above all hinder the flow and the network of significations of a variety of historical, political, social and economic registers, and thus to reduce their functioning to absurdity. Far from being a foreclosure of the symbolic, the package is a schizoid slicing of language that in its obsessiveness dismantles the pretension of symbolic effectiveness. Obsessive reiteration fractures semantic fields, in the way an autistic person might repeat a motif. In *Bulto*, unwieldiness is but the expression of repetition as an affective fixation in which symbolic regimes are disrupted. This "fixation" is sustained aesthetically by two elements: the duration-shot, whether fixed or tracking, and montage as an anachronism that suffers the displacement of the webs of signification of the symbolic. The duration of sequences structures perception like a subconscious, that is, it opens up a certain oneiric condition in the image, allowing fixation to be "verisimilar," and changes on the plane of signification to hold the same affective intensity despite the diversity of situations in which the package is placed. Montage, in turn, is a structural anachronism from which the displacements of time and situation of the image operate. The dialectical structure of montage allows for the changes of planes of signification; thus, the *Bulto's* voyage through different places in Lima, Peru, also causes affections of different symbolic orders: that of memory and history, that of the political, the commercial and even the social. Montage is what allows the emplacement of these scenes as spacings in place and thus to conduct compulsion toward other forms of fixation, which in the case of its placement in Venice, radicalizing the double condition of the impossible and the in-significant as a political obstruction of the symbolic networks of history and culture. In all these interventions or obstructions, the fixation of the package drive becomes the compulsion of the character *Bulto*. Like a tragicomic English character, *Bulto* is a mass of affect without representation that dislocates, through laughter and compassion, the heterotopic sites of modernity: a bank, commodities, the past and its monuments, but also the historical sites that are the patrimony of the Western imaginary, demonstrating that a ruin can also be an undoing.

If libidinal-compulsion works by fixating affect on a representation, melancholy operates as the impossibility of investing desire in any object. In melancholy, affect is always more potent than the object in which it is invested. Perhaps this is why the subject cannot find satisfaction in any object, and all objects appear to him or her like the trace or the halo of a loss. If the image of the melancholic subject is Hamlet, what produces his "humor" is scarcely an object, or if one prefers, an object that escapes, evades, is erased. For Hamlet, the object is a ghost. The ghost has something two-dimensional about it, or at least, when it appears we know that it is not real or that its condition of appearing is as a reflection. In this sense it is easy to think that the space haunted by the specter is that of the reflective surface – in short, the mirror. Inscribed as a unifying element of the plot



and as a moment of estrangement in the piece *Xilitla*, Melanie Smith makes the mirror into a surface where the ruins of the unfinished, conceived as a surreal architecture in Edward James's project, are returned to melancholic affect to produce the ghostly dimension of the ruins. In this piece, Smith operates a relationship between poetics and imaginaries of the exoticism and the exuberance of "the tropics," with her strategies of dismantling the colonial gaze that invented the oneiric exuberance of the landscape. If *Xilitla* is the screen onto which James projects his imaginary, the mirror that travels through his architecture in Melanie Smith's film is a citation of the use of this same element in Smithson, while at the same time a reactivation of the melancholic affect with which Surrealism produced its gaze upon landscape. By contrast to its use by the North American artist, who explores the conditions of trickery and illusion as a production of art, here the resource of the mirror is a paraphrase through which Melanie Smith dialogues with Smithson. *Xilitla* is a play of trebled oneiric, critical reflections in which, on one hand, the dream knows that it is dreaming when it dreams, and on the other, this dream is fractured when the mirror is broken, thereby dismantling the "frame" as a limit and marking the moment of awaking from the dream. This game of "unframing" is activated by sound in the same way. At some point, the image is dragged away from its oneiric condition by making evident the sound of the light dimmers, which produce the atmosphere of the place. These are strategies of distancing through which Melanie Smith disassembles the modern gaze, which would make the exotic landscape into a screen and an image whereupon to project its desire, to produce its utopia. In sum, it is a critical play on the reflection as a fold, revealing the mechanism of the gaze that makes nature into an *oneiric landscape of modernity*.

Delirium, compulsion and melancholy are the three affects that Melanie explores in these works. Through them the artist disassembles the poetics and aesthetics on which the utopias of twentieth century art are founded. But not only that; by doing so, she reinscribes a problem that seemed to have been overcome by the discourses and practices of contemporary art: the question of the historical and political realization of different strategies of modernization once the utopias of globalization have failed, a question which makes sense as a function of the place from which it is formulated: Latin America and Mexico as heterotopias proper to modernity. Here Melanie Smith proposes art as a political-aesthetic position from which to critique the expanded forms of late capitalist modernity. *Red square impossible pink* emerges as the production of an indeterminate surface haunted by the specters and affects of modernity. We will never really know if pink is impossible as a color or as a square, but we are sure that it (un)defines a surface; i.e., the surface that has to do with a field of aesthetic affection and vital potency, wherein the current historical forms of modernity are played as pure geopolitical alteration.











## THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEvised

HELENA CHÁVEZ MAC GREGOR

*The history of all times and places is nothing  
else but the impossible and the improbable;  
what we should say was impossible, if we did  
not see it always before our eyes.*

WILLIAM BLAKE

*Aztec Stadium. Malleable deed* (2010) by Melanie Smith in collaboration with Rafael Ortega is one of those works that resonates for a long time without coming to rest: a work with an internal tension, like a dialectical image, to show the promise and the failure of the revolution, of its frames and its forms of representation.

The grandeur of this deed – forming mosaics out of stunt cards to create kaleidoscopic images, carried out in Mexico City's Aztec Stadium in 2010, the year that Mexico celebrated the bicentennial of its Independence and the centennial of its Revolution – does not lie in its monumentality nor in the complexity of its production, but in the way the work activates the possibility of exploring ideological fracture in the overflowing of the image as pure affect.

An investigation into the limits of both painting and representation, in terms of a frame within which the sensible is apprehended under a series of configurations, is a constant feature of Smith's work. Her investigation explores the forms of displacement and overflowing through which the frame can always be expanded and moved.

This question – about the way of displacing the frame to be able to work with its vulnerability and to make this rupture part of its very definition – becomes radical in Smith's new interventions, in which the question of the image cannot be conceived outside of its relationship to history. Her work interrogates not only the eminently historical character of the image, but also how historical experiences are obtained by the image, and how, in turn, images are charged with affect as sensory potentials that no longer refer to a feeling or a simple affection, but rather to blocks of sensations that operate beyond representation and that undo the ordering of bodies.

# I.

*Aztec Stadium. Malleable Deed* (2010) consists of the massive construction of images with a revolutionary connotation. Whether it be through the Suprematist aspiration of revolutionizing painting by representing the revolution without any figuration (*Red square: Painterly realism of a peasant woman in two dimensions* by Malevich) or through the figurative synthesis of the Mexican Revolution in the production of cultural imaginaries (*The Motherland* by Jorge González Camarena, an illustration that graced the covers of the books published by the Department of Public Education [SEP] from 1962 to 1972), the images that these stunt cards are meant to construct signify a historical experience more than just a history: the passage from the mask of Xipetotec to that of El Santo; the *mise-en-scène* for the creation of *The birth of pulque* to a picture card in which a tire transforms into an “Aztec” calendar under the guard of giants, while the angel from the Monument to Independence looks on as if she were issuing a call for progress; from the map of the political divisions of the nation – which could well be called white on black – to the pure transparency that is agitated to allow the bodies of this fragmented and dissolved nation to appear.

While they do operate as historical symbols of the revolution(s), these images also mark a very specific historical experience: namely, modernity – that project to which Walter Benjamin referred when he wrote, about the angel of history: “Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Xilitla* and *Bulto*, their most recent works, Smith and Ortega review the formal and sensory tensions that cross each other in the unfinished modernities that have developed not only in Mexico, but throughout Latin America; “failed” modernities that operate as disjointed spaces of mimesis, copy and rehearsal for an epistemological and political construction based on the imposition of the frame of European modernity: progress. These modernities, imposed under the forms of mimesis and rehearsal, configure spaces of delirium.<sup>2</sup> This delirium is of a political as well as psychical nature. In both cases, it has both paranoid and schizophrenic dimensions. Because of this dual structure, delirium sometimes manifests itself through the production and overcoding of fears and fantasies recorded in social structures.

Psychical formations, in Deleuze’s formulation, are not passages of life but rather states into which one falls when a process is interrupted: processes of domination that cancel out the spatial and temporal processes of peoples, races and tribes in the imposition of a universality. Unframed from psychoanalytic discourse, these categories operate as aesthetic and political displacements with which to conceive that which is repressed and foreclosed and which nevertheless – or rather, for these very reasons – continues to manifest itself. Smith installs herself in delirium in order to explore the Latin American condition of modernity, to examine its forms and its trajectories, to intervene in its imaginaries and to work with that which refuses to remain hidden.

*Aztec Stadium* works within a nationalist delirium, within the imaginary that constituted a post-revolutionary State and assumed that we had conquered history, that decided that to face progress it was necessary never to look back, to construct a monument out of ruins and to erase, with the mythical representation of past civilizations, all those who fell outside the project of modernization.

In the case of *Aztec Stadium*, delirium frames the construction of the image out of the mode of production of ideology solely in order to un-frame it, to subvert the frame of representation and assert that the apparatus does not *present* reality, but rather *produces* it.

<sup>1</sup> Walter BENJAMIN, “Theses on the philosophy of history,” in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 257.

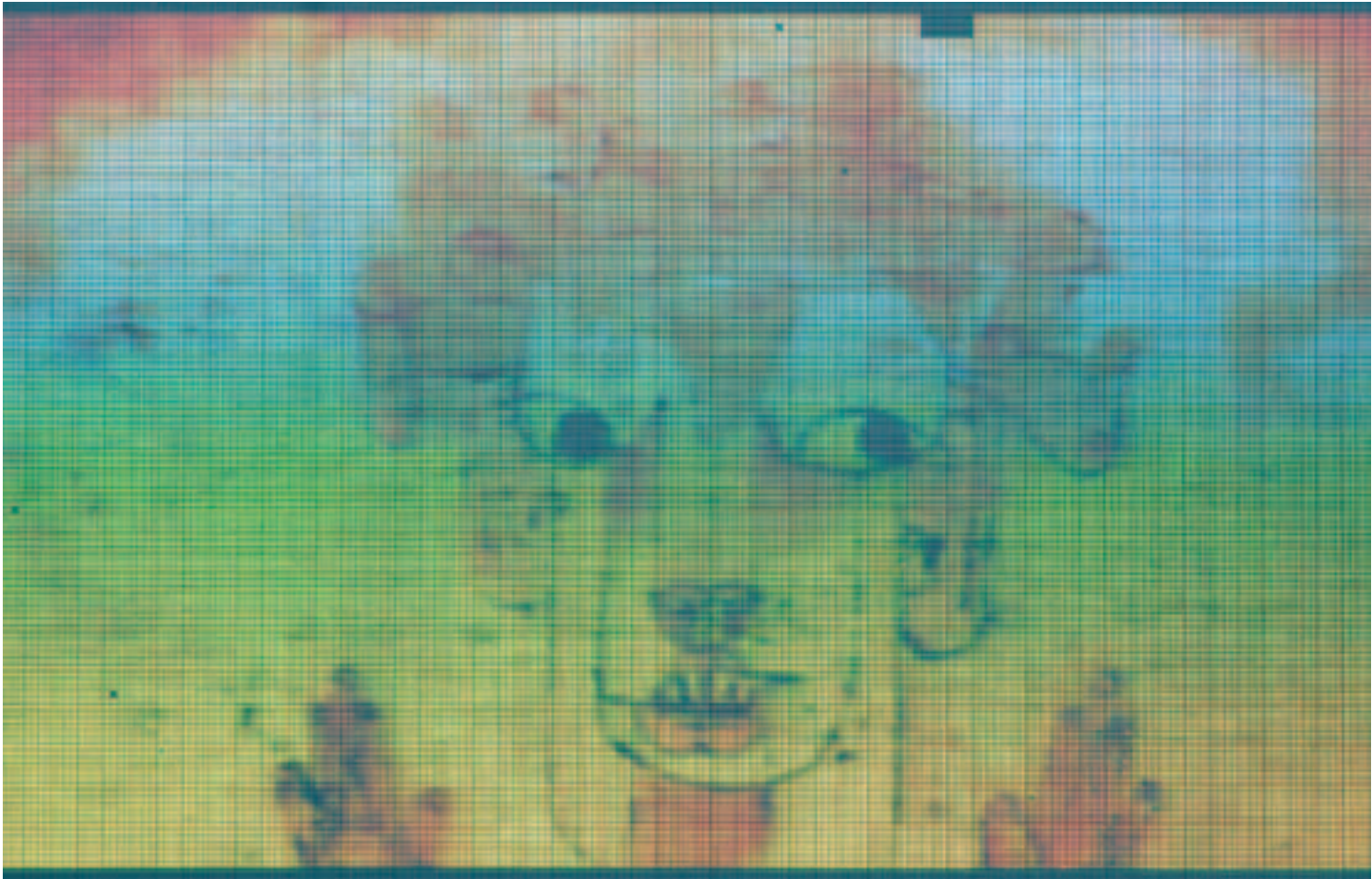
<sup>2</sup> “[...] delirium is not a mother-father affair: there is no delirium that does not pass through peoples, races and tribes, and that does not haunt universal history. All delirium is world-historical, ‘a displacement of races and continents.’ [...] Delirium is a disease, the disease par excellence, whenever it erects a race it claims is pure and dominant. But it is the measure of health when it invokes this oppressed bastard race that ceaselessly stirs beneath dominations, resisting everything that crushes and imprisons, a race that is outlined in relief in literature as process.” Gilles DELEUZE, “Literature and life,” in *Essays critical and clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, London: Verso, 1998 [1993], p. 4.



27







## II.

With *Aztec Stadium. Malleable deed* (2010) Smith and Ortega locate themselves at the nodal point of the capitalist-nationalist production that marked the twentieth century, a point that does not seem to have changed in the twenty-first; that is, at the exact point where the relationship between the disciplining of bodies intertwines with mass spectacles and technical apparatuses to create, in a single machine, a form of civilizing domination in which technology operates in the service of politics to produce subjects and mass mobilizations that perpetuate the apparatus of domination.

In his text “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction,” Benjamin already laid out the problem we are confronting. By making use of the apparatus, politics does not just reproduce a representation of mankind, but rather produces it out of the very structure of alienation:

The representation of human beings by means of an apparatus has made possible a highly productive use of the human being’s self-alienation. The nature of this use can be grasped through the fact that the film actor’s estrangement in the face of the apparatus, as Pirandello describes this experience, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one’s appearance [*Erscheinung*] in a mirror – a favorite theme of the Romantics. But now the mirror image [*Bild*] has become detachable from the person mirrored, and is transportable. And where is it transported? To a site in front of the masses.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> WALTER BENJAMIN, “The work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility: Second version,” in *The work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility and other writings on media*, trans. Edmond Jephcott and Harry Zohn, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 33f.

Nevertheless – and here lies the profound subversion that operates in *Aztec Stadium. Malleable deed* (2010) – the individuals that comprise this intervention are ungovernable, boycotting any possibility of framing this operation as a spectacle in which the masses can find the form of representation by which to be alienated.

It is clear that the stunt cards are part of a vocabulary for demonstrating power, which uses this grammar as a social order for politico-military domination. The spectacle of bodies achieves a cult and ritual function, inciting a mystical activation of an epic narrative that propagates enthusiasm, verifying the power of the State and mytifying the idea of the masses. It is this alienation that eliminates individuals in the face – framed and presented by apparatuses – of the masses over itself.

The stunt cards, in general terms, aim to aestheticize this control over bodies and to provoke in the spectator the feeling of the sublime, that type of monumentality that brings us close to the monstrous, to provoke terror along with desire.

Nevertheless, in the stunt cards of *Aztec Stadium* the frame is not centered around moments of control but on moments of chaos. Here all we see is a series of individuals who manifest the impossibility of organization and control. The montage that Smith achieves with Ortega succeeds in suppressing the logic of the apparatus to make way for the affect that provokes the dissolution of the ideological frame and of the spectacle.<sup>4</sup> And the sensation is one of devastation.

This malleable operation changes the image’s register by un-framing the representation between image and history with ungovernable bodies that, with total determination, boycott the functioning of the disciplinary machine. The subjects that gave shape to the action of this intervention are the residue of the decomposition of a social fabric, which, although it no longer assumes the disciplinary power of the school (participants are undergraduate students from public colleges and the Center for Industrial Technology and Services), nor the authority of the artists, neither does it succeed in subverting the logic of forms of control. The formalization of *Aztec Stadium* oscillates between order, chaos, and the intervals between them: spaces of neglect, of *desmadre* (fucking mess) where one wonders whether the little door through which the revolution will come might truly be there.

<sup>4</sup> That a version of this piece is under the complete control of Televisa, one of the sponsors of this project, reveals the perverse reverse side of technology as a frame of history. *Aztec Stadium. Malleable deed II* shows how montage is an ideological tool. The chaotic creation of mosaics does not succeed in sustaining the image. It confuses it and at each instant it seems on the verge of dissolving into ungovernability, but this montage, carried out by the corporation, does manage to subvert this chaos with a montage in which music and special effects determine an epic narrative: a moment of celebration when the revolution masquerades as a sporting event, in which Televisa violently asserts the character of montage as an ideology and that of the image as spectacle.



Although it has been proposed that *desmadre* – as a national category that aims to identify Mexican character in a sort of nationalist apologia<sup>5</sup> – could be a tool of resistance in the subversion of disciplinary systems, it is, in reality, one of the social system's appropriations of domination itself to contain unrest.

As Achille Mbembe asserts in his analysis of the aesthetics of vulgarity in his book *On the postcolony*,<sup>6</sup> *Homo ludens* is a form that is typical of the structures of domination. The problem of whether humor in postcolonial spaces is an expression of resistance or a form of opposition or hostility to authority is unimportant. The important thing is that in this process, which adds nothing to the depth of submission, subordination, or the level of resistance, empowerment escapes as much from the disciplined body as from disciplinary power: a pure state of chaos in which the regime is maintained within its own failure, a continuation of a temporality of rehearsal in which the *desmadre* seeks the passage of time without ever achieving its collapse.

### III.

Although this work does not attempt to be a metaphor nor a representation of the condition of a failed State, it does inevitably interrogate us, once the mythical revolutionary narrative has been destroyed, about the conditions of possibility of a revolution.

Revolutions tear apart the frame. They are events that drive the established conditions of temporality and spatiality mad, where, therefore, there are no conditions of possibility but only pure event. The revolution resists thought and it does so because there is no frame with which to apprehend it. The affect that overflows it erases any limit, and spontaneity becomes the greatest force of mobilization.

Much has already been written about the unexpectedness of the recent mobilizations in North Africa and the Middle East. Their impossibility has been their greatest force, and their propagation the best demonstration of the contagiousness of becoming-revolutionary. In these cases, it is not clear if these uprisings are conquering a revolution or if the revolution will be stolen from them because, as we all know, the revolution also summons terror and the counter-revolution. But what is clear is that these processes have opened the possibility of thinking of revolutionary wangles beyond revolutions as programmatic actions.

The great revolutions as chains of cause-and-effect are a myth, a narrative production that seeks to consolidate an idea of progress: the ordering of bodies and of signs that fix meanings in an epic narrative that erases the incommensurability of processes, and that hides the bodies of the disappeared and the ruins of those projects that got twisted and met with failure. Because we must be honest enough – even when this entails shaking the theological and teleological structure that operates in every utopian revolutionary fantasy – to maintain that revolutions, by situating themselves in a logic of action-reaction based on temporal continuity and homogeneity, always fail:

Who ever believed that a revolution would end well? Who? Who? People say “Look at the English, they spared themselves a revolution.” That’s absolutely not true! Today we live in this kind of mystification.<sup>7</sup>

Here we are not seeking to affirm the impossibility of the revolution, but simply to note that at the moment when the revolution is instituted in order to make way for the constitution of a proper state, the revolutionary process can be violently subsumed under a program that attempts to create a new order, one that would give a direction to and an outlet for the forces that those processes opened up, unleashed, invoked. The violence with which the forces, wangles, affects and desires that are produced during a

<sup>5</sup> As Roger Bartra asserts in his analysis of the construction of Mexican-ness in *La jaula de la melancolía* (The cage of melancholy): “Studies of ‘Mexicanness’ constitute an expression of the dominant political culture. This hegemonic political culture finds itself bound by the set of imaginary networks of power that define socially accepted *forms of subjectivity*, and that tend to be regarded as the most elaborate expression of national culture. It is a process through which post-revolutionary Mexican society produces the *subjects* of its own national culture as mythological and literary creatures generated in the context of an historically determined subjectivity that ‘is not only a place of creativity and liberation, but of subjugation and imprisonment.’ Thus, the hegemonic political culture has created particular subjects, and has bound them to various archetypes of universal extension.” *La jaula de la melancolía*, Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1986, pp. 14f.

<sup>6</sup> Achille MBEMBE, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (dir. Pierre-André Boutang), interviews with Claire Parnet, Paris, Éditions Montparnasse, 1996; in response to the prompt “Left” (*gauche*). Deleuze continues: “All revolutions fail. Everyone knows it. We pretend to rediscover it – how dumb! So, everyone rushes to say it. This is the current revisionism. There’s Furet, who discovers that the French Revolution was not so great. Alright, agreed: it messed up, too. And everyone knows it! The French Revolution gave us Napoleon. Discoveries are made that are not so very moving in their novelty. The English Revolution gave us Cromwell. The American





31









Revolution gave us what? Worse, right? It gave us, I don't know –" Parnet: "It gave us neoliberalism –" Deleuze: "It gave us Reagan. Which doesn't seem to me to be any better. So what does that mean? We're in such a state of confusion. That revolutions fail, that revolutions go wrong: this never stopped people, nor did it keep people from becoming revolutionaries!"

<sup>8</sup> "The revolution will not be televised" is the song/poem by which Gil Scott Heron claimed the revolutionary role of "Black power." This movement is without a doubt one of the key moments for the type of revolutions that have managed to generate a social and juridical change on a large scale, beginning from molecular and subjective mobilizations. See Gil Scott-Heron, "The revolution will not be televised," on *Small talk at 125th and Lennox*, RCA, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Walter BENJAMIN'S Thesis IV in "Theses on the philosophy of history," in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, p. 255.

revolutionary project are subsumed to a unitary project always catches up, producing the delirium that maintains the past in constant tension with history. What must always be feared is not the revolution as such but its institution; that is, the moment at which a homogeneous project that is unable to incorporate different demands and different desires in a single system establishes itself. Revolutions are betrayed and that should not mean that we seek consolation in the "resistance" of *desmadre*, which ultimately just sustains this era of rehearsal, but rather to usher ourselves toward the quest for new processes that are programmed not within the "Revolution" but rather within becoming-revolutionary.

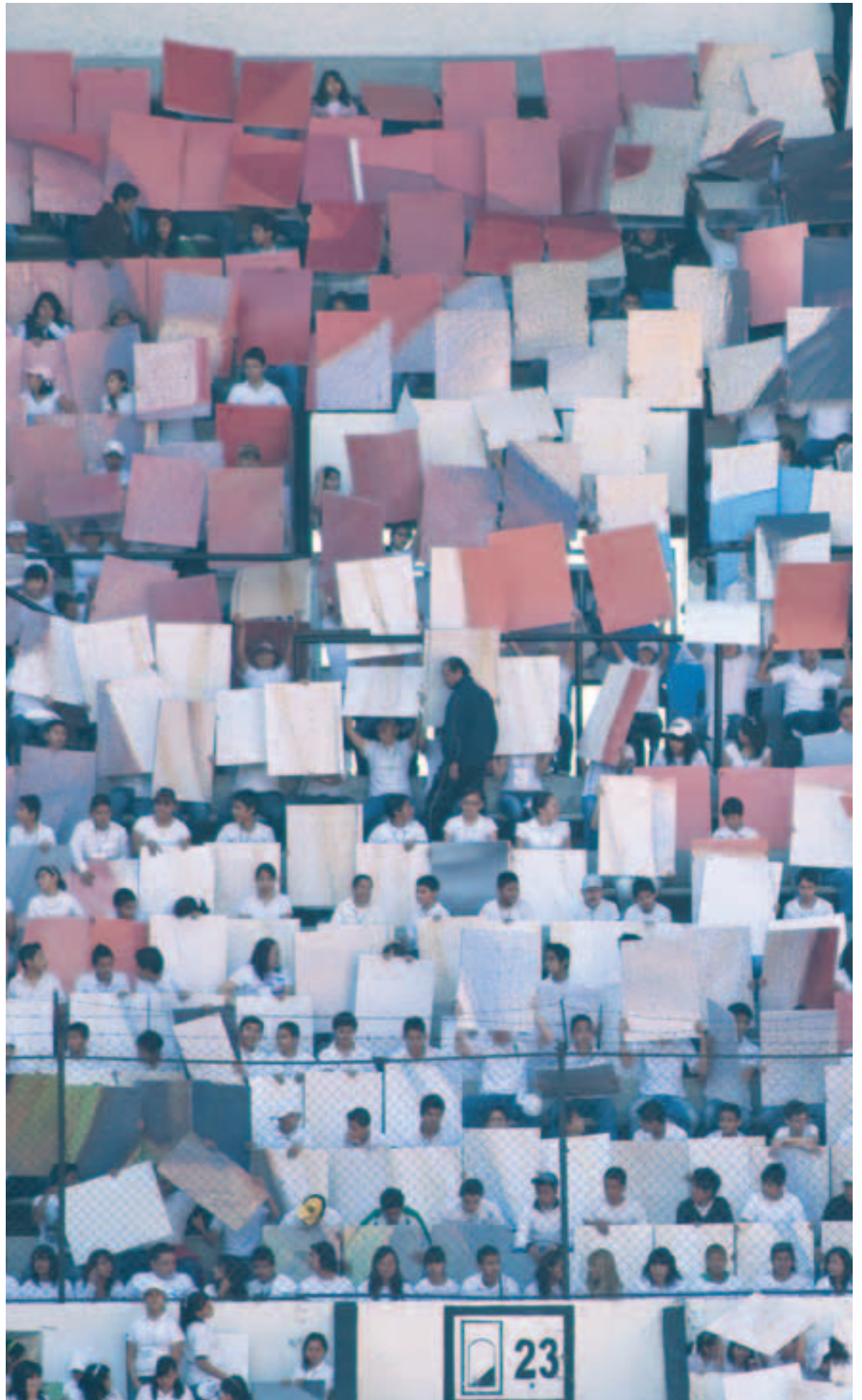
"The revolution will not be televised,"<sup>8</sup> a slogan that is repeated time and again in *Aztec Stadium*, gives us the key to thinking beyond the frame of representation on the basis of the system of apparatuses since – let us not deceive ourselves – the fact that today revolutions are carried out *on* television and *for* television – something which has been going on from the fall of Nicolae Ceaucescu's regime to the present day – does not imply their condition of possibility but rather their moment of representation and formalization. Their possibility, as paradoxical as this may be, is to be found rather in their impossibility.

*Aztec Stadium* alerts us that the revolution will not be televised and thereby activates the destruction of every epic, dissolving the promise of satisfaction of the spectacle into melancholia. Smith's work with Ortega offers not indulgence, but a devastating reading of the history of revolutions. It shows the promise and the failure in an image detached both from the system of ideology and from the promise of emancipation.

Today, thinking about revolutions should not mean to fix them as they truly were, as Walter Benjamin tells us about history, but rather to make ourselves the owners of a memory just as it is when it strikes us in an instant of danger. The danger lies in transforming the celebration of revolution into an affirmation of the regime, into dogma, into an institution that only serves to legitimate a sovereignty born of the very dead who accumulate ceaselessly. As we already know, "not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if it triumphs. And this enemy has never stopped triumphing."<sup>9</sup>

Becoming-revolutionary: what that could mean today is to exceed the frame, to recognize its rupture as something inherent to it, and to search for the possibility of its displacement at every moment; to work within the impossible and to saturate each representation of an excessive affect in order to invoke the improbable. *Aztec Stadium. Malleable deed* (2010) un-frames the celebration of the revolution from the teleological frame to indicate the impossibility of formalizing history in an image. Here, the image restores historical experience so as to invoke revolutionary possibilities, to un-frame the frame and make the impossible possible.







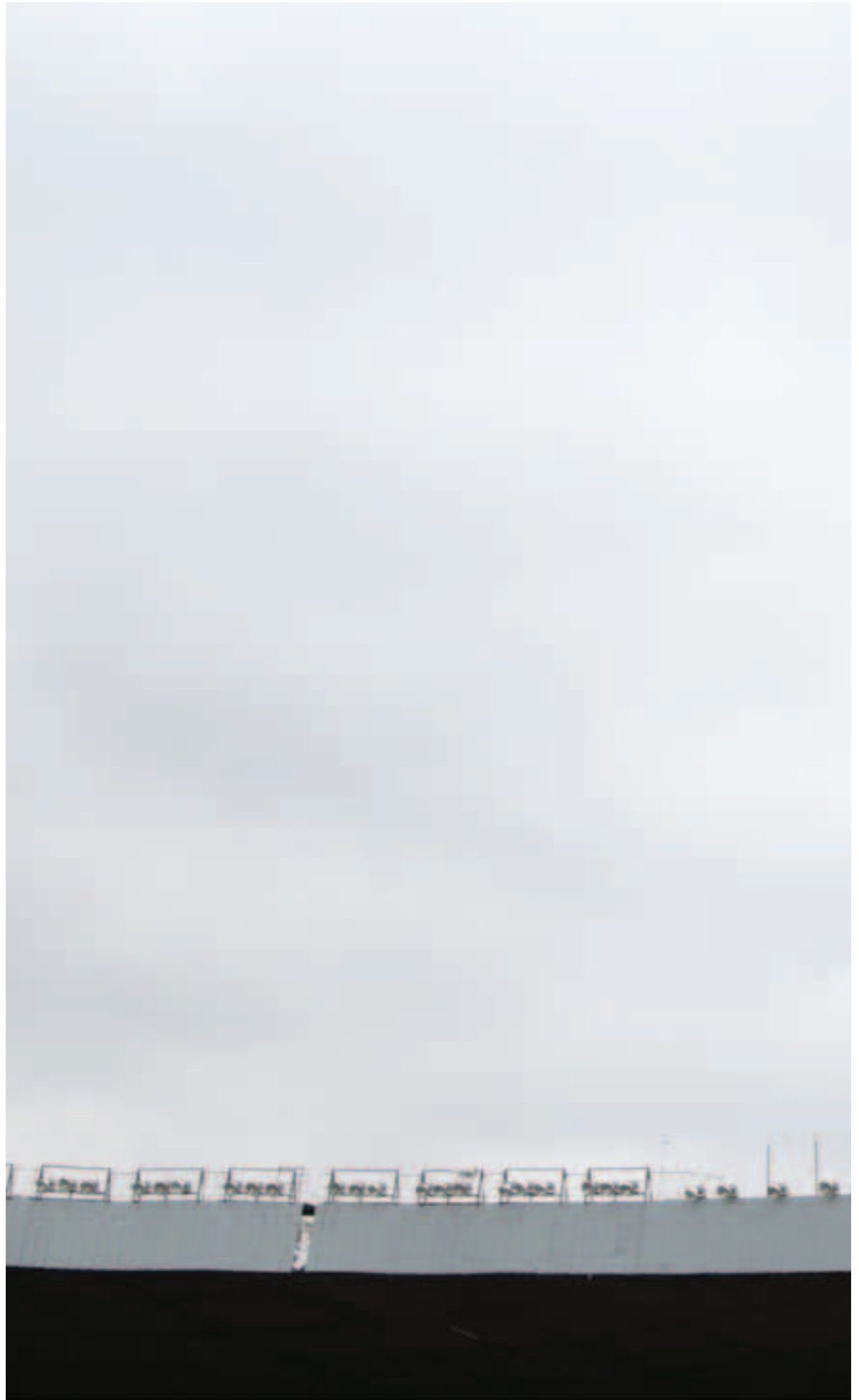














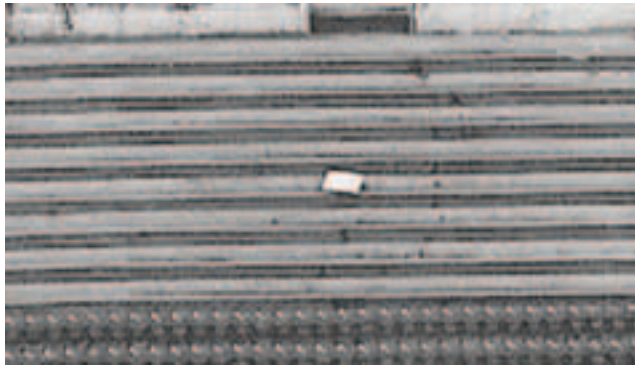
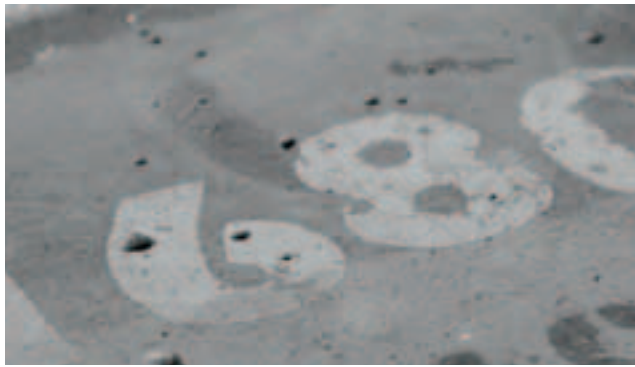




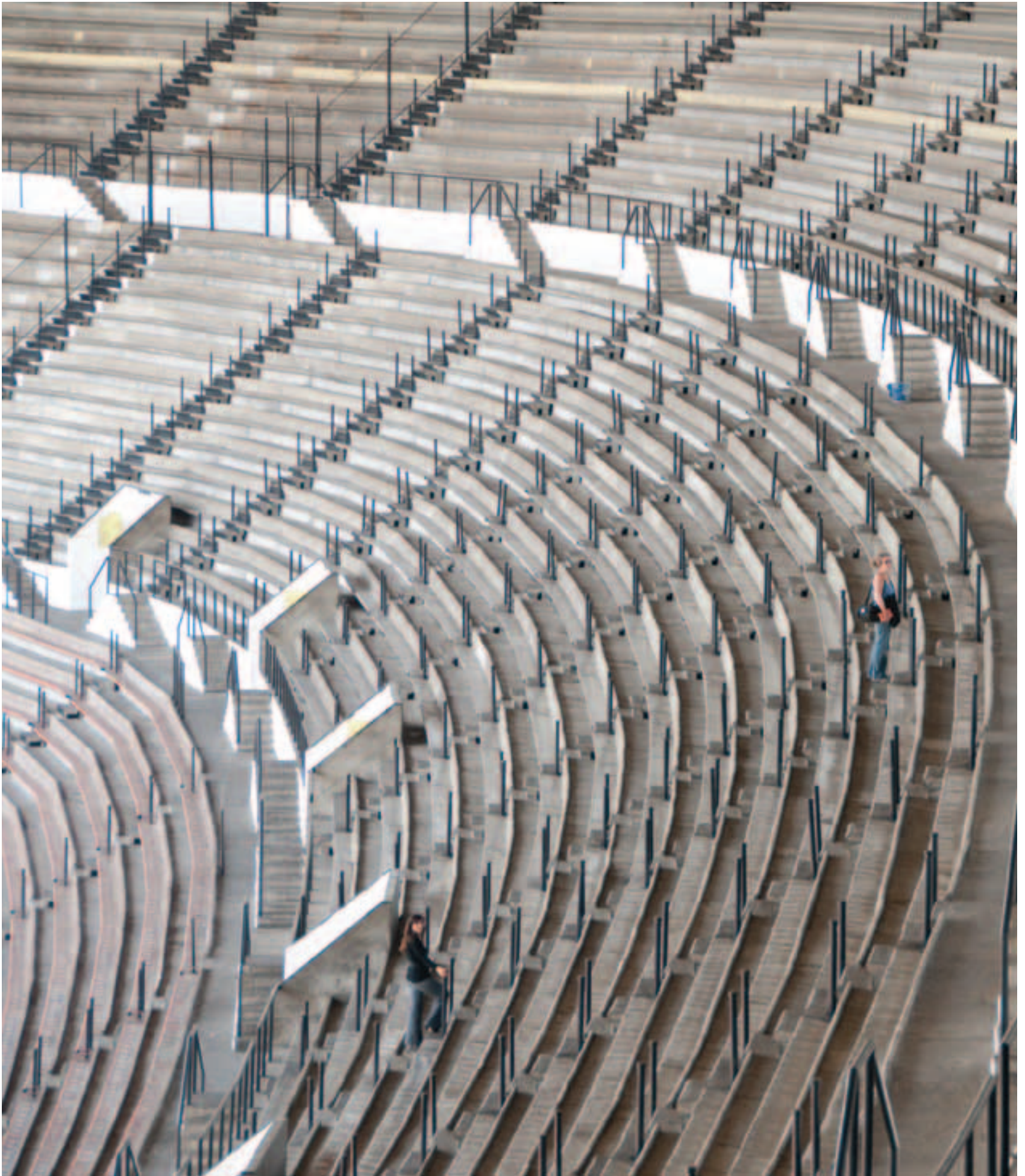
40



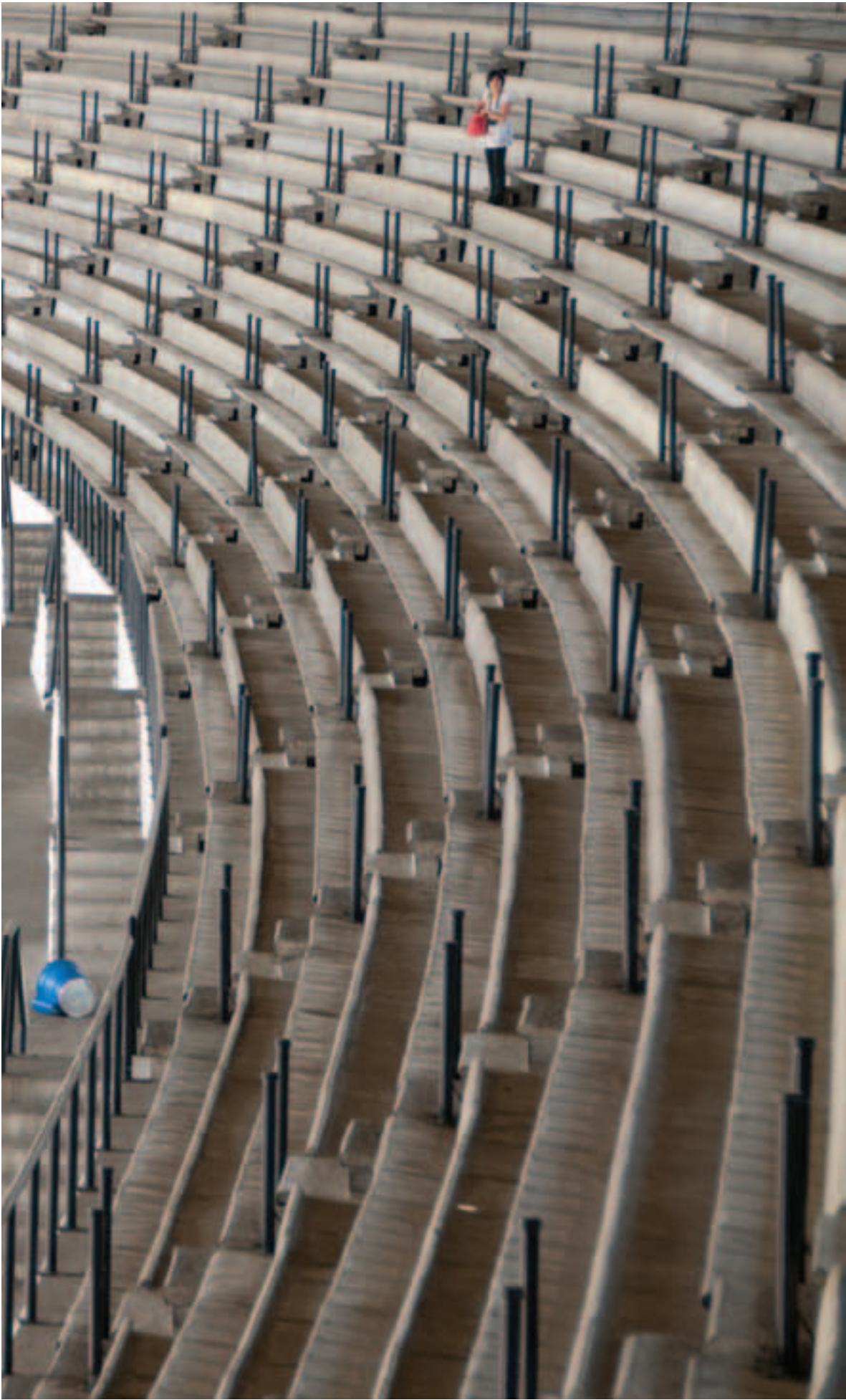


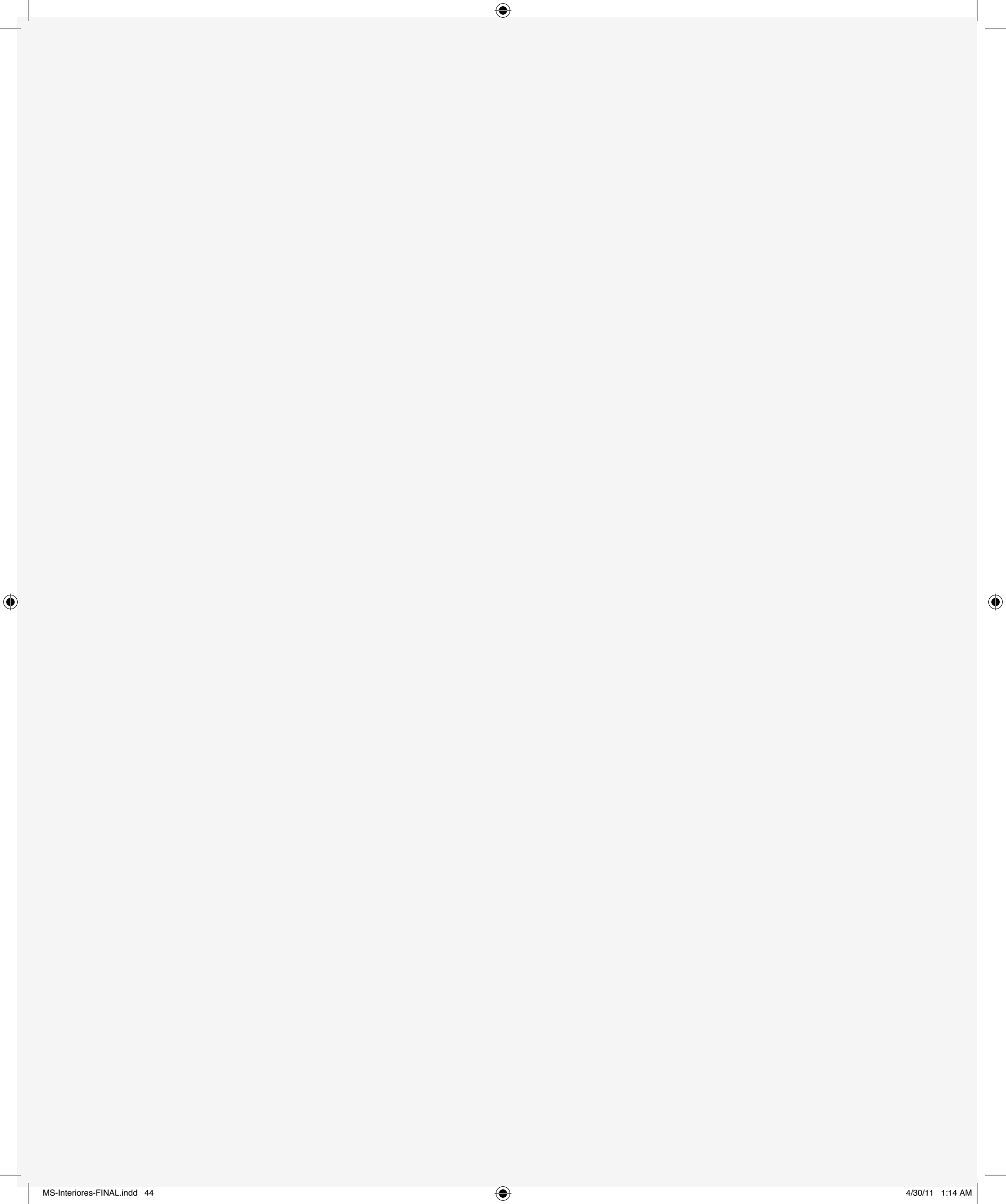


















## XILITLA

PAOLA SANTOSCOY

*Why do the mirrors display a conspiracy of  
muteness concerning their very existence?*

ROBERT SMITHSON<sup>1</sup>

47

<sup>1</sup> Robert SMITHSON, “Incidents of mirror-travel in the Yucatán,” in *The collected writings*, ed. Jack D. Flam, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996 [1969], p. 124.

*Xilitla* is a visual exploration of the current possibilities of meaning in one of the most enigmatic and remote places in Mexico. Located in the mountainous region of the Huasteca Potosina, Xilitla is known for the large, fantastical concrete structures erected there. Built between 1960 and 1984, this place is the delirious creation of Edward James (1907-1984), a writer and eccentric British aristocrat capable of dedicating three decades to this enterprise and investing huge sums of money in a symbolic architecture devoid of functionality, at least in the sense of modern architecture.

As a product of James’s affiliation with Surrealism, this place is the antithesis of urban planning, of a rational view of the world. Scattered around a plot of uneven land, about 20 acres in area, there are at least fifty structures of different forms and sizes that were constructed whimsically and according to no particular scheme over the course of the years. This is also an anachronistic universe that would seem not to have been touched by the outside world, a monumental declaration conceived on the margins of the Western world’s sense of reality, a *sui generis* installation that is nevertheless situated within a long history of interventions in the landscape, and of Surrealist dreams and nightmares.

This seductive and decadent setting of nature’s exuberance is the motive behind *Xilitla*, a collaboration between Melanie Smith and Rafael Ortega whose centerpiece is a 35 mm film that questions the boundaries traditionally imposed between “the modern” and “the contemporary.” Contrary to the cinematic convention of shooting in landscape perspective, this film opts instead for a vertical format as one way of relating to the surroundings and simultaneously as a strategy for destabilizing the gaze. By rotating the camera sideways, the viewer finds him- or herself confronted with an oblique perspective – what we might call an misaligned view – that delineates a different frame, making way for a space of aesthetic operations and appropriations that go beyond the context itself.



## LAS POZAS

Las Pozas is the name of the region near the town of Xilitla, some five hundred kilometers from Mexico City, where Edward James constructed his own “Surrealist Eden,” as some authors have called it.<sup>2</sup> Born in England and based in Mexico for more than twenty years, Melanie Smith’s history of displacements runs parallel to James’s, locating her within a convergence of symbolic links to this place. Although they were attracted to Mexico for individual reasons of their own and at very different historical moments, one might say that James and Smith both put strategies for living outside of their homeland to work in order to make sense of the unknown.

One of many pilgrims who came searching for an idea of liberation offered by Mexico-as-a-symbol, James arrived in the late 1940’s. By then he already had a growing collection of art and was a patron of many artists belonging to the Surrealist movement in Europe, including Salvador Dalí, Man Ray and René Magritte. He was uninterested in establishing himself in Mexico City, and, with the exception of his closeness to the painter Leonora Carrington and her circle of friends, James did not interact with the country’s arts community. The history of Las Pozas is plagued by anecdotes that focus on the eccentricity of the personage as seen from the eyes of the inhabitants of Xilitla, many of whom ended up working at some point for “The Englishman” in the construction and maintenance of the garden.

Smith and Ortega’s intention in working with the site – with *what is found there* – appropriating the place to display it by the light of their own artistic interests and in dialog with other historical moments, gives James a thoroughly cryptic, almost ghostly presence throughout the film: details like a lavatory in the middle of the jungle or multiple water taps reveal his obsession with cleanliness; the restless strides of an animal, perceived blurrily from his room; the pools of water created by the waterfall that, so they say, captivated him wholly when he first came to this place. This way of blurring the character makes possible the creation of a broader frame of references within which many other questions arise; in other words, to break the link from individual to individual in order to open a broader link with the place. If we think for a moment about relationships of proximity, about the distances that exist between Las Pozas and Mexico City, between Las Pozas and West Dean (James’s home in England), these are less important as geographical distances than as metaphorical distances, or even as oppositions: the rational and the irrational, the urban and the rural, the European and the American, the pragmatic and the intuitive.

## THE MIRROR

Over the course of the non-linear narrative of the film, the most recurrent protagonistic element is a large mirror that we see in different situations and landscapes. Here, the mirror is, among other things, a direct citation of the work *Mirror Displacements* completed by Robert Smithson in 1969 during his trip to the Yucatan Peninsula. In this piece, a series of photographs that he calls *standstills* record temporary sculptural installations that are the result of Smithson’s placing the same set of rectangular mirrors in the landscape as an investigation into the dialectic of place/non-place behind the physical presence of the mirror and its reflection: the mirror as a concept and an abstraction.

In Smith and Ortega’s film, by contrast, the mirror is moved from one place to another by the site’s gardeners. Rarely pausing in a single place, the light that is reflected along with the details of some of the unfinished sculptures, the rods, the textures, the garish colors of the place insistently challenge the idea of a unitary gaze. Thus, mirror

<sup>2</sup> See Margaret Hooks, *Surreal Eden: Edward James and Las Pozas*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.







and camera are transformed into a multifaceted eye that allows the spectator to see different, fragmented perspectives, making it impossible for any of the images to be unified to create a spatial whole.

A reflection can be blinding: if one stares at the flash of a mirror's light, one momentarily loses one's sense of direction. The mirror is never parallel to the observer's gaze; that is, to the camera. When Smithson speaks of his "mirror displacements" in the Yucatan, he says: "The mirror itself is not subject to duration, because it is an ongoing abstraction that is always available and timeless. The reflections, on the other hand, are fleeting instances that evade measure."<sup>3</sup> Eventually this leads him to conclude that the surfaces of mirrors cannot be understood rationally. In *Xilitla* there are moments when the reflection is almost a visual break. Or perhaps an escape?

When Walter Benjamin refers, in his *Arcades project*, to the glass windows and mirrors that comprise London's Glass Palace in the nineteenth century, he emphasizes the ambiguous nature of reflections, calling them "double-edged." The world of mirrors "blinks: it is always this one – and never nothing – out of which another immediately arises."<sup>4</sup> This other world, however, is not the alternate universe behind the looking glass in Lewis Carroll's stories, in which the mirror, for Alice, is the possibility of inhabiting another reality. In *Xilitla*, the reflection is a visuality that is opposed to or that resists a unitary gaze: a *countervisuality*.

<sup>3</sup> SMITHSON, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Walter BENJAMIN, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 542.

## LUCIO

Lucio González Reyes is a gardener who has worked in Las Pozas for many years. He is also one of the few people to appear in the film. Lucio has strabismus, which is the misalignment of one eye in relationship to the other, preventing him from focusing both eyes on the same point. Lucio's gaze represents a perspective out of alignment, different from the Renaissance vision directed at a single point. At the same time, it indicates a dialog with this place by way of the optical element – the eye –: the lens. This physiological condition also holds a connection to Smithson and his trip to the Yucatan. It signals and attempts to dismantle the structures of power.

This conversation across time begins with the travelogue *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (1843) by the American John Lloyd Stephens. This work, illustrated by the architect Frederick Catherwood's drawings, is famous for being an attempt to articulate a portrait of a grand pre-Hispanic past "forgotten" in the midst of undergrowth and the "indifference" on the part of the area's indigenous inhabitants. Stephens represents the figure of the nineteenth century explorer who attempts, through his tales, to found a modern gaze in an environment that is undecipherable to him. In his stories, the idea of modern vision takes on a literal cast when he describes in detail the various eye surgeries performed by one of his companions on the expedition, Dr. Samuel Cabot, who intervened more than once on people with strabismus, attempting to "correct" their vision. It is curious that Stephens reports finding a high percentage of people with strabismus among Yucatecans in particular.

According to Jennifer L. Roberts, "Smithson's work in Yucatan can be interpreted as an inversion or undoing of Stephens's operations. Smithson begins his travelogue, for example, by challenging the paradigms of narrative progress that had defined Stephens's entire enterprise."<sup>5</sup> Roberts sees the use of mirrors in *Incidents of mirror-travel in the Yucatan* (1969) as a mode of opposition to the visual imperialism of Stephens and to the Enlightenment project that lies behind his ideas. The substitution that Smithson makes in the title of his work – of *travel* for *mirror-travel* sends the gaze and its interests on a detour toward an asymmetrical vision.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer L. ROBERTS, "Landscapes of indifference: Robert Smithson and John Lloyd Stephens in Yucatan," *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 3, September 2000, p. 552. And p. 552f.

Robert Smithson is no doubt an artist that interests Smith a **great deal**, and therefore it is necessary to stress that her piece does not aim to repeat Smithson's action, nor to reinterpret it. It is rather a way of activating the utopian / dystopian vision of this place, as well as post-colonial questions through reference to Smithson, forty years after his journey to the Yucatan.

Focusing on visibility and a very specific context, *Xilitla* takes this conversation one step further. The script is circular; that is, it has a beginning and an end but there are elements that are repeated and that function as breaks in the linearity of the narrative. The film is built around a cinematic atmosphere of bluish light into which situations apparently alien to Xilitla are introduced, although these are linked powerfully to one of Melanie Smith's investigations in progress, about pictorial space and the legacy of modernist painting, as well as to the experiments carried out by North American artists in the 1960's and 1970's. In this way, the gothic elements of the place's architecture, and other elements that could be qualified as being of a Surrealist order, such as stairs that lead nowhere, big concrete flowers and labyrinthine pathways, are juxtaposed with formal quotes from the work of artists like Gordon Matta-Clark, Dan Flavin and, of course, Robert Smithson.

This idea becomes more evident in a series of Smith's paintings. Completed over the course of the two years it took to work on the film, these paintings are different from the photographic relationship to painting seen in her previous works. Her most recent paintings are the product of processes of erasure, sanding and surface destruction that bring them closer to the notion of a palimpsest, revealing textures and layers of memory that enter into relationships sometimes with the place and others with elements that come from the artist's psyche. The oppositions between media and the presence of multiple points of reference throws Xilitla out of alignment. The painting of monkeys in an apocalyptic landscape further expands the scope of the piece's action. Thus dismantlings and different conceptions of the world find themselves in dialog with each other.

"While driving south from Merida in his rental car, Smithson muses that 'one is always crossing the horizon, yet it always remains distant.... The distance seem[s] to put restrictions on all forward movement, thus bringing the car to a countless series of standstills.' Whereas for Stephens the hard fought view into depth had anchored the coherent perspectival organization of space and time, assuring its visual, physical, and historical traversability, here it ensnares the traveler in an impassable network of infinite distances. In Smithson's conception of the region, the landscape immediately proclaims the futility of all attempts at progress."

## RUINS

There is no horizon in Las Pozas. One is down below, caught up in the undergrowth, in the cement structures and the humidity. Green and gray. Blue. Green, gray, blue in infinite tonalities. Neither does one walk in a straight line there, it's impossible. Lucio was the one who told me that the plants found at Las Pozas are not endemic to the area, that it was Don Eduardo who brought them. "Truck after truck would show up," he said. Motivated by his fascination with orchids, James tasked himself with creating a tropical jungle ecosystem in the middle of the mountains, a universe within itself where vegetation abounds. This leads us to believe that what James was constructing here were already ruins themselves and never a building meant for posterity, being aware that the jungle would reclaim these structures sooner or later, transforming everything into a melancholic scene not far removed from the one that Stephens and Catherwood found in the tropical jungle of the Yucatan.

It would seem that, from the moment of their conception, these structures were destined to disappear, rather than to try to endure. Entropy is deliberately present in the search for an accelerated erosion and a disappearance of something, which, in the last instance, obliges us to think about death. *Xilitla* also depicts those parts of this garden that are not ruins in the Romantic sense of the word, but rather simply unfinished buildings left under construction. Anyone who has traveled Mexico's highways knows that these kinds of abandoned sedimentations are part of the landscape. Some of these shots are filmed through a mirror, again with the intention of questioning the utopian idea of the place itself, and of allowing its dystopian potential to emerge.





The gothic novels of the eighteenth century are predominated by ghostly feminine figures, gloomy landscapes, sinister forests and the castles and ruins of Medieval buildings, all stimulating melancholy. Xilitla is without a doubt a setting where many of these elements are to be found. Just as powerful is the presence of the oneiric and the fantastical at this place. The only feminine figure to appear in Smith's work is a young woman who appears twice, for just a few fractions of a second. She wears a fluorescent orange bathing suit, a wink at Smith's characteristic use of this color in her work from the 1990's, as a way of speaking about the flows of informal economy in a way that is both visual and that acknowledges the artificiality associated with this color.<sup>6</sup> This gesture – or, more precisely, this citation of her own work – is perhaps an attempt to reclaim this place as feminine.

Freud's idea of the uncanny – the unfamiliar, the *unheimlich*, which therefore becomes inexplicably terrifying for us – is manifested in the film by means of an intimist relationship between light and shadow and the architecture of the place, as well as through sound. The uncanny is something we find sinister, hidden, perverse, precisely because – as the root of the German word indicates – the *unheimlich* is something familiar (*heimlich*) that becomes unknown.<sup>7</sup> One such moment occurs when we see a pair of wooden doors open to reveal a plain, everyday lavatory. The musical accompaniment of an organ gives a lugubrious tone to the scene, capable of giving it a disconcerting air, of signaling something deeper in it. It is the sound of an organ that is always on the verge of suggesting something, disconnected chords that keep us in suspense, waiting for something big to occur, for an answer, only to let us go and leave us to our fate.

### THREE MOMENTS

Through the use of various media – painting, photography, video, installation – Smith's work presents a wide range of angular, temporal and visual perspectives on a single theme: aerial views, still and moving shots, behind-the-scenes, snapshots from the everyday life of the city, different degrees of urbanization, chromatic saturation in the urban landscape, among others.

The first collaboration between Melanie Smith and Rafael Ortega dates to 1995, the year that they met. *Aerobics class* (1995) is a video installation of multiple monitors reproducing a fixed shot on the window of Roma Gym in Mexico City: the camera as an observer of chromatic patterns, intensities, idiosyncrasies and sociocultural flows encapsulated in this window. Over the years, the projects they have done together – which, it bears mentioning, invariably involve moving images, since Ortega's training is in film – have grown increasingly complex on both technical and conceptual levels. For **their** effects on the work that concerns us, there are two previous pieces that are particularly relevant to understanding the arrival at a landscape and context like Las Pozas.

*Spiral city* (2002) is a macroscopic view of Mexico City. Shot from a helicopter, this video documents a spiral-shaped journey over anonymous neighborhoods, cement and asphalt blocks, uniformly rectilinear urbanization. This is where Smith clearly initiates a conversation across time with Robert Smithson, his *Spiral jetty* (1970), and the idea of entropy understood as a continuous, gradual process of change, and the tendency toward disorder and chaos as a natural progression. Whereas in Smithson's film, *Spiral jetty*, a spiral-shaped aerial shot opens out more and more until it reveals the scale of a spiral made of stone and sand in Utah's Great Salt Lake, in *Spiral city*, the gradual distancing of the camera suggests a process of erosion of the landscape that lends the urban framework a sculptural character, while at the same time revealing the impossibility of capturing it in its entirety. *Parres I* (2004), in turn, is a film shot in a desolate

<sup>6</sup> See Cuauhtémoc MEDINA, "Artificial tastes," in *Melanie Smith: Spiral City & other vicarious pleasures*, Mexico City, A&R Press, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Sigmund FREUD, *The Uncanny*, David McIntock, trans., New York, Penguin Books, 2003 [1919], p. 123-161.

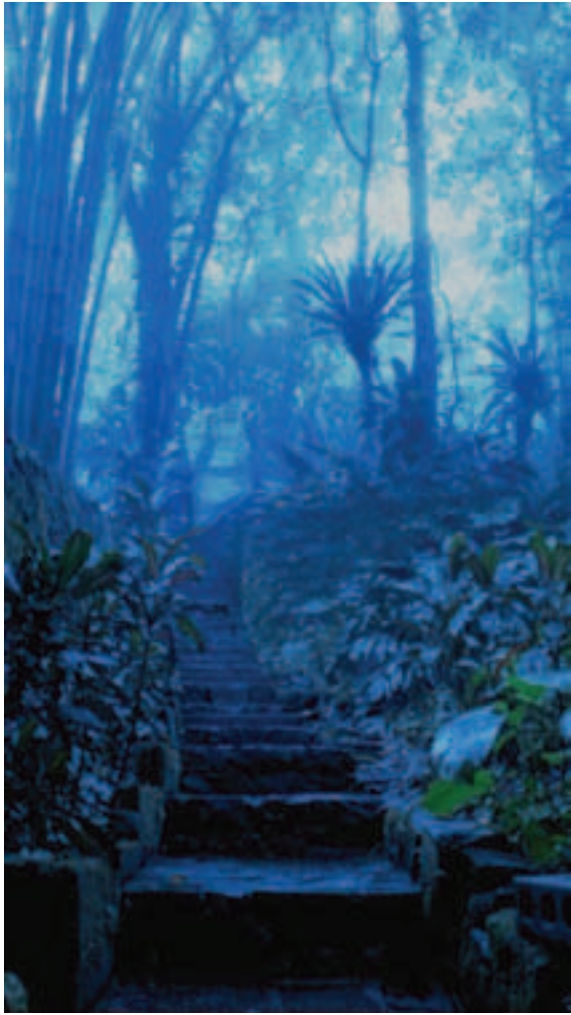
suburban settlement located along the old highway that links Mexico City to Cuernavaca. In this piece, Smith explores the visual transformation of an urban landscape into a white monochrome through the on-camera action of a man painting the surface of the “screen” with an airbrush. Here, the break of the pictorial illusion opens a window onto another reality, accentuating the self-referentiality of the monochrome.

In this relational scheme, it is interesting to suggest that *Xilitla* is in a certain sense the culmination of a three-part voyage: a voyage from the urban (*Spiral city*) to the suburban (*Parres*) to the extra-urban (*Xilitla*). It is a fluid space of visual, stylistic and conceptual resonances, in which no reference or interpretation is definitive. In Octavio Paz’s words, “Surrealism attempts nothing more: it is a radical challenge to what our society has, until now, considered immutable, as well as desperate attempt to find a way out. Not, of course, in search of salvation, but of *true life*.”<sup>8</sup> I like to think of *Xilitla* as a Surrealist work in the sense that is activated by Paz’s words; that is, as a ruthless, poetic bombardment that leaves behind not a panorama of destruction, but a terrain of latencies and questions.

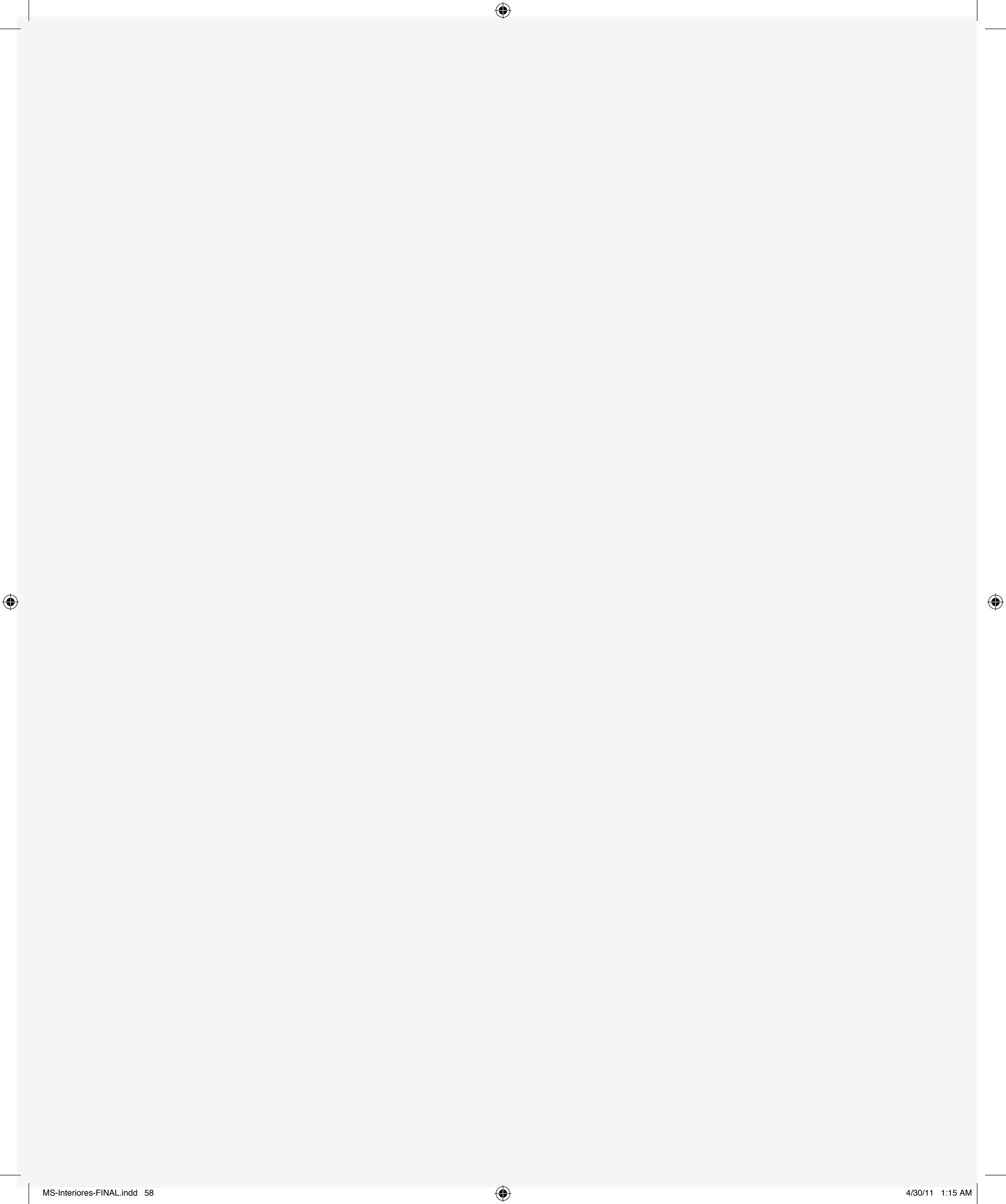
<sup>8</sup> Octavio PAZ, *Estrella de tres puntas. André Breton y el surrealismo*. Mexico City: Editorial Vuelta, 1996, p. 13.





















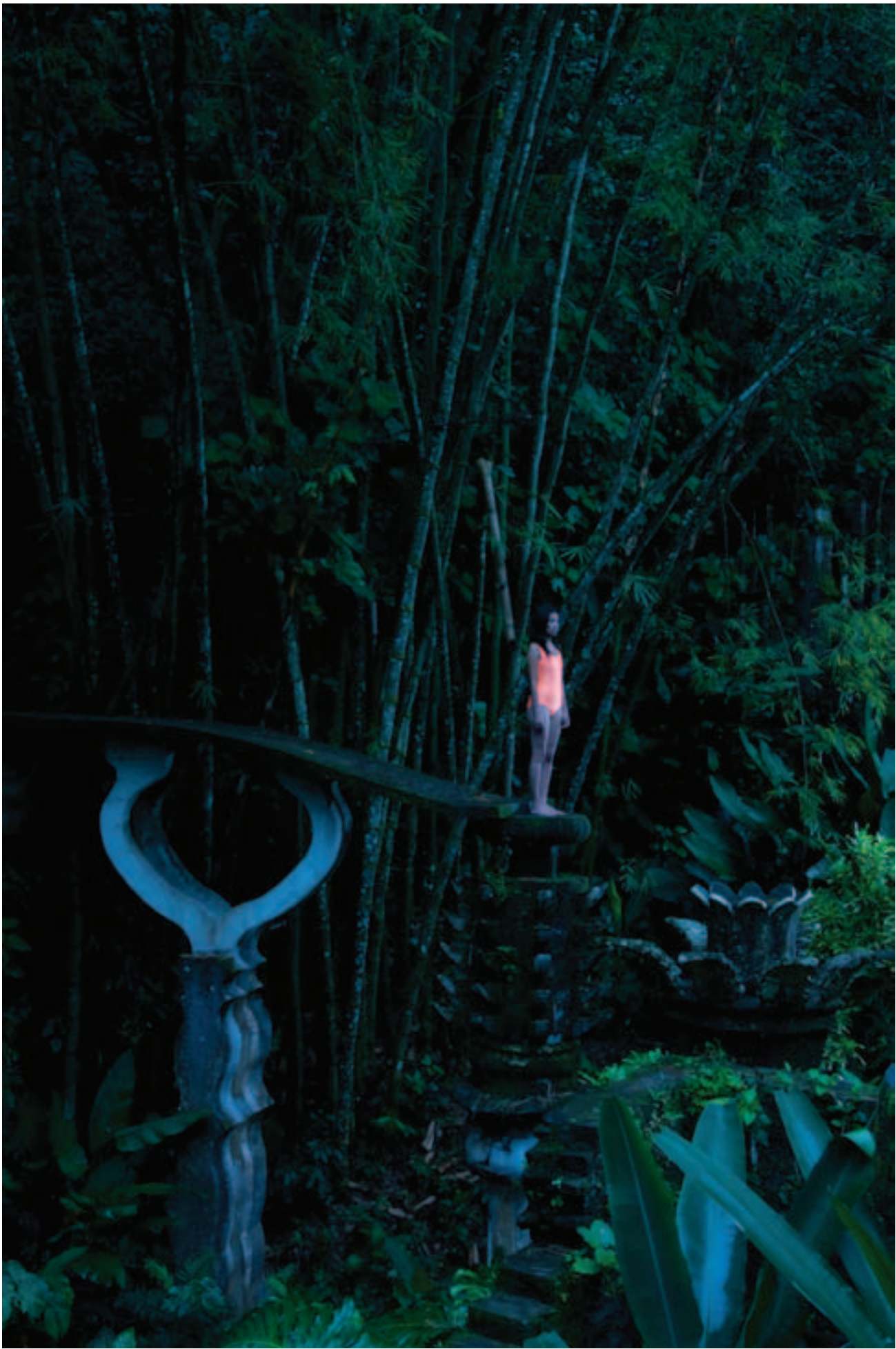












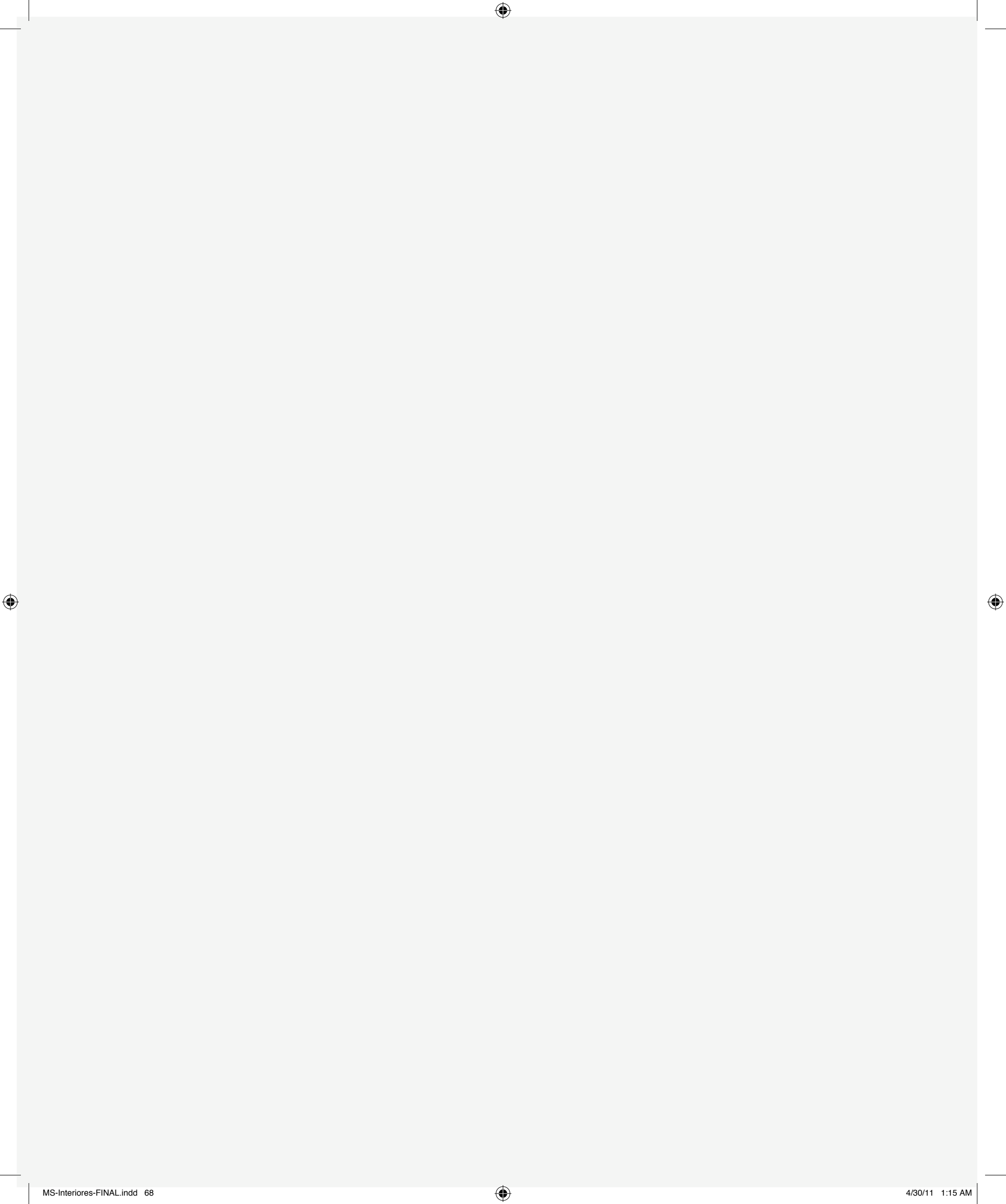


















## BULTO<sup>1</sup>

TATIANA CUEVAS

71

<sup>1</sup> *Bulto* (Package) was commissioned by the Museo de Arte de Lima – MALI. It was filmed in the Peruvian capital in September 2010, and screened from February 15 to May 22, 2011 as part of the MALI in situ program. Its presentation made use of two platforms: the first occupied the main hall of the museum in the manner of an improvised urban theater, accompanied by four stations where some of the artist's previous works were projected; the second inserted the full version and an edited version of the piece in the programming of some of the city's movie theaters, infiltrating new spaces for contemporary art.

In August 2010, astonished newspaper headlines announced a traffic jam nearly one-hundred kilometers long that blocked transit on the Beijing-Zhangjiakou highway for more than ten days. Just as Cortázar had described it a little more than four decades ago, the tangled mass of vehicles forced drivers – mostly of heavy trucks – to find ways of killing time: playing cards, spending the night in their cars, bathing on the highway, and suffering the abuses of local business operators near the highway, who took advantage of the situation to gouge their prices for food and drink. With its population of more than 1.3 billion and one of the biggest automotive fleets on the planet – in China, vehicular traffic grows at an annual rate of 40% thanks to the country's continuous economic growth – even one of the most booming economies in the world continues, nevertheless, to represent the cliché of vehicular chaos that haunts developing countries as an illustration of their troubled economic, political and cultural dynamics.

It is clear that the mechanisms that articulate traffic can reveal dimensions of local idiosyncrasy. Thus, traffic in developing countries tends not to adhere to a strict set of national laws, regulating itself instead through tacit agreements inherent to each city. In the case of Lima, what stands out is the surprising malleability of traffic signals painted on the pavement: the lines between lanes seem to pulse to the rhythm of the slow choreography of an automotive body that oscillates from one lane to another without paying too much attention to the neighboring lane. This dance joins the exercise of pedestrians, who cross avenues ignoring – as do the vehicles – marked walkways and thereby adding themselves to the grand staging of what frequently ends up becoming an intriguing urban theater. These dynamics, just to mention a couple, are reflected in fields that include the disordered growth of urban settlements, the obstructive practices of bureaucracy or the febrile resistance to practices aimed at facilitating the labyrinthine path of progress.



Melanie Smith takes this aspect of the Peruvian capital as a point of departure for the development of a piece that tours a succession of locations, seeking to illustrate the imaginary that defines certain dynamics of everyday life in their relationship to politics, economic powers, informal commerce, culture or historical memory. The traffic scene that begins this film is inspired by the well-known traffic jam sequence in Jean-Luc Godard's film *Weekend* (1967) – itself inspired by Julio Cortázar's short story "Autopista del sur" (Southern highway, 1966) – in which an affluent couple escapes the city in a convertible only to find itself stuck in a long line of cars that have stopped for an unknown reason. While the couple desperately attempts to get past the tedious and absurd traffic jam on a two-lane highway in the middle of the French countryside, the scene offers a series of references that represent – through different types of vehicles and characters – the economic conditions, political postures and social dynamics of 1960's France.

To articulate this display of Lima's image, Smith recruits an enigmatic protagonist: a package whose origin and contents remain unknown throughout the whole film. This object travels through a city that embodies many of the dystopian results of modernizing projects, allowing a strange, bulky and useless object to be integrated almost naturally into the flow of everyday life without causing any alarm, as just one more of the many nuisances – physical, emotional and symbolic – for whose origin and consequences no one takes any responsibility. Its most decisive condition is a constant state of motion, the root of its uncertain and mutable symbolism. When it's not sprouting spontaneously in all manner of contexts, the package is escorted by different people on trucks, buses, motorcycle taxis, cars or boats. Its content might be inferred from each of the places through which it moves, and from the treatment it receives: it could be a bundle of merchandise, a corpse, an explosive, a work of art or some of the remains of a shipwreck.

The structure of this central element formally alludes to modern sculpture – a regular strategy in the artist's work – but it also makes reference to the funerary bales present in almost all pre-Columbian cultures in Peru and updated in the proliferation of images of corpses – tirelessly reproduced both in the press and in recent Peruvian art<sup>2</sup> – a result of the atrocities committed during the violent period between 1980-1992. The mystery of this package's contents winks at Duchamp's *secret noise*, simultaneously using the resources proper to documentary film and a combination of filmic references that include Luis Buñuel's Surrealist cinema and plot device like Alfred Hitchcock's MacGuffin<sup>3</sup> to the presence of an object as inscrutable as the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey* by Stanley Kubrick. The package is thus a hybrid product that combines the documentary with the fictional, starting from a narrative device divorced from all context, that, in its otherness, is able to articulate the particularities of each place.

More than triggering a plot, the effect of this amorphous pink volume traveling through Lima activates rather the sense of each place it occupies. Its mere presence points simultaneously at the past and the present of the place, but it also establishes the possibility of imagining the same situation in other times and places. Moving ceaselessly through the city, the package takes pause indiscriminately: in a cantina, in a dance club frequented by soldiers and police officers, or in the main room of an affluent apartment. It evades the security of a crowded political meeting, as well as of the Lima mayor's office, located just steps away from the seat of national government. It presents itself on Tarata Street in the neighborhood of Miraflores, where, in 1992, the Shining Path perpetrated their most violent terrorist attack on Lima, which unleashed a hard and indiscriminate reaction on the part of the State's forces. Later it appears at the ruins of Pachacamac – a sanctuary more than 1,800 years old that was one of the principal pilgrimage centers in ancient Peru – and, afterwards, it is studied by an academic in the

<sup>2</sup> Artists such as Armando Williams, Eduardo Tokeshi, Elena Tejada-Herrera and Alfredo Márquez, among others, have addressed this theme in their work. For a broader reference, see Gustavo BUNTINX, "Los signos mesiánicos: Fardos y banderas en la obra de Eduardo Tokeshi durante la 'República de Weimar peruana' (1980-1992). (Más dos posdatas)," *Micromuseo*, Lima, No. 1, April 2001, 55 pp.

<sup>3</sup> A term coined by Alfred Hitchcock to designate a plot device that serves as an excuse for the development of a plot. The important part of this mechanism is that it is an interchangeable device whose nature is irrelevant except as an object of desire and a source of conflict between the protagonists.







galleries of the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology and History. Then it is deposited on a fishing wharf, where it heads out to sea, which, along with the desert and the mass of clouds standing still over the city for most of the year, give shape to Lima's peculiar landscape, weighing upon its spirits and its perspectives. Finally, it is rescued from a shipwreck by a group of youths, who return it to the traffic jam that started the whole journey.

*Bulto* represents everything and nothing. It is an abstract body emptied of content, which allows it to enclose everything and anything that one doesn't want to see and for which one doesn't want to be held responsible: say, the repressive phenomenon that molds aspects of post-colonial identity; or the pride of an idealized ancestral past shaped by ahistorical identities that overcome the value enhancement of contemporary reality; or, in the particular case of Peru, the complex phenomenon of migration, not just from the countryside to the city, but also from the city to its surrounding area, producing slums whose settlement patterns are controlled by suburban mafias; or an economic model that swings between the promises of capitalism and the seduction of piracy; or the absence of the nearly seventy thousand people who died or disappeared during the internal armed conflict.<sup>4</sup>

*Bulto* joins the research Melanie Smith has been carrying out with her work for more than two decades. In it, the artist has explored the relationship between certain aspects of pictorial abstraction and the way these can involuntarily reflect the growth of cities, their dynamics and their visual agitation. Each of her pieces sets off from a particular angle or point of view – it might be a shot from eye level, an aerial view, a sequence of instants from everyday life or a chromatic abstraction of the urban sprawl – which is added to the use of different media – whether painting, photography, video, film or installation – thus revealing different facets of a single object of study.

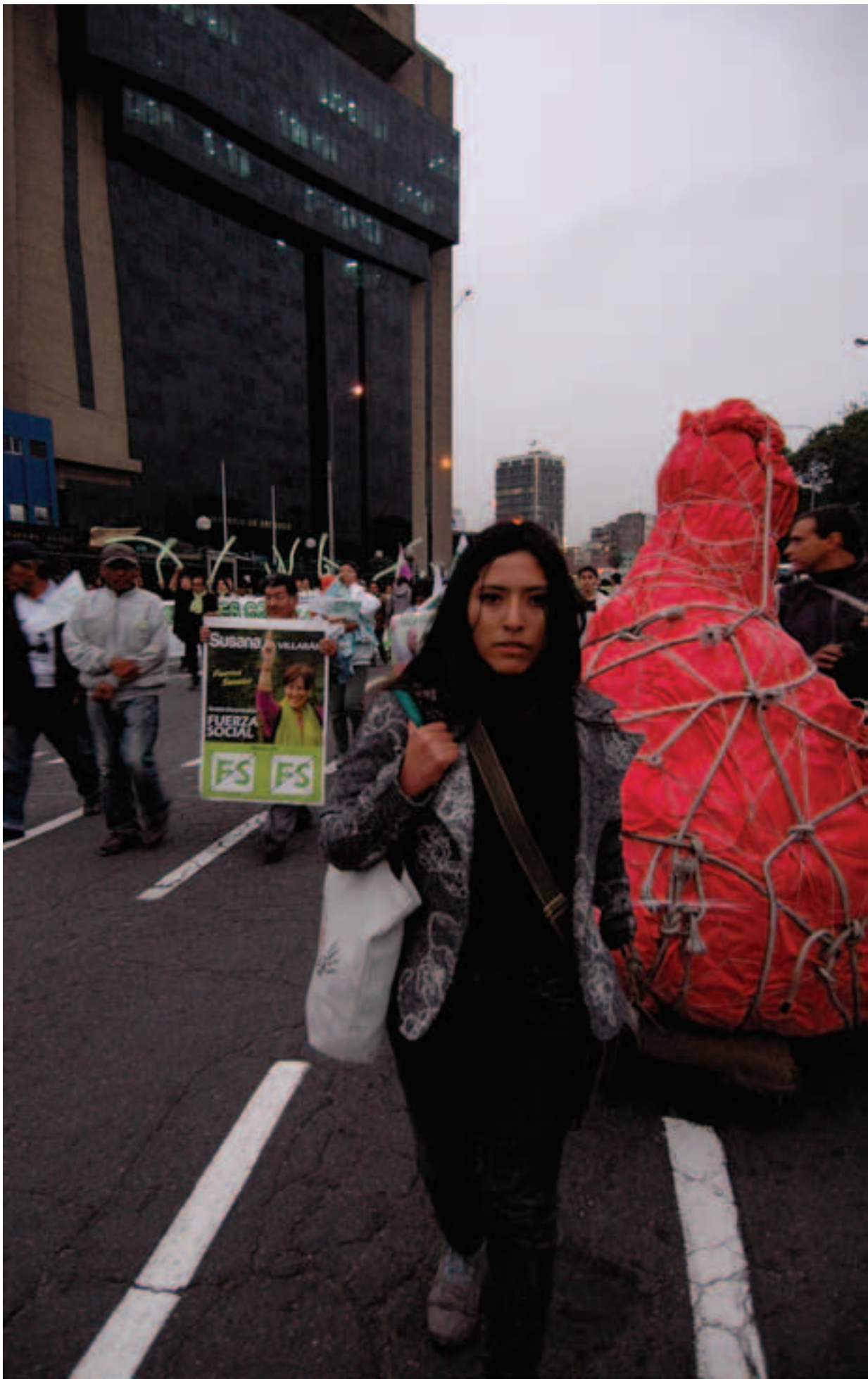
After arriving to Mexico at the end of the 1980's, Smith concentrated on exploring the visual repertoire of the Federal District, which is characterized by the presence of a broad sector of the population dedicated to informal economy, resisting regularization and establishing their own forms of exchange. This new film thus echoes pieces like *Tianguis II* (2003), a video that documents the merchandise, materials and colors that define the identity of certain neighborhoods in the Mexican capital and their markets. A second important reference point for *Bulto* is the displacement of Smith's gaze toward an exploration of urban settlements that, although they might be imagined as small enclaves within nature since they are found so far away from the asphalt jungle, are but mere reproductions of flawed development of settlements in neighboring cities. In *Parres* (2004-2006), the artist takes advantage of the ambiguity between the idyllic image of the rural and its real condition as a facsimile of the urban in order to suggest the disappearance – or the appearance – of the difference between urban and rural life by way of a superimposed monochrome.

With *Bulto*, Smith has transposed the fields of interest she has been exploring up to the present in Mexico City and its vicinity to the functioning of another metropolis that shares a number of characteristics with it. *Bulto* is a film that deals with ambiguity and reiteration, keeping itself within a loop that doesn't get out of itself. Some of its references are historically precise, while others reflect aspects of dynamics that it shares with other cities of the world, trapped between the demands of development and the persistence of conflicts whose solution looks like it will forever be deferred, getting further and further away in the backlog of clarifying its origin.

<sup>4</sup> According to Chapter 1 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report, published on August 28, 2003. See: <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/pagina01.php>











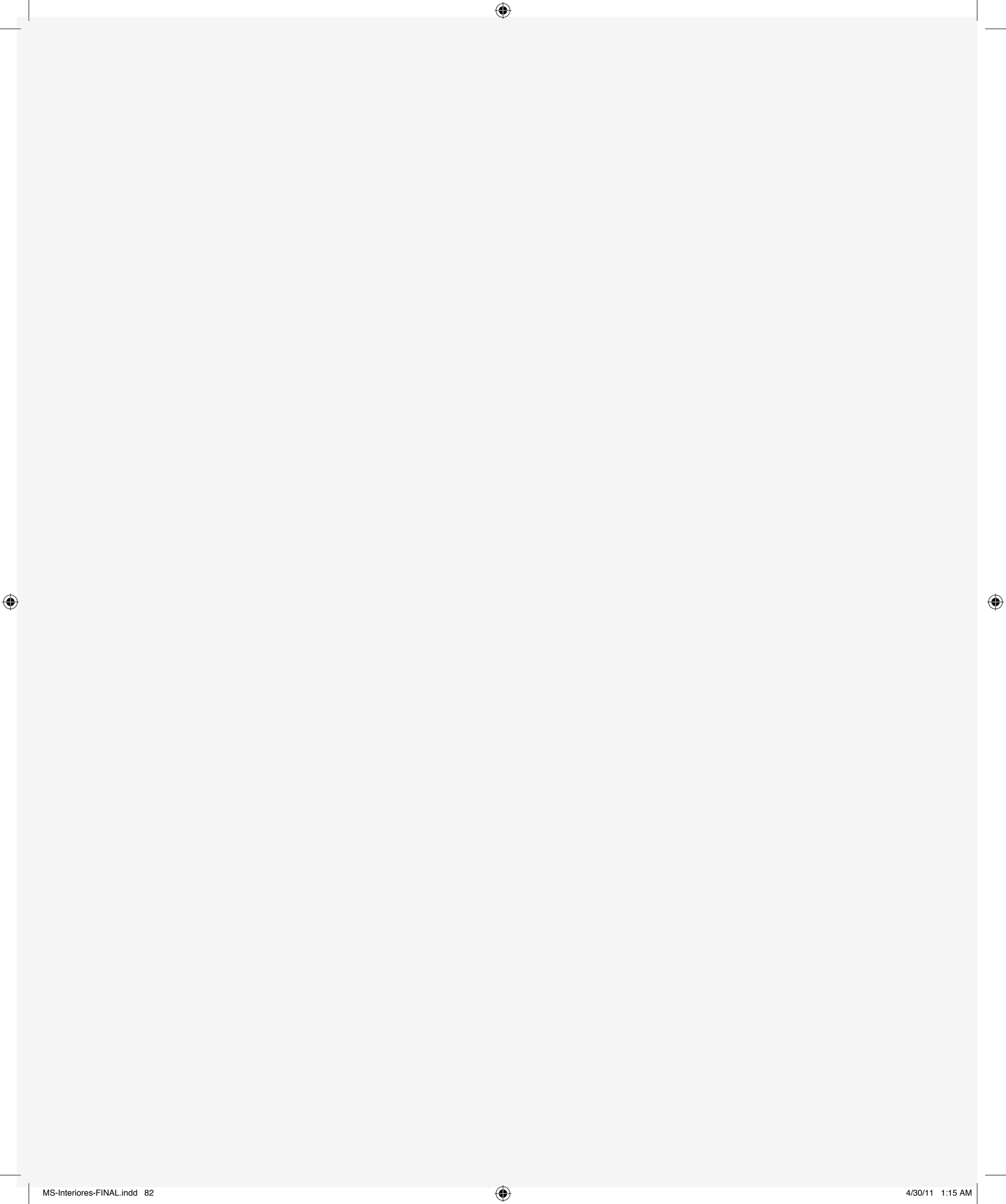




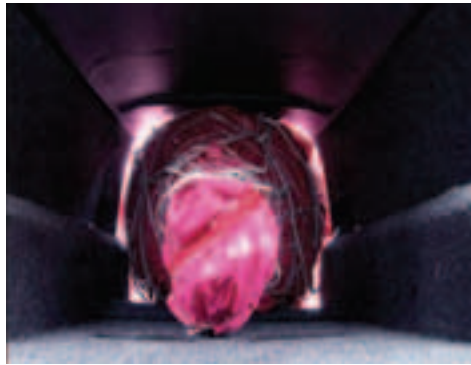






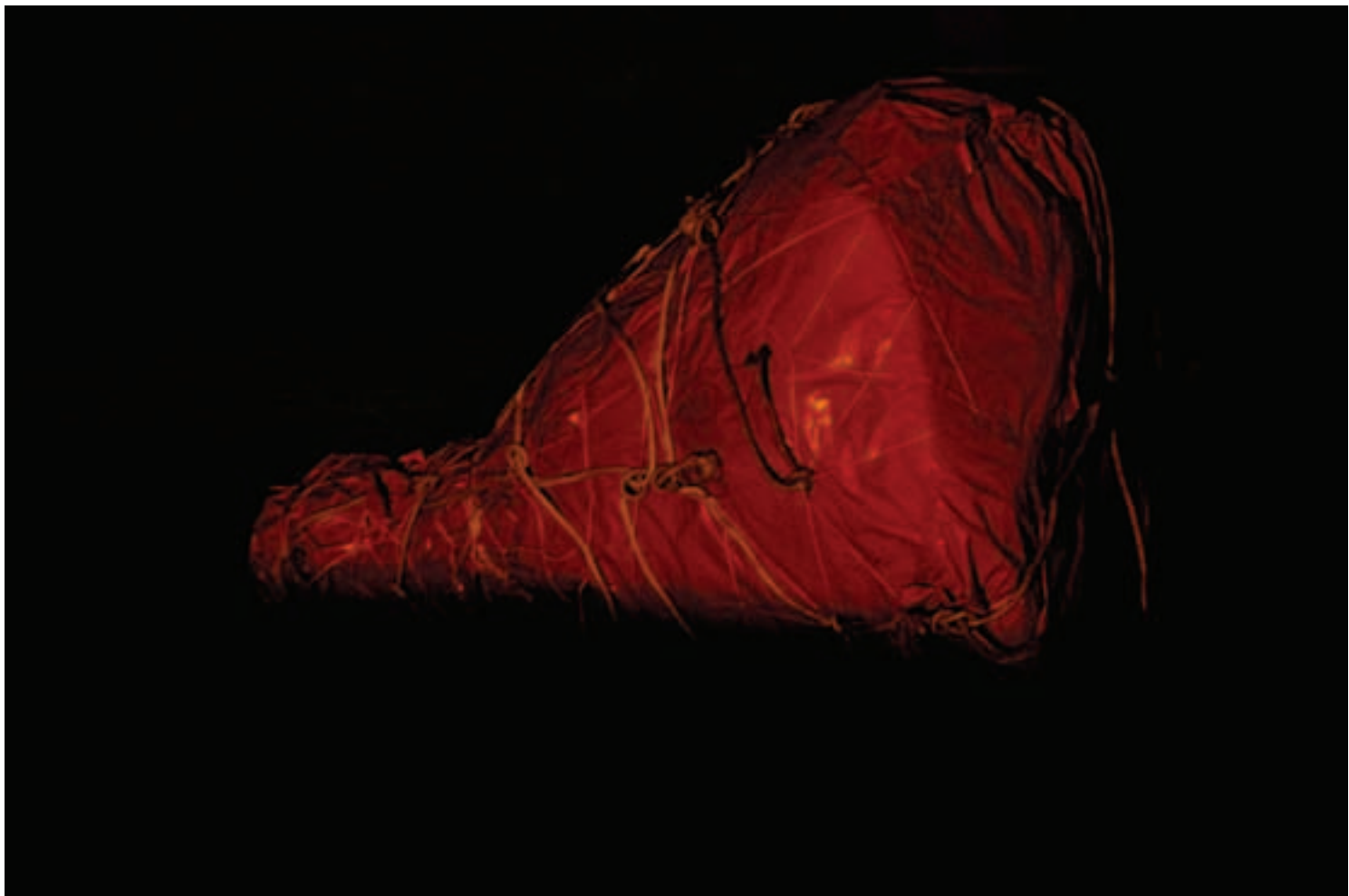


















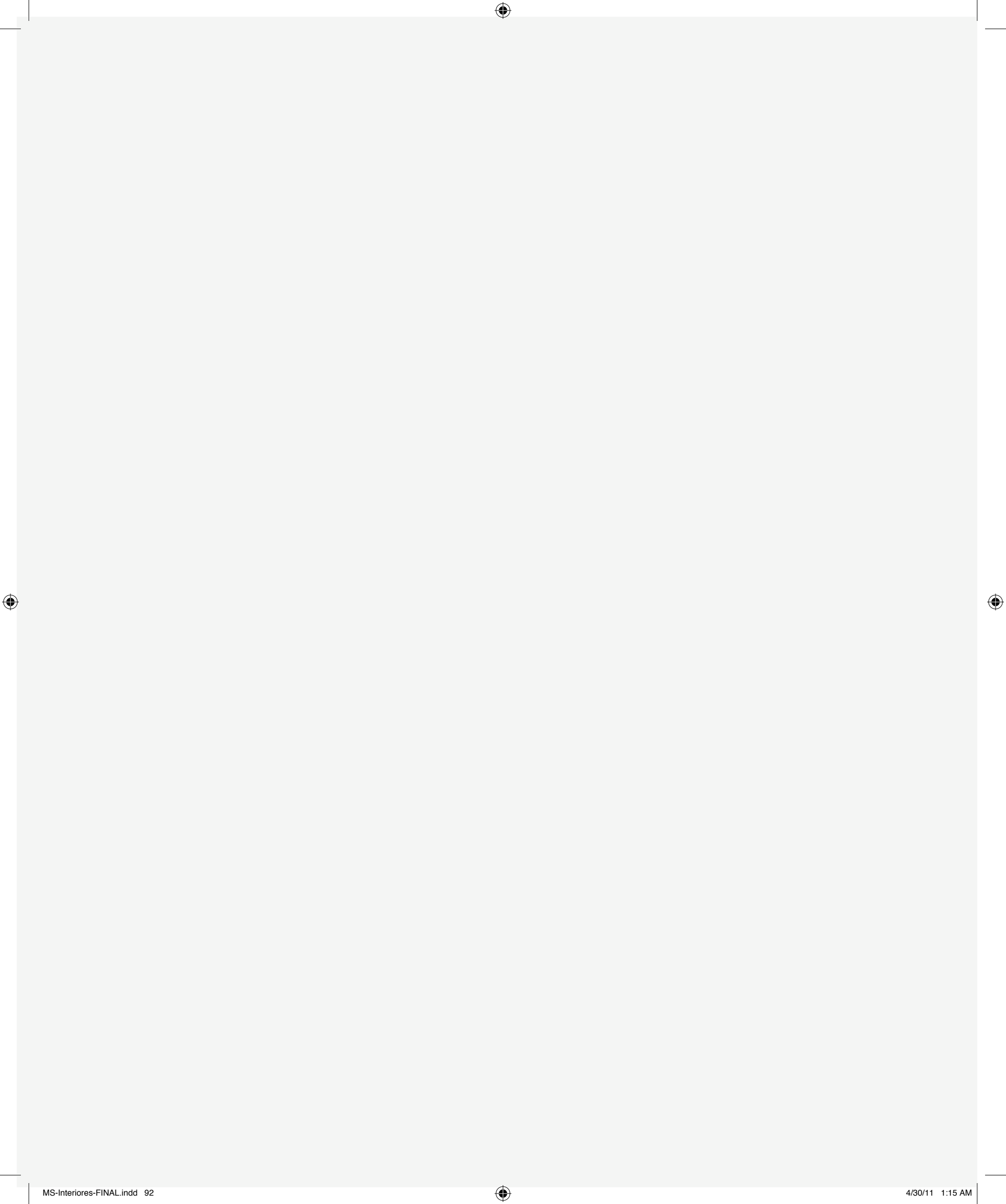


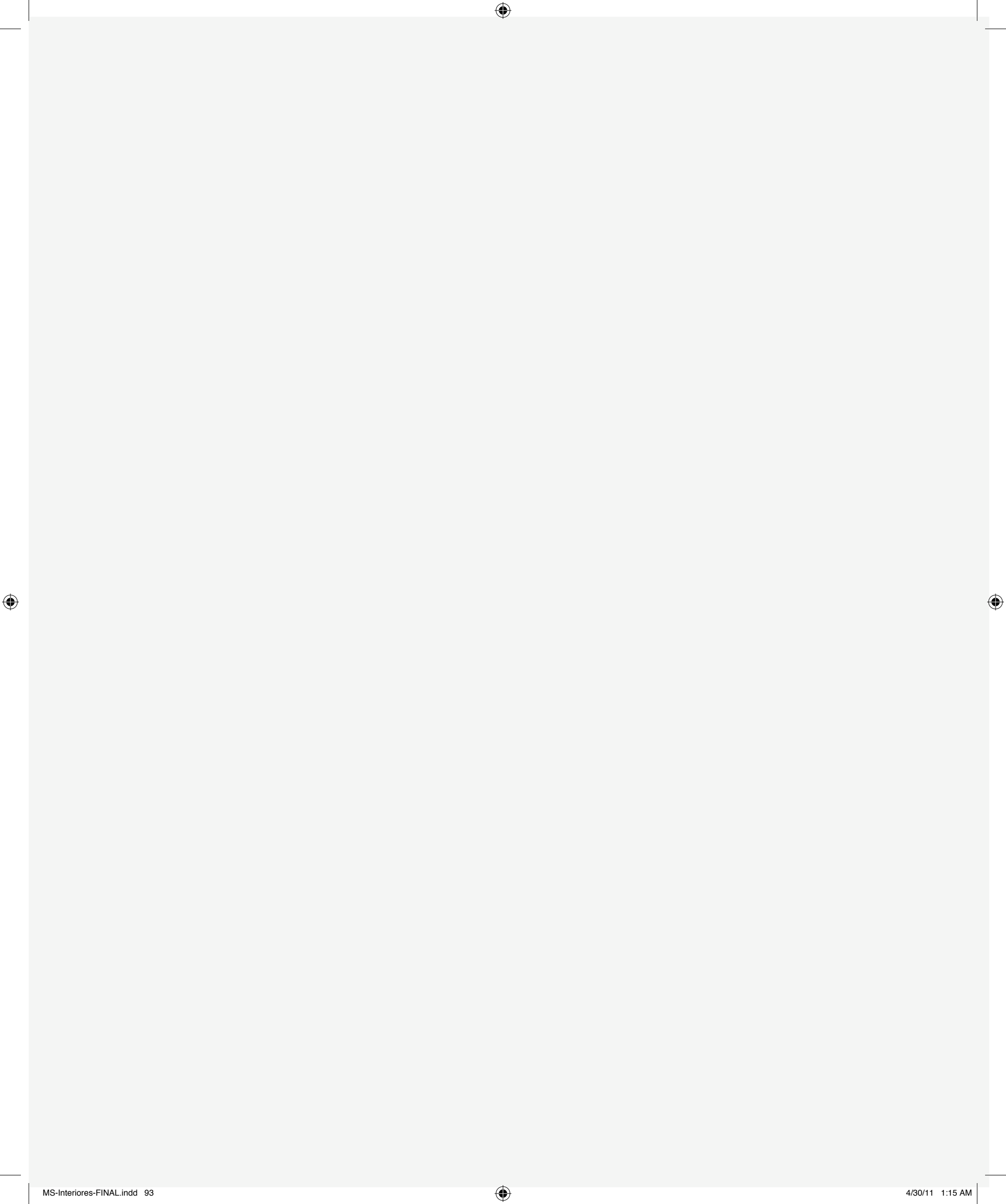














## MELANIE SMITH

Melanie Smith was born in Poole, England in 1965. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Reading. Since 1989 she has lived and worked in Mexico City, an experience that has enormously influenced her work ever since. Her work has been characterized by a certain re-reading of the formal and aesthetic categories of avant-garde and post-avant-garde movements, problematized at the sites and within the horizons of heterotopias. Her production is intimately related to a certain expanded vision of the notion of modernity, maintaining a relationship both with what this means in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, and with the implication this has for her formal explorations as a critical moment in the aesthetic-political structure of modernity and late modernity.

Her earlier pieces considered Mexico City itself, recording its multitudes, its violence, its banality, and its clandestine nature and at the same time its inherent decomposition. The most outstanding piece from this cycle is the video *Spiral city* (2002). In another of her works, she broadens the notions of place and non-place by documenting the small town of Parres on the outskirts of the city. She produced a trilogy of 35 mm films and a series of paintings and installations that rework the modernist idea of the monochrome.

CURRICULUM

95

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2011

- *Red square impossible pink*, 54 Venice Biennale. Palazzo Rota Ivancich, Venice, Italy.
- *Bulto*, Museo de Arte de Lima, Lima, Peru

2010

- *Xilitla*, El Eco, Mexico City, Mexico

2009

- *Spiral city and other vicarious pleasures*, MIT List, Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, USA

2008

- *Parres trilogy*, Miami Art Museum, Miami Beach, USA
- *Resiste*, Galería Alberto Sendrós, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- *Grey (negative) rectangle on white background*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich, Switzerland
- *Urban views*, Patrick Painter Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

2007

- *Spiral city and other vicarious pleasures. Melanie Smith*, The Laboratory of Art and Ideas at Beldar, Lakewood, Colorado, USA

- *Parres* (in collaboration with Rafael Ortega), OMR, Mexico City, Mexico

2006

- *Spiral city and other vicarious pleasures*, Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes, MUCA Campus, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Parres trilogy*, Art Now, Tate Britain, London, England
- *Inmaterialidad sensible*, Galerías del Bosque y Nacho López, Mexico

2005

- *Parres*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich, Switzerland

2004

- *Cerca series: Melanie Smith*, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, USA
- *Six steps to the unpredictable*, Mark Quint Contemporary, La Jolla, California, USA

2003

- *Seis pasos hacia la realidad, 2002* (in collaboration with Rafael Ortega) and *Untitled (works with no sense) 2003*, OMR, Mexico City, Mexico

· *Melanie Smith*, Galería Marco Noire Contemporary Art, San Sebastiano Po, Italy

2002

- *Seis pasos hacia la abstracción*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich, Switzerland
- *Seis pasos hacia la realidad*, Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico City, Mexico

2001

- *100% acrílico*, OMR, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Melanie Smith*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich, Switzerland

1997

- *Orange lush*, Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura, Mexico City, Mexico

1996

- *Obra reciente: 1916-1996*, OMR, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Installation*, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, USA
- *Dream spots: Taxqueña bus station*, Sala Díaz, San Antonio, Texas, USA

1994

- *En la punta de mi lengua*, OMR, Mexico City, Mexico

1992

- *Melanie Smith and Francis Alÿs*, L'Escaut, Brussels, Belgium

1989

- *Melanie Smith*, Salón de Los Aztecas, Mexico City, Mexico

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011

- *Another victory over the sun*, MCA Denver, Denver, USA
- *The Smithsonian effect*, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, USA; Bienal de Mercosur, Porto Alegre, Brazil

2010

- *Die Nase des Michelangelo*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Marktgasse, Zurich, Switzerland
- *Espectrografías: paradojas de la historia*, MUAC, Mexico City, Mexico
- *¡Sin techo está pelón!*, Fundación/Colección Jumex, State of Mexico, Mexico
- *Mexico beyond its revolution*, Koppelman Gallery, Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, USA

· *Proyección de Spiral city*, La Seance-Concentré de pure image sur le monde contemporain, Cinema les 3 Luxembourg, Paris, France

· *Hot to cold/Cold to hot*, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr University, Vancouver, Canada

· *Trayectorias aleatorias*, Ancienne école des veterinaries, Brussels, Belgium

· *Model kits*, MUSAC Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Leon, Spain

· *The library of Babel/In and out of place*, 176 Zabłudowicz Collection, London, England

· *Changing the focus: Latin American photography 1990-2005*, Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, USA

2009

· *Cinco solos*, OMR, Mexico City, Mexico

· *Great expectations. Contemporary photography looks at today's bitter years?*, curated by Enrico Lunghi, Pierre Stiwer and Paul di Felic, Casino Luxembourg-Forum d'art contemporain, Luxembourg

· *Mexico: expected/unexpected*, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, Schiedam, Netherlands

· *Mexico: expected/unexpected*, TEA Espacio de las Artes, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain

· *Mexico: expected/unexpected*, Colección Isabel y Agustín Coppel, Maison Rouge, Paris, France

· *For you/Para usted*, Daros Exhibitions, Zurich, Switzerland

· *Multiple city*, projection of *Spiral city* together with exhibition, Film Museum Munich, Germany

· *Topographic*, La Maison, Église des Forges, Tarnos, France

· *Deux pieces*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Marktgasse, Zurich, Switzerland

· *The twentieth century: How it looked and how it felt*, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, England

2008

· *¡Viva la muerte!*, CAAM Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain

· *Pleinairism*, curated by Kitty Scott, i8 gallery, Reykjavik, Iceland

2007

· *¡Viva la muerte! Kunst und Tod in Lateinamerika*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria

· *Global cities*, Tate Modern, London, England

· *La era de la discrepancia. Arte y cultura visual en Mexico, 1968-1997*, Museo Universitario de Artes y Ciencias, Mexico City, Mexico

· *Ideal city-Invisible cities*, Öffentlicher Raum in Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany



- *Ideal city-Invisible cities*, Öffentlicher Raum in Zamosc, Zamosc, Poland
- *Constructing a poetic universe*, MFAH, The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, USA

2006

- *Esquiador en el fondo de un pozo*, La Colección Jumex, State of Mexico, Mexico
- *Los Ángeles/Mexico: complejidades y heterogeneidades*, La Colección Jumex, Mexico State, Mexico
- *Invisible cities*, Zamosc, Poland; Potsdam, Germany
- *Pasión/provocación. Fotografía y video en la Colección de Teófilo Cohen*, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, Mexico
- *What makes you and I different*, Tramway Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland

2005

- *This peaceful war*, Tramway Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland
- *New acquisitions*, MoMA, New York, USA
- *Beyond delirious: Architecture. Arquitectura en fotografías seleccionadas por The Ella Fontanals*, Colección Cisneros, Miami, USA
- *Indeterminate states. Video in The Ella Fontanals*, Colección Cisneros, Miami, USA
- *Polysemia*, Arcaute Arte Contemporáneo, Monterrey, Mexico
- *Farsites/Sitios distantes*, San Diego Museum of Art, USA; Centro Cultural Tijuana, Mexico
- *Declaraciones*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain
- *Eco. Arte mexicano contemporáneo*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain

2004

- *Sodio y asfalto. Arte británico contemporáneo en México*, Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Sólo los personajes cambian*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Mexico
- *From above*, Galerie Georg Kargl, Vienna, Austria
- *Made in Mexico*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, USA
- *Made in Mexico*, UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA
- *La relatividad del tiempo*, OPA (Oficina para Proyectos de Arte), Guadalajara, Mexico
- *La colmena*, La Colección Jumex, State of Mexico, Mexico
- *Al otro lado de la puerta*. Subasta del Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico

2003

- *Cambio de valores*, Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló, Castelló, Spain

- *Vacío 9*, Madrid, Spain
- *Gestes*, Printemps de Septembre, Festival de Imágenes Contemporáneas, Toulouse, France
- *Biennale Prague*, National Gallery Veletrizni Palace, Prague, Czech Republic
- *Colored surfaces*, Pražský dům fotografie, Prague, Czech Republic
- *Mexico iluminado*, Freedman Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania, USA
- *VIII Bienal de La Habana*, Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba
- *Mexico attacks!*, Associazione Culturale per l'Arte Contemporanea Prometeo, Lucca, Italy
- *20 million Mexicans can't be wrong*, John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, England
- *Within temporary crossroads*, Central de Arte, Guadalajara, Mexico
- *Mexiko-Stadt: Eine Ausstellung über den Tauschwert von Körpern und Werten*, Kunst-Werke Berlin, Berlin, Germany

2002

- *Sublime artificial*, La Capella, Barcelona, Spain
- *Superficies coloreadas*, Mexican Embassy in Berlin, Berlin, Germany
- *Zebra Crossing. Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Mexiko*, House of World Cultures, Berlin, Germany
- *20 million Mexicans can't be wrong*, South London Gallery, London, England
- *Mexico City: an exhibition about the exchange rates of bodies and values*, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, USA
- *Libre albedrío. La colección de arte contemporáneo de la UNAM y otros encuentros*, Casa de la Cultura de Monterrey, Mexico
- *Sala de recuperación*, Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Here is there 2*, Wiener Secession, Vienna, Austria

2001

- *La persistencia de la imagen*, Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City; Sonje Art Center Museum, Seoul, South Korea
- *Escultura mexicana (tercera parte). De la academia a la instalación*, Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Superficial*, Colección de Patrick Charpenel, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, Mexico

2000

- *Caleidoscopio: Lenguajes contemporáneos*, Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior (Bancomext), Mexico City, Mexico
- *Territorios abstractos*, Museo del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico
- *VI Salón de Arte*, Grupo Financiero BBVA/Bancomer, Mexico City, Mexico

- *Última generación del siglo*, Antiguo Palacio del Ayuntamiento, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Photo América Latina*, Museo de las Artes, Guadalajara, Mexico
- *Imágenes robadas*, Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Segundo sexo, tercer milenio*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, Oaxaca

1999

- *Keep fit, be happy*, DeChiara Stewart, New York, USA
- *IV Bienal de Monterrey*, Museo de Monterrey, Mexico
- *Cinco continentes y una ciudad*, Museo de la Ciudad de México, Mexico City, Mexico

1998

- *Situacionismo*, OMR, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Chromaform, color in contemporary sculpture*, University of Texas at San Antonio, USA
- *Multi-nationals*, Universidad de Boulder, Colorado, USA
- *7 + 1 mujeres artistas*, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico

1997

- *Mexico now. Point of departure*, The Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery, Columbus, Ohio, USA; El Arsenal de la Buntilla, San Juan, Puerto Rico; The Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, USA; Woodstreet Gallery, Pittsburgh, USA; The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, Chicago, USA; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA; The Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, USA; The Mexican Cultural Institute, Washington, D.C., USA
- *The conceptual trend: six artists from Mexico*, El Museo del Barrio, New York, USA
- *Cultural hybrids*, Oboro Gallery, Montreal, Canada
- *InSite'97, Nuevos proyectos de arte público del continente americano*, San Diego/Tijuana, USA and Mexico
- *Inauténtico: Hecho en Mexico*, Museo de las Artes, Guadalajara, Mexico
- *Shopping/Comprando*, Art & Idea, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Life's little necessities*, Second Johannesburg Biennial, South Africa

1996

- *Cuadro x cuadro*, Museo Regional de Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico

1995

- *Plantón en el Zócalo*, Temístocles 44, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Juntos y revueltos*, Hospicio Cabañas, Guadalajara, Mexico
- *It's my life, I'm going to change the world*, ACME Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
- *Par avion*, LACE, Los Angeles, USA

- *Es mi vida, voy a cambiar el mundo*, Ex Teresa Arte Alternativo, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Pautas y tendencias paralelas de los 90's*, ACME Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
- *La demanda está en barata*, OMR, Mexico City, Mexico

1994

- *Neo*, Galería OMR, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Las nuevas majas*, Otis Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
- *Arte mexicano: imágenes en el siglo del sida*, CU Art Galleries, Colorado University, Boulder, USA
- *Múltiples*, Temístocles 44, Mexico City, Mexico

1992

- Studio exhibition with Melanie Smith and Ethel Shipton, Plaza Santa Catarina, Mexico City, Mexico

1991

- Studio exhibition, Zamora 139, Mexico City, Mexico
- Gallerie L'Escaut, Brussels, Belgium
- *Marcas*, Galería Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico
- *D.F. Art from Mexico, D.F.*, Blue Star Space, San Antonio, Texas, USA
- *Registro-forma I*, Casona II, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Acción-reacción*, Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, Mexico

1990

- *Estancia*, installation at Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Salón de Los Aztecas*, Mexico City, Mexico

1989

- *A propósito (Homenaje a Joseph Beuys)*, Ex Convento del Desierto de los Leones, Mexico City, Mexico
- *London en Mexico*, Salón de Los Aztecas, Mexico City, Mexico
- *Sympathy es simpatía*, Museo del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico

## PUBLICATIONS

2010

- *Espectografías, Memorias e historia*, MUAC Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, exhibition catalog, pp. 70-77.
- BLANCSUBÉ, Michel, *¡Sin techo está pelón!*, Fundación/Colección Jumex, Mexico, pp. 36-37.
- ZAVALA, Adriana, and Amy Ingrid SCHLEGEL, *Mexico beyond its Revolution. Mexico más allá de su revolución*, TUFTS University Art Gallery, Medford, exhibition catalog, pp. 21-23, 88-89.

- IDURRE, Alonso y Alejandro CASTELLANOS, *Changing the focus: Latin American photography 1990-2005*, Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, exhibition catalog, pp. 58-59.
- SPRINGER, José Manuel, "Mexico: expected/unexpected", *Flash Art*, Milan, no. 271, March-April, p. 121.
- CORTÉS, José Miguel G., "Visiones urbanas alternativas", *Exit Express*, Madrid, no. 50, March, pp. 32-39.
- MEDINA, Cuauhtémoc, "Lugar caleidoscopio", *Reforma*, January 5.

#### 2009

- MEDINA, Cuauhtémoc, *For you/Para usted. Videos aus der Daros-Lateinamerika Sammlung*, Daros Exhibitions, Zurich, exhibition catalog, p. 28.
- LOCKHART, Donatella, "Melanie Smith en camino", *Casas & Gente*, Mexico City, vol. 25, no. 241, December, pp. 54-57.
- WILSON LLOYD, Ann, "Melanie Smith", *Art in America*, New York, April.
- MERJIAN, Ara H., "Melanie Smith", *Artforum Online*, March.
- WILCOX, Jess, "Melanie Smith", *Artforum*, New York, January, p. 111.

#### 2008

- *Melanie Smith. Parres*, A&R Press/Turner, Mexico.
- "¡Viva la muerte! in der Kunsthalle Wien", *Kunst-Bulletin*, Zurich, nos. 1/2, pp. 71-72.

#### 2007

- MIESSGANG, Thomas, *¡Viva la muerte! Kunst und Tod in Lateinamerika*, exhibition catalog, pp. 26, 42-45.
- SPRINGER, José Manuel, "Melanie Smith, OMR Gallery", *Art-Nexus*, Miami, no. 65, pp. 139-140.
- OLIVARES, Rosa, *100 Latin American artists*, Exit Publications, Madrid, exhibition catalog, pp. 402-405, 452.
- *Spiral city & other vicarious pleasures. Melanie Smith*, Turner, Madrid, exhibition catalog
- SREDNI DE BIRBRAGHER, Celia, "Frieze and the parallel fairs", *ArtNexus*, Miami, vol. 63, no. 63, pp. 134-138.
- "Ciudades de arte", *Fahrenheit*, Mexico, vol. 4, no. 21.

#### 2006

- "Una mirada al D.F. artificial de Melanie Smith", *Revista Shock by Excelsior*, November 30.
- "Tiempo, memoria y comunicación visual", *Tiempo Libre*, October 14, p. 55.
- RODRÍGUEZ BARRÓN, Daniel, "Descubre la ciudad y sus placeres estéticos", *Reforma*, September 17.
- "Ciudad espiral y otros...", *Gaceta UNAM*, September 7.
- JIMÉNEZ BERNAL, Gabriela, "Ciudad espiral, estética y placer de la megalópolis", *La Razón*, August 23.

- GUTIÉRREZ, Vicente, "Placeres artificiales", *El Economista*, August 18.
- "Pobreza y consumismo global en retrospectiva de Melanie Smith", *Crónica*, August 17.
- HERNÁNDEZ, Edgar, "Contrasta Smith pobreza y opulencia", *Excelsior*, August 15.
- BLANCO, Sergio R., "Elige Melanie Smith mirar desde las alturas", *Reforma*, August 15.
- CEBALLOS, MIGUEL ÁNGEL, "Una estética entre el consumo y la pobreza", *El Universal*, August 15.
- GÓMEZ, ANDRÉS, "Melanie Smith muestra una Ciudad espiral y otros placeres artificiales", *Unomasuno*, August 12.

#### 2005

- BACHOFEN, Katrin, "Peter Kilchmann, Zürich", *Handelszeitung*, Zurich, no. 19, May 11, p. 37.
- MEDINA, Cuauhtémoc, *et al., Eco: arte contemporáneo mexicano*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, exhibition catalog, February, pp. 64-67, 252.
- "Ciudades", *Exit*, Madrid, no. 17.

#### 2004

- "Sodio y asfalto", *Arte al Día*, Mexico, November, p. 5.
- KNIGHT, Christopher, "Mexico joins global club", *Geo Topics*, Los Angeles, June 23.
- EISL, Sonja, "Das richtige Bild im falschen. Wie wirklich ist die Wirklichkeit? - Identitätsfragen in vier Zürcher Fotogalerien", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Zurich, no. 112, May 17, p. 36.
- SALTZ, Lynda, "ICA's Made in Mexico", *Newbury Street & Back Bay Guide*, Boston, February 20.
- JOHNSON, Ken, "Mexican Conceptualists, none especially Mexican", *The New York Times*, Nueva York, February 20.
- VICARIO, Gilbert, *Made in Mexico*, Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Boston, January, exhibition catalog, pp. 9-19, 102-105.
- MCQUAID, Cate, "Mex", *The Boston Globe*, Boston, January 23, pp. 13, 18.

#### 2003

- FERNÁNDEZ-CID, Miguel, *Traces of light*, Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, exhibition catalog, pp. 10-15, 39-41.
- PÉREZ, Luis Francisco, *Cambio de valores/The rings of Saturn*, Fundación ARCO, Madrid, and Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporánea (CGSC), Santiago de Compostela, November, pp. 136-139.
- "Melanie Smith", *Flash Art*, Milan, vol. 36, no. 232, October, p. 92.
- GILLI, Marta, entrevista, *Gestes*, Printemps du Septembre, Toulouse, September, exhibition catalog, pp. 106-107.



- ROMANINI, Alessandro, "A State of Mind. Mexiko Attacks", *Art Nexus*, Miami, no. 49, June-August, pp. 153-155.
- CROWLEY, Tom, "Mexico City on the move", *Tema*, Milan, no. 97, May-June, pp. 22-25.
- KLAUS, Philipp, y Chris LÜTHI, "Geballte Ladung", *Die Weltwoche*, Zurich, no. 11, April 13, pp. 65-68.
- "20 million Mexicans can't be wrong", *www.art-onma.org*, New York, no. 8, January-March.

2002

- DAY, Pip, "Postcards from the Edge", *The Royal Academy Magazine*, no. 77, Winter, pp. 59-61.
- PÉREZ SOLER, Eduardo, *Sublime artificial*, La Capella, Barcelona, November, exhibition catalog, pp. 48-49, 63-69.
- SMITH, Melanie, "Melanie Smith", *European Photography*, Berlin, no. 72, Fall-Winter, pp. 19-23.
- BENÍTEZ, Issa María, "Art Basel", *Art Nexus*, Bogota, no. 46, October, pp. 112-116.
- YEHYA, Naief, "Mexico City: An exhibition about the exchange rate of bodies and values", *Art Nexus*, Bogota, no. 46, October, pp. 156-158.
- BIESENBAACH, Klaus, *Mexico City: An exhibition about the exchange rates of bodies and values*, PS1 and Kunstwerke Berlin, Berlin, exhibition catalog, pp. 256-263.
- OLES, James, *Superficies coloreadas/Colored surfaces*, Pražký dům fotografie, Prague, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, September, exhibition catalog, pp. 23-25, 61-65, 67-75, 95.
- BHATNAGAR, Proya, Samuele MENIN and Michele ROBECCHI, "Focus Mexico", *Flash Art*, Milan, July-September, pp. 86-89.
- *Hier ist Dort 2*, Wiener Secession, Vienna, exhibition catalog, p. 11.

2001

- MARTÍN, Patricia "Conozca México", *Parachute*, no. 104, p. 102.
- HERZOG, Samuel, *Kunst-Bulletin*, no. 3, March, p. 45.
- ARLITT, Sabine, "Lustvolle Rebellion", *Züritipp Tages Anzeiger*, Zurich, February 9.
- OMLIN, Sybille, "Mexiko und Mustermix", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Zurich, February 1.

2000

- ZAMUDIO TAYLOR, Víctor, "Arte, violencia y agresión", *Atlántica*, no. 25, Winter.
- MEDINA, Cuauhtémoc, "Mexican strategies", *Flash Art*, January-February.

1998

- HEATH, Jennifer, "How does a piñata commit suicide?", *Boulder Planet*.

- HAYDEN, Niki, "Multi-Nationals", *Daily Camara*.
- AKHTAR, Suzanne, "Contemporary art by way of the discount store", *Star Telegram*.
- DANIEL, Mike, "Pigments of their imaginations", *Dallas Morning News*.
- GRAVES, Jen, "Coloring between the lines", *Dallas Entertainment Chronicle*.
- KEITH, William E., "Chromaform at UTSA", *Voices of Art*.
- *Chromaform. Colour in contemporary sculpture*, UTSA, Texas, exhibition catalog
- GALLO, Rubén, review, *Flash Art*, Milan, Spring.

1997

- TEJADA, Roberto y María GUERRA, *Orange lush*, The Anglo-Mexican Institute of Culture, Mexico, exhibition catalog
- JONES, Kelly, *Life's little necessities. The Second Biennale of Johannesburg*, exhibition catalog
- MONCADA, Adriana, "La instalación, válida si provoca la reflexión", *Unomasuno*, November 17.
- JUDISMAN, Yishai, review, inSite '97, *Reforma*, octubre.
- ANASTAS, Rhea, "The conceptual trend: six artists from Mexico City", *Art Nexus*, April-June.
- AQUIN, Stephane, "La filière mexicaine", *Voir Montreal*, April-May.

1996

- "Melanie Smith at Randolph Street", *Chicago Reader*, September.
- GUERRA, María, "Intermitentes", *Reforma*, August 4.
- DEBROISE, Olivier, "Un nuevo contrato", *Curare*, Spring.

1995

- PAGEL, David, "A life of hunting down perfectly quirky bargains", *Los Angeles Times*, June 1.

1994

- JUSIDMAN, Yishai, "Las nuevas majas", *Art Issues*, September-October.
- SÁNCHEZ, Osvaldo, "Recipientes y protuberancias", *Reforma*, August 25.
- McMASTERS, Merry, "En la punta de mi lengua", *El Nacional*, July 27.
- ROTH, Charlene, "Working space", *Art Week*, July 21.
- KNIGHT, Christopher, "Independent spirit lives on in Majas", *Los Angeles Times*, July 16.
- NAVARRETE, Sylvia, "En la punta de mi lengua", *Poliester*, Summer.

1992

- HOLLANDER, Kurt, "Marcas, at the Galería de Arte Contemporáneo", *Mandorla*, Fall.

- MEDINA, Cuauhtémoc, “Dúo de instalaciones”, *Poliester*.
- SCOTT FOX, Lorna, *La Jornada Semanal*, July.

1991

- GUERRA, María, “Art from Mexico City”, *Poliester*, Summer.

1990

- SMITH, Melanie, and José Manuel SPRINGER, “Cinco hipótesis”, *Unomasuno*, January.

1989

- SPRINGER, José Manuel, “Más allá de la interpretación”, *Unomasuno*, June.
- “A propósito (Homenaje a Joseph Beuys)”, *Shift*, Spring.
- “A propósito (Homenaje a Joseph Beuys)”, *Proceso*, Spring.

## RAFAEL ORTEGA

*Co-author of film projects*

Mexico City, 1965. Started his career as co-director of photography in the film *Under California, The Limit of Time* (*Bajo California, el límite del tiempo*, Dir. Carlos Bolado, 1998). He has worked as director of photography in more than 30 fiction and documentary film projects, including: *A Banquet at Tetlapayac* (*Un banquete en Tetlapayac*, Dir. Olivier Debroyse, 1998-2000), *Broken Hearts* (*Corazones rotos*, Dir. Rafael Montero, 2000), *Carambola* (Dir. Kurt Hollander, 2004-2005) and *The Gaze Back* (*Volver la vista*, Dir. Fridolin Schönwiese, 2005).

Since 1994 he has worked in contemporary art projects internationally involving film or video, as co-author, or in collaboration with: Francis Alÿs, Melanie Smith, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Daniel Guzmán, Raúl Ortega, Damián Ortega, Thomas Glassford, Miguel Ventura, Claudia Fernández, Silvia Gruner, João Penalva, Miguel Ángel Ríos, Luis Felipe Ortega, Cuauhtémoc Medina, Enrique Olvera and composer Paul Barker, amongst others.

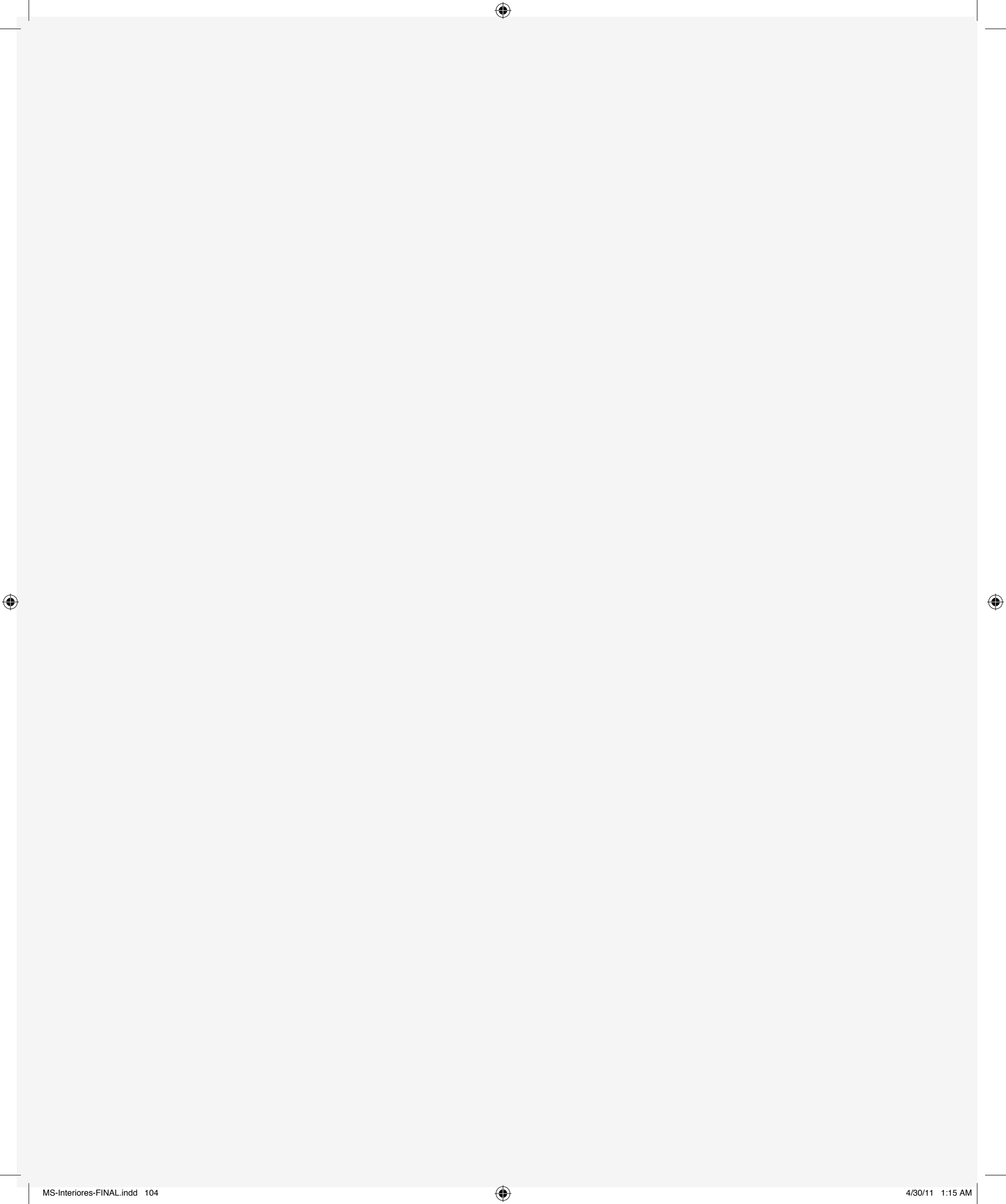


## JOSÉ LUIS BARRIOS

*Curator*

103

José Luis Barrios Lara, philosopher and art historian, full-time professor at the Ibero-American University Mexico City (UIA), and professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). He is the head of the curatorial seminar and is also Adjunct Curator in the Contemporary Art University Museum (MUAC). He has published eight books and over fifty articles in various art and cultural criticism journals. His latest publications are the essays: “Anotaciones en torno al entusiasmo, el tiempo y la ruina” (“Notes on Enthusiasm, Time and the Ruin”), in: *Dynamic (In) Position / (In) posición dinámica*, exhibition catalogue, Mexico City: Laboratorio de Arte Alameda, INBA, 2010, and “Historia y memoria. Notas sobre el olvido como condición crítica del pasado” (“History and Memory. Notes on Oblivion as a Critical Condition of the Past”), in: *Espectrografías. Memorias e historia*, Mexico City: MUAC, UNAM, 2010. Recent books: *Atrocitas fascinans. Imagen, horror, deseo* (“Atrocitas Fascinans. Image, Horror, Desire”), Mexico City: Conejoblanco/UIA, 2010; *El cuerpo disuelto. Lo colosal y lo monstruoso*. (“The Dissolved Body. The Colossal and Monstrous”), Mexico City: UIA, 2010. He has curated exhibitions at the National Museum of Art (Munal), the University Museum of Sciences and Arts (MUCA), the Carrillo Gil Art Museum (MACG) and the Contemporary Art University Museum (MUAC).



CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Aztec Stadium. Malleable deed  
Xilitla  
Bulto

105

AZTEC STADIUM. MALLEABLE DEED, 2010

Pages 24-43

Melanie Smith/Rafael Ortega  
Action with cards of 3000 students ascribed to the middle school system of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) and the Centre for Industrial Technological and Service Studies (CETIS).  
Video Full HD  
10 min 29 seg  
Collection Fundación Televisa and Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM, Mexico  
Courtesy of the artists and Peter Kilchmann Galerie  
Copyright © Melanie Smith / Rafael Ortega

Production

Melanie Smith, Rafael Ortega | Direction  
José Luis Barrios | General coordination  
Marcela Flores | Production coordination  
Joaquín Silva | Associate director  
Ángel Rincón, Norma González, Mauricio Rodríguez |  
Direction assistants  
Tania Pineda | Melanie Smith’s assistant  
Estrella Fernández Solís | Logistics advisor  
Rodrigo Valero | Stills photographer

Pablo Portillo | Guitar  
Francis Alÿs | Making off  
Natalia Almada | Making off  
Benedeta Monteverde | MUAC image production coordination  
Sol Henaro | MUAC coordination

With the collaboration of

Joel Aguilar, Claudia Arriaga, Sara Baz, Arq. Raúl Barrios and the Estadio Azteca’s team, Claudia Barrón, Antonieta Bautista, Héctor Bourges, Adriana Casas, Marilin Castillo, Alfonso Cornejo (screen images), Aysleth Corona, María de los Ángeles Cortés, Graciela de la Torre, Pedro Díaz, Ernesto Falcón, Miguel Fernández Félix, Ángela Fuentes, Elizabeth García, Pilar García, Mónica López Velarde, Mauricio Maillé, Alejandra Maldonado, Adolfo Mantilla, Iván Martínez, Fernanda Monterde, Mariana Morales, María Eugenia Murrieta Romo, David Ortega, Raúl Ortega, Héctor Pacheco, Leticia Pardo, Alejandra Peña, Susana Pliego, Itza Restrepo, Arízbe Rodríguez, Javier Rodríguez, Arq. Juan Ramón Rodríguez (Tecnoprint), Jorge Remo, Efraín Salinas, Paola Santoscoy, Nina Shor, Patricia Sloane, Ricardo Villacorta, Andrea Villalba and Gate Gourmet Maasa, and Televisa’s technical team.

This production would not have been possible without the



**support of the following volunteers:**

Juan Carlos Armas Cortez, Julián Ávila Juárez, Laura Natali Barajas Sánchez, Maylen Bourget Rivas, Monserrat Celedón Murillo, Sandra Cepeda, José Alfredo Cortés, Aglae Cortés Zazueta, José Manuel Cruz Santiago, Itzel Dávalos Bautista, María del Rosario Delgadillo Castillo, Víctor Manuel Delgado Osuna, Mariano Fabela, Mauricio Fernández Moreno, Casandra Gómez García, Enrique González Lozada, Miriam Angélica Guerrero Villa, Luis Islas Peralta, Jesús Antonio López Bernal, Mónica López Hernández, Rosario Yael López Hurtado, Uriel López Peña, Jazmín López Saldívar, Iván Pierre Lys Mora, Edit Martínez Pérez, Tania Carolina Miranda Mayorga, Carmen Gabriela Moedano García, Francisco Montes Alcocer, Jacobo Nieto Ruiz, Diana Olvera Estévez, Juan Fernando Ramírez Lara, Montserrat Rodríguez Méndez, Rosario Rojas Díaz, Samuel Silva Chávez, Claudio Fabián Téllez, Leonardo Tirso Espinoza, Itzel Velasco Tolentino, Orlando Villalobos Germán.

**We especially thank the students from the following SEP's schools:**

Ángel Salas Bonilla, Ludwig van Beethoven, Virgilio Camacho Paniagua, Belisario Domínguez Palencia. **As well as the students from the CETIS:** Nr. 02, Nr. 03, Nr. 04, Nr. 05, Nr. 06, Nr. 07, Nr. 09, Nr. 10, Nr. 11, Nr. 30, Nr. 31, Nr. 32, Nr. 33, Nr. 39, Nr. 42, Nr. 49, Nr. 50, Nr. 51, Nr. 52, Nr. 53, Nr. 54, Nr. 55, Nr. 56, Nr. 57, Nr. 76, Nr. 152, Nr. 153, Nr. 154, and Nr. 166.

**We especially appreciate the support of Aimée Labarrere de Servitje and Magdalena Zavala**

**Institutional acknowledgements**

Fundación Televisa  
Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo  
Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes  
Coordinación Nacional de Artes Plásticas  
Museo Nacional de Arte  
Secretaría de Educación Pública  
Centro de Estudios Tecnológico Industrial y de Servicios

**We thank the Museo Soumaya/Fundación Carlos Slim A.C. for the use of the following images:**

José Bribiesca Casillas  
Untitled, ca. 1946

Posing for *The great council*, 1985  
Gelatin silver print  
Photograph Javier Hinojosa

**XILITLA, 2011**

Pages 46-67

Melanie Smith/Rafael Ortega  
Video transferred from 35 mm  
12 min  
Collection Charpenel and Fundación CIAC, A.C.  
Courtesy the artists and Peter Kilchmann Galerie  
Copyright © Melanie Smith/Rafael Ortega

**Production**

Charpenel Collection, Guadalajara, and Fundación CIAC, A.C. |  
Production  
Melanie Smith | Direction  
Rafael Ortega | Image  
Paola Santoscoy | Curatorship  
Jorge Zúñiga | Camera assistant  
Rodrigo Valero Puertas | Stills photographer  
Finella Halligan | Production coordination in D.F.  
Zaira Teresa Liñán Zorrilla | Production coordination in Xilitla  
Héctor Pacheco | Production assistant  
Paola Santoscoy | Continuity  
Roberto Oviedo | Gaffer  
Javier Márquez | Dolly Grip  
Carlos Orozco Luna "El Oso" | Lighting  
Gustavo Patiño and Fridolin Schoenwiese | Live sound  
Oliver and Mila Ortega | Sound assistant  
Hugo Álvarez Mata, Alfredo Hernández Hernández, Sebastián Hernández, Vicky Hernández Hernández, Hilario, Bernardo Pérez Bautista, Julio Romero Castelán, Ignacio Soto, Sarita Villalobos Córdova | Production support  
Alfonso Cornejo | Image editing  
Melanie Smith and Alfonso Cornejo | Montage  
Jorge Romo | Color correction  
Álex de Icaza | Sound design  
Juan Cristóbal Cerrillo | Organ

**With the collaboration of:**

Magdaleno Alvarado Sánchez, Lucio González Reyes, Benjamín Hernández Hernández, Narciso Hernández Hernández, Gisela Jongitud Zorrilla, Ángel Martínez Martínez and Andrés Salvador Rubio.

**Institutional acknowledgement**

Fondo Xilitla, San Luis Potosí

**Acknowledgements**

Arturo de la Rosa, Plutarco Gastélum (Kako) and his deer, Eli Soriano and the fireworks men from Tamazunchale, Natalia Almada, Francis Alÿs, Rosa Ayala, María Bostock, Javier Carral,

Patrick Charpenel, Agustín and Isabel Coppel, Mireya Escalante, Cristina Faesler, Claudia Fernández, Damian Fraser, Ricardo Garibay, Thomas Glassford, Ernesto Gómez, Irene Herner, Mathew Holmes, Thierry Jeannot, Uzyel Karp, Miguel and Cuca Legaria, Zaira Teresa Liñán Zorrilla, Donatella Lockhart, Ramiro Martínez, James Oles, Emmanuel Picault, Paloma Porraz, Francisco Rivera, Sebastián Romo, Itala Schmelz, Kitty Scott, Aimée Servitje, Patricia Sloane.

**BULTO, 2011**

Pages 70-91

Melanie Smith/Rafael Ortega  
Video HDV  
40 min 30 seg  
Collection MALI, Lima, and La Colección Jumex, Mexico  
Courtesy of the artists and Peter Kilchmann Galerie  
Copyright © Melanie Smith/Rafael Ortega

**Production**

Tatiana Cuevas | Curatorship  
Rossana del Solar | Production  
Vanessa Chiappo | Production assistant  
Valeria Quintana | Coordination assistant  
Javier Becerra | Live sound  
Hugo Vásquez | Stills photographer  
Musuk Nolte | Stills photographer, MALI auction  
Ignacio Dasso | Camera assistant  
Carlos Sánchez Giraldo | Second camera operator  
Mariano Lingar | Transportation  
José Quintanilla | Transportation  
Jehú Quintanilla | Transportation  
Adver Bernaldo Bonifacio | Transportation  
Rafael Ortega | Postproduction coordinator  
Melanie Smith, Alfonso Cornejo | Editing  
Federico Smuckler | Audio mixing  
Jorge Romo | Color correction

**Institutional acknowledgements**

A work commissioned by the Museo de Arte de Lima – MALI  
partially supported by La Fundación/Colección Jumex  
This project has been possible thanks to the support of Fondo  
Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes  
Banco de la Nación  
Bar La Jarrita  
Centro Comercial Polvos Azules  
Colegio Fe y Alegría N° 17 - Villa El Salvador  
Expreso CIAL  
Juanito Bodega Bar

Municipalidad de Miraflores  
Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima  
Museo de Sitio Huaca Pucllana  
Museo de Sitio de Pachacámac  
Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú  
Playa Punta Roquitas  
Restaurante Huaca Pucllana  
Aeroméxico  
Embajada de México en Perú

**Acknowledgements**

Manuel Alegre, Luis Ángel Baca Valdivia, Janis Alicia Baluarte Ronceros, Jimena Barreto, Carmen Benavides, Dorota Biczal, Giuliana Bobbio Olano, Daniel Cano García, Sara Carrasco, Franco Caverio Lobatón, Andrea Cisneros, Andrea Cueva, Gonzalo del Águila, Vanessa de la Torre, Rogelio Delgado, José Antonio Durand Palomino, Antonella Espósito, Ana Estrada, María Luisa González Ayala, Evelyn García, Violeta González Paz, Jorge Armas Ghersi, Víctor Huayhua Galarza, Jennifer Isla, Gabriela Jordán, Nicolás Kecskemethy, Óscar León, Carmen Lobatón Sánchez, José Miguel Lobatón Benito, Ada Linares Torres, Mariano Lingar, Lury Lupaidi, Ángel Luyo, Jimena Mendezú, Karla Mora Farfán, Paola Palian Flores, Teddy Pérez Vázquez, Jorge Polo, Fabiola Puwaranga, Flor Quispe, Yasmin Quispe Navarro, Patricia Quiroz, Oswaldo Salas, José Antonio Salazar, Juan Salazar, Felipe Sánchez, Katherina Sánchez Yábar, Nelly Sánchez de Lobatón, Jacky Sandoval, Paloma Ráez, César Ríos, Katia Tapia, Patricia Terry Castro, Viviana Tito, Alan Torre, Ariana Tuesta Martínez, Josué Valverde, Marilyn Vergel, Jacky Villafuerte, Gabriela Villanueva, Rodrigo Virrueta, Luciana Salinas, Catalina Akasiete, Eduardo Alfaro, Janeth Arias, César Casussol, Rodolfo Casussol, Hermana Inés Farro, Marisa Huertas, Natalia Majluf, Luis Alberto Mendoza, Christian Mesía Montenegro, Miguel Molinari, Ana María Moreyra, Isabel Pantoja, Denise Pozzi Escot, Nancy Prieto, Gabriela Salazar, Pablo Vargas Lugo, Lucas Vargas Lugo, Enrique Verdura, Juan Carlos Verme.

## PAINTINGS AND PRINTS

### SKULLS, 2010

Page 13

Oil on canvas

20.5 x 33.1 in

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie

### MONKEYS II, 2010

Page 23

Oil on canvas

32.7 x 44.1 in

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie

### TOWER, 2010

Page 45

Oil and acrylic enamel on MDF

7.9 x 5.9 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie

### STAIRWAY, 2010

Page 46

Digital print on cotton paper

45.7 x 35 in

Edition of 4

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie

### JUNGLE, 2010

Page 59

Oil and acrylic enamel on MDF

21.3 x 27.6 in

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie

### FINGER, 2010

Page 60

Digital print on cotton paper

30.3 x 12.6 in

Edition of 4

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie

### NIPPLE, 2010

Page 69

Oil and acrylic enamel on MDF

5.9 x 7.9 in

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie

### RUBBLE, 2010

Page 83

Oil and acrylic enamel on MDF

27.6 x 35.4 in

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie



## MEXICAN PAVILION 54 VENICE BIENNALE

Mexico's first participation in the Venice Biennale dates back to 1914. It is interesting to think that the Mexico of those years, despite being in a war that would cost its people a million lives, participated in the largest art event in the world. One could think that our country was following the example of the economic powers of that time, and therefore wanted to participate in the Biennale and be part of the international community that had achieved modernity. Unfortunately, due to the contradictions and conflicts that the country would pass through, Mexican art lost its presence in Venice for many years.

During the 1950's Mexico participated three times projecting internationally Mexican art. During a break of nearly half a century our country participated five more times, the last three as a guest of the exhibitions organized by the Italo-Latin American Institute, it was only in 2007 that Mexico finally had a national pavilion.

Since its founding in 1895, the Venice Biennale has modified many times its bases and objectives, adapting itself over time to become the most important art event in the world. Since its first participation in it, Mexico's artistic production has reached levels that mark, in some cases, the cutting edge of international contemporary art, which reflects not only the cultural and social growth of the country, but also its economic progress that has take it to become one of the largest economies of the world. In this new century, for the third consecutive time Mexican art has its own space in this privileged window, which leads us to question: what does it mean and what are the implications for Mexico and its art scene? It is undeniable that the presence of any State in the Venice Biennale offers it a remarkable visibility, but also an economic, political and cultural credibility that few spaces provide. One of the major advantages, if not the more important, to participate in an event of this magnitude, is that it opens a space for discussion and promotes artistic exchange between local artists,

giving them the opportunity to confront the international contemporary art world and with the general public.

It is well known that art does not always reflect the ideal society the State structures would like to show, that's why some pavilions and the Biennale itself have had their disputes; as an example we can cite the year 1968, where the Biennale was censored by the artists, leading to the most substantial change in its history, which was the elimination of patronage and the sale of the artworks displayed. On the other hand, we could say that many art projects presented at the Biennale, had set off not only artistic and social processes, but even politics, contributing to the democratization of the country represented.

George Steiner tells us that "any serious form of art, music and literature is an act of criticism,"<sup>1</sup> and critique is rarely pleasant to whom finance, however, it is imperative for social progress, and tolerance reflects democracy, which thrives from differences. Now, the challenge facing our country at the dawn of the century, goes beyond the fact of promoting art. In a time of profound social transformation and large problems, the biggest challenge is to ensure the abundance of the national representation in events of international quality and vision as the Venice Biennale. Making an analysis of the representation of Mexico over the history of the Biennale, and observing the institutional effort undertaken in recent years, we can be confident that this will not be just another participation, but the opportunity to definitely open the door to have a permanent pavilion.

<sup>1</sup> George STEINER, *Vere Presenze*, trans. by Claude Béguin, Milan: Garzanti Editore, 1992, p. 24.

Gastón Ramírez Feltrín





### **RED SQUARE IMPOSSIBLE PINK**

printed and bound in May 2011 by Artes Gráficas Palermo, S.L. printers, in Madrid, Spain, under the supervision of Ekaterina Álvarez & Cristina Paoli. Typeset in Electra, designed by William Addison Dwiggins and Neuzeit S, designed by C.W. Pischiner. 1000 copies were printed for this edition.