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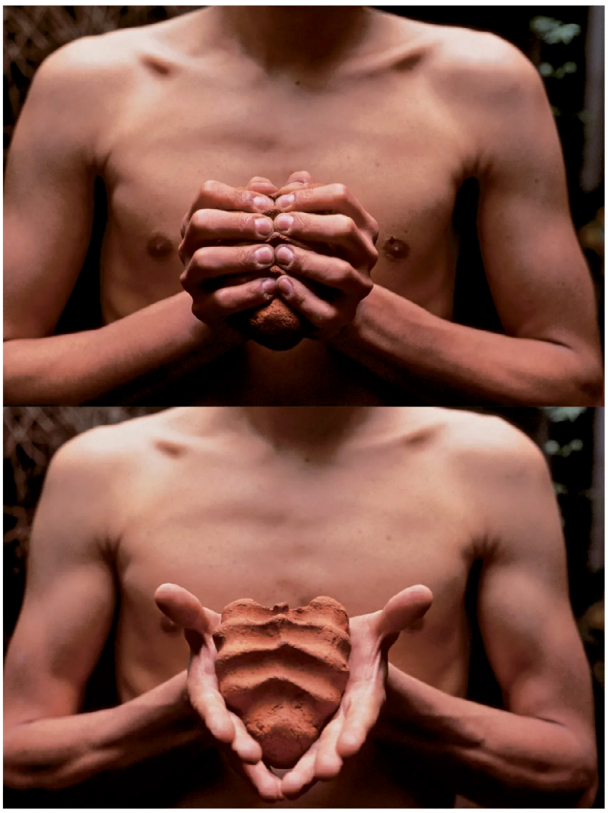
ARTFORUM

GABRIEL OROZCO

Sculpture between spectacle and use value



Gabriel Orozco, *Mis manos son mi corazón* (My Hands Are My Heart), 1991, diptych, two Cibachrome prints, each 9 1⁄8 × 12 1⁄4″.

WHEN MARCEL DUCHAMP mounted a challenge to Constantin Brancusi during a joint visit to an exhibition of new airplane technologies in Paris in 1912—asking Brancusi whether he could ever sculpt anything as perfect as an airplane propeller—he figured a contradiction that haunted sculptural production for the remaining part of the twentieth century and into the first two decades of the twenty-first: the dialectics between traditional artisanal and artistic modes of sculptural production and the ever more compelling paradigm of the technologically produced readymade. Obviously, this dialectic has been constitutive of Gabriel Orozco's work from the very beginning and determines it to this very day.

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh
Gabriel Orozco
Artforum, Volume 63, N°10, Summer, 2025.
https://urlr.me/n2qYxX

But the challenge addresses an even more pertinent question: Which, if any, of the traditional modes of sculptural production—e.g., modeling, cutting, and casting—is still viable and credible in the present at all? And how do we relate to a sculptural oeuvre like Orozco's in which the artist continues to deploy all these supposedly outdated modes simultaneously (occupying in fact an almost unique position among sculptors since the second half of the twentieth century)? His project becomes even more complex when the artist —as early as 1991—introduces two additional strategies into the arsenal of his traditional production procedures that programmatically contest their exclusive viability: the readymade and the photograph.

Bruce Nauman, *Art Make-Up: No. 2: Pink White, No. 2 Pink*, 1967–68, 16 mm transferred to video, color, sound, 40 minutes. © Bruce Nauman/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The decisive—certainly not the conclusive—moment of Orozco's retrospective exhibition "*Politécnico Nacional*" at Mexico City's Museo Jumex, organized by Briony Fer, allows us to contemplate the astonishing multitudes of his singular sculptural practice. In fact, no other project of the past half century comes to mind that is comparable to Orozco's work of the past three decades, with its the complex and contradictory morphologies, operations, materials, and sites. But this retrospective also gives us the opportunity to think once again about the medium, genre, practices, materials, and sites of sculpture in its recent past, its present, and possibly even its future.

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Confronting Orozco's sculptural work could inspire us to rewrite Richard Serra's famous *Verb List* of ca. 1967–68, which named about one hundred infinitive verbs describing processes of sculptural production. In contradistinction to Serra, we could formulate *two* lists of terms constituting Orozco's work. The first would give an account of the extreme diversity of materials and object types the artist deploys: rubber tires and terra-cotta, papier-mâché and marble, cars and bicycles, toilet paper and lint, construction debris and boomerangs, cacti and agave leaves, oranges and chewing gum, river stones and rubber balls, motor scooters and yogurt caps —to name but a few. The second would comprise the *sites* where his work has been conceived and installed: an abandoned market in Brazil and an open cemetery in Mali, the windows of luxury apartments in New York and a gallery transformed into a garage in Antwerp, a social club in London and the streets of Berlin, a franchise of the Mexican OXXO convenience store chain and the public space of a garden. And, eventually, an entire urban district of Mexico City: Chapultepec Park (and of course, the spaces of galleries and museums).

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Gabriel Orozco, *La DS*, 1993, modified Citroën DS, 4'7 1/4″ × 15'10" × 45 3/8″.

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Two key early works (among many others) in Orozco's ever increasingly complex sculptural production, *Mis manos son mi corazón* (My Hands Are My Heart), 1991, and *La DS*, 1993, might not only allow us to return to Duchamp's question, but also pose all of the questions that we have asked about sculpture at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first: How can the sculptural object resist the process of fetishization (especially in a historical moment when universal technological object production and digitality make us crave compensations for the universal loss of tactility)? And how can sculpture accomplish the experience of simultaneous collective reception that was formerly its greatest social promise? Lastly, how can sculpture resist its transition into the sphere of spectacle culture, when this is indeed the universal regime governing sight, sound, and tactility, as the British art historian T. J. Clark has formulated most succinctly:

> Spectacle, as a concept, was accompanied by the idea of "the colonisation of everyday life." That meant several things. Pervasive surveillance. The monetisation of more and more of the species' so-called unproductive life. The recruiting of more and more of us to the task of providing our masters with "information" about our every doing. The shrinkage of time out. The commodification of play. But perhaps what the situationist theorists most saw in the "everyday"—most regretted as they saw it vanish—was the body clock, the lapse of attention, the recalcitrance of the organism, the idle interest in what someone else was doing, was feeling, was *like*. Bodies spoke a different language from that of their leaders. They were a reservoir of insubordination. They looked up at the pyramid or the Statue of Liberty and shrugged.
>
> Is all that counter-language a thing of the past? Has the spectacle extinguished it, or managed a life for it on a set of reservations? Art. Sex. Poetry.[1]

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Gabriel Orozco, *Cazuelas* (Beginnings), 2002, fired clay, dimensions variable.

My Hands Are My Heart seems a direct response to some of these questions, literally performing unresolvable contradictions. It seems to direct us literally to the heart of the matter of making sculpture: opposing *techne*, it insists on *soma*, the bodily immediacy, the corporeal continuity between subject and object. And it provides material evidence of a possible identity that redeems us from the state of alienation and reification. Going even further, its materiality, terra-cotta, and its iconography, the *corazón*, seduce us to discover an even more seductive identity, a cultural and historical foundation, *mexicanidad*. Paradoxically, these seductions endow the sculpture with all the false functions of a substitute, which is the quintessential definition of the fetish—compensation for loss and lack, ranging from corporeal presence to the gratifying promise of national cultural identity and continuity, a loss that a work of art cannot and will not repair, in fact has to resist at all costs to do the *work* of the work of art.

But these seductions or deceptions are canceled when the work confronts us with the photographic records of the performative procedure itself—and not only by making the photograph an integral component, the dialectical complement to the material sculptural production. The photograph also confronts us with the performative rehearsal of our own projections, our aspirations for the compensations that the sculpture should deliver. It is in this photographic rehearsal of the productive process that Orozco's work reminds us of a crucial piece by Bruce Nauman, *Art Make-Up*, 1967–68,which likewise traces the origin and the destination of the desire for the aesthetic experience, in this case, the origin of painting.

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Like Orozco, Nauman had exposed his own naked torso to satisfy our desire for absolute immediacy and authenticity. Ever since Nauman (and corresponding figures in Italian Arte Povera like Giuseppe Penone), sculptural production has comprised, if not even required, the presence of photography as a discursive element. The photograph corresponds, complements, or even dissolves the sculptural object's manual and artisanal production procedures, functioning not as document but as its dialectical technological counterpart. This sculptural dialectic is activated again and again in Orozco's subsequent work, especially when engaging with the treacherous matter of terra-cotta: In an utterly central work from 2002, *Cazuelas* (Beginnings),the seductive performance of an apparent return to the potter's craft is inverted and countered through a chance operation, a *ludic* intervention performed by the hand of the artist, who throws freshly formed terra-cotta balls into the surface of the freshly formed artisanal vessels, fracturing them and partially disabling their utilitarian potential.

Gabriel Orozco, *Empty Shoe Box*, 1993, shoebox, 4 7/8 × 13 × 8 1/2″.

In this confrontation between traditional craft procedures and the supposedly timeless archaisms of terra-cotta, Orozco once again foregrounds one of his deepest sculptural convictions: that the most powerful enemies of sculpture, the reification and fetishization of the object and the transformation of sculpture into spectacle, can be subverted, if not undone, by associating sculpture with the structures of the *game*. The *ludic principle* does not only transfigure the spectator's passive contemplative mode of aesthetic experience; it activates spectatorial participation, pointing to alternative roads of object relations and social interaction.

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Just as Carl Andre promised somewhat grandiloquently in 1970 that his sculpture should function like a road, a road taken by the activated spectator, and thus fulfil the constructivist promise of a transition from radically reductivist abstraction to utilitarian function and use value, Orozco's *Empty Shoe Box*, 1993, counteracted the idealizing deception of utopian promises with the deconstruction of the Duchampian readymade paradigm. The empty shell of the utilitarian object, the device of preservation, becomes the object of presentation, allegorically denying grand sculptural promises and literally returning the sculptural object to the actual basis of corporeal and somatic experience of the body's movement in time and space.

> **In the postwar period, car culture has become a seductive violation of private and public space, manifested in its ever more powerful cult status and continually expanding fetishization of an imaginary self-ruling and self-rolling subject secreted in shiny, protective armor.**

Arman, *White Orchid*, 1963, exploded MG sports car mounted on wood, 8′ 2 3⁄8″ × 16′ 8 3⁄4″ × 4′ 3 1⁄8″. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Axel Schneider, Museum MMK für Moderne, Frankfurt am Main.

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The fascination with the celestial airplane as an ideal standard of perfect modernist sculptural form was soon secularized by artists as they discovered the down-to-earth appeal of the newly emerging car culture of the late 1910s and early ’20s. Numerous are the examples that illustrate the enchantment with this mechanical motorized object that seemed to embody essential features of a truly sculptural structure of the future: from Marinetti’s celebration of the birth of Futurism in his car wreck in the mud of the trenches, to Picabia’s obsession with racing cars as engines of spectacular masculinity and Sonia Delaunay’s adulation of the car as one more object through which to expand and disseminate the new world of abstract chromatic design. This infatuation with the motorized body changes dramatically in the postwar period, when it dawns on brighter minds that car culture has in fact become a seductive violation of private and public space, manifested in its ever more powerful cult status and continually expanding fetishization of an imaginary self-ruling and self-rolling subject secreted in shiny, protective armor. Indeed, we can trace the reversal of the car’s mythical fortune in the postwar era, citing such examples as Richard Hamilton’s subversive mapping of the fetishistic fusion of the body of desire and the body of the car in his 1957 *Hommage à Chrysler Corp.* and the literal explosion of fetish and cult to which the French sculptor Arman subjected his famous collector’s favorite private automotive property, the MG convertible, in *White Orchid*, 1963.[2]

It is certainly not accidental that the car models deconstructed by artists in this period had all acquired cult status. Take Claes Oldenburg’s almost nostalgic invocation in 1969 of the famous Chrysler 1937 Airflow, one of the first cars to have been designed according to the laws of aerodynamics. The extent to which Oldenburg conceived of the fetishized car as sculpture’s rival in providing unalienated bodily presence and its ultimate nemesis is evident in the artist’s request that his mnemonic relief—a model of the car had been one of his favorite toys as a boy—should have the transparency of a swimming pool and its material, cast polyurethane, should have the soft consistency of flesh.

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Flaminio Bertoni's Italian design of the French Citroën DS—as the name signals—aspired to mythical stardom from the start when it was released in 1955.[3] And indeed it took only two years for it to enter into *Mythologies*, the epochal essay collection of the philosopher of modern myths, Roland Barthes. Orozco's choice of the DS for *La DS* in 1993—and for the work's second iteration, in 2013—was certainly informed by the car's mythical powers. But what were his motivations for the sculptural cut that reduced the body by a third, literally disabling all of the fetish's functions except for those of its primary feature, *the design*, thereby intensifying it, endowing it even with an imaginary, almost futuristic acceleration? We will not prematurely assume that Orozco's apparent aggression aimed to destroy the cult car in the manner of Arman's explosion. Nor do we assume that Orozco aimed for his project to literally embody Barthes's deconstruction of the myth. Clearly, the artist was already aware that the aggressive public destruction of a mythical object—as Arman had performed it—in fact associated itself involuntarily or knowingly with the seemingly inescapable parameters of spectacle itself, thus canceling the critique it might have set out to induce. Yet at the same time, Orozco's public reduction of a mythical object by a third of its volume clearly conceives of sculpture as a process of critical *reduction,* of a paradoxical *withdrawal of mass, matter, and volume* —presumably the antidote of what we expect from a sculptural production process. It even appears that Orozco declares *cutting*—one of the most essential traditional sculptural processes—to be the phenomenological embodiment of a fundamentally different type of critical intervention.

Certainly, one precedent staged by an artist Orozco befriended and admired might have served as a model: Lawrence Weiner's *A 2" WIDE 1" DEEP TRENCH CUT ACROSS A STANDARD ONE-CAR DRIVEWAY*,1968. Here the cult of the car and the strategy of its deconstruction by a sculptural cut are literally fused in a dual subversion: The grounding of the sculptural cut in the space of private property and, in particular, in the perverse variety of private automotive space implements sculpture's innate dialectics—it asserts the primacy and privilege of sculpture's deep disregard for private space and private property, and it asserts its essential telos of being public and operating in public space. This might help us to also comprehend the almost hermetic compression of Orozco's gesture of cutting the very object of myth. At the same time that it preserves its morphology and form, it asserts the primacy of the sculptural procedure and structure over the power of myth.

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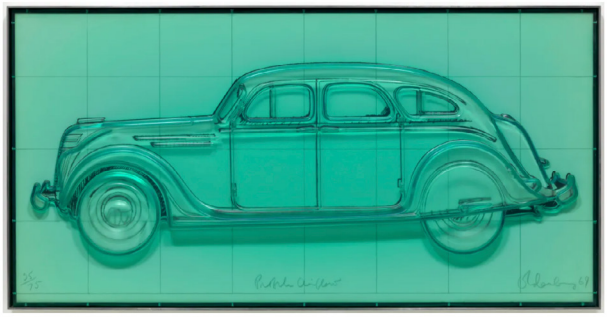
As was essential to the procedure of the cut in Weiner's work, Orozco's removal neither spectacularizes itself as gesture (as it had done in Lucio Fontana's work) nor spectacularizes the site or the object of its sculptural deconstruction. The shell of the fetish and the ruins of spectacle remain visible and intact as negative monuments. No victory is claimed other than sculpture's public affirmation of its difference from fetish and spectacle and its persistence to operate in opposition, in public space.

Richard Hamilton, *Hommage à Chrysler Corp.*, 1957, oil paint, metal foil, and collage on wood, 48 × 31 7/8″.



Claes Oldenburg, *Profile Airflow*, 1969, molded polyurethane relief over lithograph, 33 3/4 × 65 1/2 × 3 5/8″.

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To what extent Orozco's work is in fact engaged with the current conditions of public space, and more specifically with the conditions of cultural production in social space at large, was programmatically performed and formulated in *OROXXO*, a major project produced by José Kuri and Mónica Manzutto in Mexico City in 2017. Mimetically inscribing the socioeconomics of the financialization of cultural production within the conception and concretization of the work, the artist installed a completely stocked and fully functional branch of OXXO—the largest chain of Mexican convenience stores—in Mexico City's most prominent gallery of contemporary art, kurimanzutto.

OROXXO literally presented itself in a grotesque act of authorial self-effacement, with the climactic erasure of the artist's name performed in the mock phonetic assimilation of Orozco into *OROXXO*, the symbiotic fusion of the artist's name with that of a monolithic corporation of global consumption. That phonetic play alone already signals one of the project's theoretical subterfuges: that of exploring the most advanced conditions of the subject's annihilation as a foundational precondition for artistic authority. To rephrase the Duchampian and Warholian question: Can one manifestly force the work of art and the work of the commodity into a final congruence by abolishing authorial identity and interference altogether?

Lawrence Weiner constructing his 1968 *A 2″ WIDE 1″ DEEP TRENCH CUT ACROSS A STANDARD ONE-CAR DRIVEWAY*, Mamaroneck, NY, 1968. © Lawrence Weiner Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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Warhol's first presentation of his *Campbell's Soup Can* paintings had equally (and a year after Oldenburg's *Store*) appeared in the guise of objects in a store, mocking the art gallery's eternally disavowed commercial latency. And what appeared in 1962 as the most radical attempts to desublimate painting and sculpture by mimetically mapping their iconography, morphologies, and production procedures onto the actual commodity object is now fully accomplished when Orozco—in an orthodox return to Duchamp's readymade—collapses all objects, as well as their institution of production and distribution, into one congruent synthesis of monotonous and homogeneous objects, frame and fiction. The failed reception of Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Can* paintings in 1962 only proves that the consequential mapping of an economic configuration (the commodity object) on its opposite (the aesthetic object) was utterly illegible and unthinkable at that time. Similarly, at least for the time being, Orozco's congruence of store and gallery, of universal commodity and of global sculpture, emptied even of the most residual forms of tactility, has remained relatively illegible.

Not accidentally sharing the extreme delay of reception with Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, *OROXXO* concludes the innately totalizing radicality of the readymade with utter consequence. If Duchamp had finally collapsed the modus of technical production of the readymade with the readymade's technical reproduction, in *OROXXO* Orozco claims the totality of the actual institution of the production and dissemination of the objects of consumer culture as the credible matrix for his conception of the sculptural object.

Following Duchamp's prognosis that one day in the future the entire galaxy of objects would qualify for the status of readymade, Orozco came quite logically to a conclusion: Not only the objects but the institutions actually producing and disseminating the plethora of readymade objects under totalitarian consumer culture needed to be critically incorporated and theorized. *OROXXO* thus exceeds even the spatial chiasmus and discursive exchanges that artists in the context of institutional critique had initiated.

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View of "Gabriel Orozco: OROXXO," 2017, kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Photo: Studio Michel Zabé.

After grotesquely assimilating the artist's name into the corporate brand, and imposing the space of the supermarket onto the space of the gallery, Orozco no less grotesquely transferred artificial rarefication, the most crucial economic principle of the marketing of artistic objects, onto precisely the one economic institution where rarefication is utterly impossible: the supermarket. After all, the supermarket—unlike the art market—is precisely the sphere where the principle of artificial rarefication has neither value nor function, since the inexhaustible production of consumer-culture objects defines itself by the perpetual repetition and complete abolition of the singular, the specific, the concrete, and the presence of the tactile. By contrast, the principle of artificial rarefication, the essential secret of rapid value increases in artistic production under the conditions of global financialization, had brought about heretofore unimaginable numbers of speculators/investors in contemporary art, and a no less extreme increase in artistic practices that are all too willing to deliver products to this global project of investment and speculation.

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View of “Gabriel Orozco: OROXXO,” 2017, kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Photo: Studio Michel Zabé.

Orozco’s *OROXXO* installation—other than its conception and logistical planning—literally lacked any other intervention by the artist, except for one seemingly minimal addition: a single sticker, adorned with Orzoco’s idiom of painterly abstraction, affixed to every item in the store’s universe of readymade objects, an addition that designated each item as a work of the artist and the mere commodity as a work of art. Analogous to the erasure of the artist’s name, now even his innermost idiom, which had culminated in his ongoing series of “Samurai Tree” paintings, begun in 2005, appears reduced to the extreme banality of a mere marker of authorial identification, confronting each collector with the question of whether every banal object in *OROXXO* had actually been transfigured and redeemed by the sign of abstraction. After all, abstraction had been in the service of spiritual liberation and social emancipation since its inception, and had always appeared in opposition to the totally reified world of Duchamp’s readymade. Orozco’s stickers of abstraction posed the question of whether abstraction—denigrated to its lowest possible level—could now serve as a last sign of resistance and redemption from the totalitarian conditions of reification. Too, they asked whether abstraction’s last promise, offering an autotelic cognitive and perceptual instant of perception itself, had now been literally incorporated, by its mere presence, into the totalizing distribution system of commodified contemporaneity.

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Thus the global permutation of the aesthetic experience itself is staged in full view in Orozco's *OROXXO*: In a dialectical operetta, the artist subjects the most common banality to the rigorous procedures of value accumulation in the same manner that he subjects the elevated principles of a painter's spiritual aspirations to the most banal procedures of speculation and investment. The very principle of financialization rules even the most mundane exchange of objects in the same manner that the most banal exchange of economic investment and speculation regulates the sign of spiritual autonomy and utopian aspirations that abstraction had initially promised. Thus the collision between the two spheres allows us to clarify the distinct dilemma within which Orozco's project had constituted itself, and as such has acquired the conditions of an exemplary stage for a central question: whether presumably pure aesthetic spaces and sign spaces can now actually be subjected to the very same social and economic pressures to which the objects of plasticity have long since been fully adapted, if they have not even become their very essence.

View of "Gabriel Orozco: Samurai Tree Invarients," 2009–10, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Jonathan Muzikar. Below:

The final dialectics between contemporary sculpture as devalorized commodity and the utopian sculptural and architectural telos of remembering or revealing the possibility of conditions of simultaneous collective reception can find a viable model in the pragmatist conception of actually accessible utilitarian functions. Such a model was accomplished in Orozco's recent design for the bridges of Chapultepec Park in Mexico City.

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Once again it is productive to look back at some of the most important predecessors of sculptural production with whom Orozco found himself in an inevitable and continuing dialogue, if not outright conflict and dialectical historical opposition. One of the central works of post-Minimal sculpture is Serra's *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram, Right Angles Inverted*,1970, constructed almost anonymously in a neglected stretch of road in the Bronx in New York, a site that Serra himself described as one where thieves stripped and dismantled the cars they had stolen. The radical anti-monumentality of the circular steel structure, half embedded in the ground, only showing its linear metal edge, the other half of the circle revealing its minimal planarity, almost explicitly if not programmatically denied the credibility of the claim that sculpture could still achieve the promise of monumentality, if not even functionality, mythically associated by Andre with the sculpture's equivalence to the road. Serra's epochal sculpture incomparably performed the necessary condition of the anti-monument: The work's location literally prohibited any form of communicative action. The sculpture's location itself is one of total urban deletion and communicative displacement as much as the sculptural structure is one of perceptual withdrawal and refusal of even a minimum of gratifying tactility. Indeed, it initiated the most radical negation of sculpture's everlasting promises—the monument's simultaneous collective reception—an ancient aspiration first dismantled by the readymade, then extensively abused by propaganda in the '30s for authoritarian regimes, and finally totally absorbed by ever-intensifying regimes of control and spectacle. In Serra's work, nothing claims to be site-specific, and nothing claims to be seen, shown, or commemorated—these are the actual conditions of object experience in a social and economic order ruled by the dual tyranny of compulsive consumption and spectacle.

But Orozco seems to always find a road not taken or to resuscitate forgotten and repressed models of cultural production. In an almost exact reversal of every single term just listed to describe the historically crucial features of Serra's anti-monument, Orozco's extraordinary design for the vast urban renewal project of Chapultepec Park leads the way out of the epistemic and sculptural cul-de-sac within which Serra's post-Minimalist radicality placed us.

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Richard Serra, *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram, Right Angles Inverted*, 1970, hot-rolled steel. Installation view, Bronx, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni. © Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The road not taken—and now rediscovered by Orozco—is the reintroduction of the ancient Marxist concept of *use value*,the dialectical opposite of exchange value, and, more recently, also the sole form of resisting exhibition value, which has totally effaced the concepts of material use and function. But *use value* had of course also been the archenemy of modernist sculpture. For one, its simplistically radical withdrawal from functional objects like a urinal had been one of the great mysteries of Duchamp's readymade since 1917. Now Orozco resurrects one of the archaic and at the same time transhistorical models and actually functioning structures that had always fused function, use value, and immaterial spirituality: the architectural typology of the bridge. Always anonymous, totally devoted to the service and the functions of the most elemental needs of the collective, never appealing to the glamour of architectural vanities or the pomposity of the monument, never serving the propagandistic demands of ideology and authoritarian grandeur, the bridge—along with the road—is possibly the only structure among architectural types that integrates pure function and pure use value with the sphere of collective social needs and lives.[4]

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That is the amazing volte-face performed by Gabriel Orozco in his most recent rewriting and remaking of the history of sculpture in the twenty-first century. In the construction of Chapultepec Park, the artist orchestrates a triumphant synthesis of public space, sculpture, architecture, and collective conditions of simultaneous reception, along with—most threatening to all sculpture, at least until the transition from Constructivism to Productivism in the Soviet Union—the celebration of use value as a condition of collective defiance of spectacle. The political propaganda voiced by Orozco's public architecture advocates for allowing people to cross the road, take a walk in the park, and help trees survive and grow. It is a very complex public sculpture, requiring a chapter all to itself—a chapter that I still hope to write.

Aerial view of Gabriel Orozco's Parque de Cultura Urbana (PARCUR), Chapultepec Forest, Mexico City, 2023.

NOTES

1. T. J. Clark, "A Brief Guide to Trump and the Spectacle," in *London Review of Books*, January 23, 2025.

2. Arman would even decompose and rearrange the fragments of a cut-up Citroën DS himself in 1989, titling it with the peculiar term *Schmilblick*. In spite of its phonetics, apparently the term is not Yiddish, but a neologism declared by a French writer of comedic phantasms to be German and intended to designate an absurd, unfathomable object that can serve all kinds of purposes.

3. Flaminio Bertoni (1903–1964) was an Italian sculptor, whose admiration for Leonardo da Vinci's pursuit of technical design and architecture moved him to become an automobile designer in France. Bertoni became one of the most important car designers of the twentieth century, starting the Citroën Traction Avant in 1934, followed by the legendary Citroën 2 CV in 1936, and culminating with the DS in 1955.

4. It is certainly not accidental that one of the greatest architects and designers of bridges of the twentieth century, the Swiss engineer Robert Maillart (1872–1940), was a figure greatly admired and often referred to in conversations with Richard Serra. And it is even less accidental that Serra himself devoted one of his most important film works, *Railroad Turnbridge*, 1976, to one of the monumental American bridge constructions typical of a period when technical progress and democratic aspirations seemed to intersect. And these bridge constructions—like the almost mythical Brooklyn Bridge—embodied these aspirations for an emerging truly democratic public sphere. Typical, however, of Serra's modernist discipline and restriction is the fact that he could only pay homage to this fusion of function and monumental form in the allegorical representation of a lost historical object in the medium of film.

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The Architect's Newspaper

Culture Garden

Michan Architecture and Parabase's pavilions at Mexico City's Jardín y Pabellón Escénico Chapultepec plant a new paradigm for performing arts in urban park environments

An aerial view of the Jardín y Pabellón Escénico Chapultepec, updated under a new masterplan by artist Gabriel Orozco, with new pavilions by Michan Architecture with Parabase. (Arturo Arrieta)

One of the world's great urban parks, Mexico City's Bosque de Chapultepec is at once the main green lung oxygenating the metropolis's infinite sprawl; a respite for countless families that, looking to unwind, flock to its playgrounds, lawns, and cultural sites every weekend; and in need of rehabilitation. Its fraying edges are not surprising given that the forest's history can be traced back over 3,000 years. After the 1325 founding of Mexico City—named Tenochtitlan at the time—Chapultepec's natural springs made it a sacred and strategic place for the Mexica people, supplying essential water to their capital. Around 1900, under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, the park took on its current form as a public recreation spot stretching over 1,600 acres.

Suleman Anaya
Culture Garden
The Architect's Newspaper, April 8, 2025.
https://urlr.me/Uj483D

Paved roads were traced, an artificial lake was excavated, and the park's first two sections were adorned with plazas and fountains. (The less-frequented third section's wooded areas remain home to rich wildlife.) An erstwhile military school atop a hill became a lavish castle in which the republic's presidents resided until the move to a more modern estate, also in Chapultepec, in 1941.

Since then, Chapultepec has undergone further transformation, reflecting Mexico's larger political, economic, and cultural changes. But no rehaul of the iconic forest has been as ambitious as the one launched by former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who enlisted the artist Gabriel Orozco to oversee a grand master plan to revitalize the vast park, repair its neglected corners, and replace outdated facilities with state-of-the-art infrastructure. Under the banner "nature and culture," around half a billion dollars are said to have been allotted to spiff up 2.66 square miles, with a focus on new pathways to connect the park's distinct areas, foster social engagement, and create new venues for accessible culture programming. Aligned with López Obrador's populism—under "AMLO," the presidential residence was opened to the public as a museum and the ancient park became home to a huge Ferris wheel—all new projects, including a skate park and the city's third state-funded cinematheque, were designed to attract a broad swath of users, without regard to educational background or economic ability. This is a welcome departure from Chapultepec's existing offerings, which include fine art museums and the National Auditorium, where tickets to see established music acts command hefty prices.

Landscape architecture firm Taller de Paisaje Entorno's design incorporates bermed plantings as a backdrop to the pavilions. (Arturo Arrieta)

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Up until a year ago, a partially unpaved and abandoned piece of land, sometimes used as parking, bordered the east side of the National Auditorium's massive edifice, whose impressive scale was emphasized in a 1991 redesign by Abraham Zabludovsky and Teodoro González de León. But since February 2024, a different tableau greets anyone who enters the 7-hectare plot to the left of the dated-looking *auditorio* from Reforma Avenue. What appears to be an inviting, carefully designed garden full of native plants turns out—once the visitor has walked well into its winding paths past grassy mounds and a little artificial waterway—to contain three deceivingly light structures that blur with the vegetation, their glazed, canopied forms peeking through age-old trees. The whole ensemble is the new Jardín y Pabellón Escénico Chapultepec (literally "Scenic Garden and Pavilion," with *escénico* referring not to views but to the performing arts the garden and its main structure are designed to host).

The pavilions were designed by the Mexico City firm of Michan Architecture, which collaborated with the international studio Parabase. Born out of a competition that was part of the Chapultepec masterplan, the initial brief asked for a "polyvalent" space with capacity for 400 people that could easily morph to stage an array of experimental theater, opera, and music. A rehearsal space and a cafeteria also needed to be part of the single-building design. To help counter the National Auditorium's physical mass, Michan and his collaborators proposed something else: a garden dotted with discreet (and discrete) smaller buildings for the different functions. "It didn't make sense to plant another large theater building on the site, so we split the program, which resulted in three pavilions for the three main requirements," Michan told *AN* during a recent visit to the project. It was an inspired call: The choice to build light and unobtrusive is the Jardín Escénico's most appealing quality. Another critical choice by the design team was to leave as much of the site unbuilt as possible, instead relying on skillful landscape design in which to embed the slender pavilions. "We wanted to diminish the boundaries between architecture and garden," Michan said. "That gave us a road map: Using the existing dug-out earth found on-site, we could transform the site into a landscape of low hills and lakes. The resulting topography generates intimate pockets of space for outdoor activities while allowing us to impact existing ecosystems minimally and create a series of differentiated microenvironments."

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One of the main strategies employed was to diminish the boundaries between architecture and landscape. (Arturo Arrieta)

When one enters the Jardín, the three new buildings are invisible until the visitor glimpses their cantilevered, cream-colored roof coverings, which appear to be floating but are in fact supported on glass and concrete structures that rise out of inclined ground sections. What *does* immediately catch the eye is the skillful landscape design by Taller de Paisaje Entorno, which planted a variety of endemic plant species while preserving as many existing trees as possible. Artificial mounds made from soil excavated on-site articulate the space, create a small winding lake, and hide service and back-of-house areas. The graded terrain also produces auditive barriers, filtering out traffic noise—a necessity in the middle of one of the world's largest cities.

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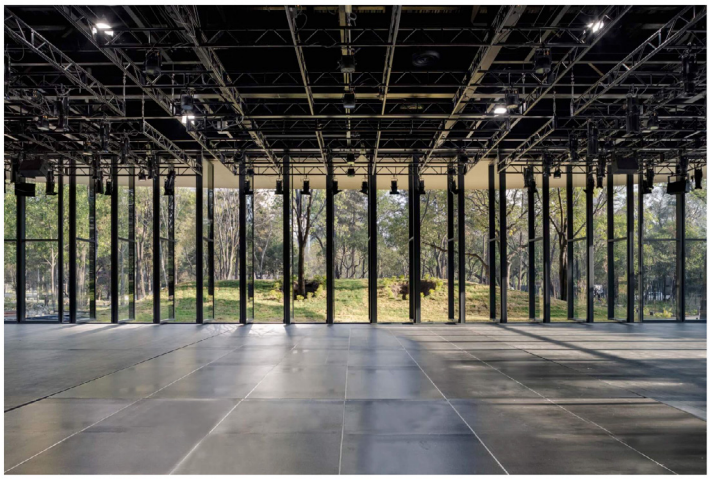
The main performance pavilion is a 12,055-square-foot versatile glass box that can be blacked out or—thanks to pivoting aluminum frames—opened to the gardens, depending on the event. “The idea is that during a performance the landscape is the silent backdrop,” Michan explained of the project’s poetic premise. But what gives the venue and its smaller rehearsal facsimile a few yards farther into the plot a distinct character is the roof design, the architecture’s most deliberate formal gesture. Flat on top, the coverings’ cantilevered underside mimics gently sloping dunes. (A tension between organic and hard-edged forms is a signature of all of Michan’s projects to date, mostly formally daring, materially expressive apartment buildings). But the coverings do not just perform aesthetically, they are also functional: Their elegantly inflated shape conceals lighting, sound, and other tech systems, allowing the theater’s interior to stay clear. Lastly, the roof overhangs also provide shade, cooling the AC-free buildings on hot days.

Resting on the glass boxes, the roof coverings—hollow cement shells wrapped around a steel structure—are, in essence, the only visible architecture. The rest of the building is conceived to vanish into the landscaping, an effect achieved by burying ancillary functions into the low hills at the edge of the footprint. Evocatively, the performance and rehearsal halls are accessed through tunnellike openings in the mounds, which produces a sense of entering an insulated cocoon to enjoy a play or sonata.



Pivoting aluminum frames allow the performance pavilion to open to the gardens (Arturo Arrieta)

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The landscape is designed to change with time and the seasons. As in all of Taller de Paisaje Entorno's landscape projects, the new garden in Chapultepec is meant to maintain itself and grow on its own, thus minimizing the amount of required care and resulting in a more natural appearance. As haphazardly exuberant as all the greenery can appear, especially after the summer months' heavy rain, quasi-surgical precision went into the placement of the pavilions and paths to respect the existing vegetation.

A cafeteria concession, housed in a circular pavilion, opened recently. Here, as in the other buildings, the kitchen and service areas are tucked into the sloped perimeter, leaving the central space open for dining with panoramic views. The garden has clearly been embraced by locals of any age, who can be found relaxing on the verdant grounds at all hours. It also serves as an appealing practical axis connecting a busy metro station to, at the *Jardín*'s back end, an Orozco-designed bridge that leads to Chapultepec's second main section. That said, the programming for the main performance pavilion—which is run by INBAL, Mexico's National Institute for Fine Arts—seems to not be clearly defined yet. Occasional chamber concerts are announced the week before on the site's social media. For a project that cost close to US$14 million, that seems like squandered potential, but it's also not surprising in a country where funding for culture has been slashed as part of government austerity measures.

Still, the main draw of Jardín Escenico is its openness and the lightness of its buildings. Not only is most of the site given over to plants, trees, and inviting, expansive greenery accessible to anyone in need of a pause, but its main venue is effectively a hybrid of an open-air forum and a covered theater that visually blends into its surroundings. To build it, existing resources—namely, soil—and novel landscape design were integrated as material and functional elements of the scheme. That alone creates a new paradigm in a city that is setting standards for generous thought-out public infrastructure projects at an exemplary pace.

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The Architect's Newspaper, April 8, 2025.
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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Gabriel Orozco: 'I work internationally while always maintaining ties with my country'

One of Mexico's most influential contemporary artists, who is also at the helm of the transformation of a public park in Mexico City, discusses his life and work on the occasion of a showcase at Museo Jumex

Orozco's sculptures include *El jardín del mundo* (1998, above); the elements of air, earth and water are visible throughout his "polytechnic" work
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/Los Angeles

Gabriel Orozco's *Politécnico Nacional* marks the artist's first museum show in Mexico since 2006. Spanning more than 300 pieces—including installations, drawings, photographs and sculptures produced since the 1990s—it occupies every level of Museo Jumex, plus a new version of his participatory sculpture *Ping Pond Table* (1998) in the adjacent plaza. The exhibition is arranged thematically following the vision of its curator Briony Fer, one of Orozco's longstanding interlocutors, and is one of the most ambitious projects staged at the museum's Polanco venue since its opening in 2013. And though it is Orozco's first show at the museum, its founder Eugenio López has been collecting the artist's work for decades.

Constanza Ontiveros Valdés
Gabriel Orozco: 'I work internationally while always maintaining ties with my country'
The Art Newspaper, February 6, 2025.
https://urlr.me/BRE8XS

The opening of *Politécnico Nacional* (until 3 August) follows Orozco's years-long leadership of the master plan for Mexico City's Chapultepec Park, his most ambitious public project to date. While the master plan for the 686-hectare urban forest includes numerous cultural and ecological components, one of its distinctive elements is his *Calzada Flotante* (2023), a 248m-long pedestrian bridge connecting parts of the park previously separated by highways.

Before installation at Museo Jumex began, Orozco discussed the show and how its title humorously reflects his creative range.

The Art Newspaper: The exhibition features works you have created since the 1990s, yet it is described as a playground where one can trace lines in your practice. Could you explain this?

Gabriel Orozco: Briony Fer, who has extensively written about my work and curated past shows, has done an outstanding job curating this exhibition. It is not exactly a retrospective; it is arranged thematically and follows my practice in public and private spheres, spanning scales from drawings and objects to working tables and large-scale public sculptures. One of the exhibition's linking threads is the expanded notion of game, considering the interplay of languages, strategies, objects, symbols, geometries, spaces, processes and materials drawn from my practice. This is reflected in the versatile selection, including the billiard table and the chess set but also the *Shoe Box* (1993) and the whale (*Dark Wave*, 2006) shown in London.

What inspired the exhibition's title?

Over time, I have explored various techniques and disciplines, including writing, architecture, landscape design, geometry, stone carving and photography. Somewhat jokingly, especially after leading the Chapultepec project, I believe I could now consider myself a sort of graduate from Politécnico Nacional, a public technical and science institute in Mexico City. The word "nacional" is also interesting because I have continued to work internationally while always maintaining ties with my country.

For the Chapultepec Park project, you worked with Politécnico Nacional graduates.

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That is true. The project included many experts, some of them from Politécnico. While this division has been surpassed, traditionally, Mexico City's National University, where I studied, represented the humanities, whereas Politécnico reflected the technical disciplines. However, more than a reference to one institution, the title alludes to the broader meaning of the French term *polytechnique*, encompassing a specific curriculum. I think that, especially in Mexico, the title's significance will be easily caught.

How does the exhibition reflect your interest in nature, regardless of scale?

Since Jumex is a building, Briony Fer proposed that each of the three floors focuses on an element of my "polytechnic" work: air, earth and water. The upper floor relates to the atmosphere, planets, space and vehicles such as *La DS* (2013) acting like a kind of projectile. The middle level presents works connected to the organic aspect of the planet, like my terracotta pieces and *Plant Diaries* (2021-22). The lower level showcases underwater life and water, including the whale. Instead of following a chronological or technical order, the idea is that visitors can explore these interconnected themes and embark on a journey through the landscape of the museum levels.

Orozco, whose solo show at Museo Jumex is his first in Mexico since 2006
Photo: Ana Hop; courtesy of Kurimanzutto

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One of Orozco's signature *Working Tables*, his arrangements of objects he has collected over decades
Courtesy of Jenny Yeh, Winsing Arts Foundation

A famous work of Orozco's, *La DS Cornaline* (2013), that is a reassembling of a Citroën car
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/Los Angeles

The show features a new version of *Ping Pond Table* in the plaza next to the museum. What is distinctive about this version?

I made the first version of this work in France and, since then, I thought of making an outdoor one where the pond at the centre acted as a fountain and sketched the idea in my notebook. For some cultures, like the Hindu or Oriental traditions, the pond symbolises the centre or origin. Also, ping pong can be played outdoors. The new version, specifically made for this show, is made in stone, working with the workshop I usually collaborate with for my stone works. It acts as a fountain and ping pong table where four to eight people can play at the museum.

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As you have been preparing for the exhibition, what aspects of your practice have stood out to you?

The exhibition displays around 40 photographs together for the first time, allowing viewers in Mexico to connect them to my other works. The same goes for a panoramic display of my drawings. In a way, they are also "polytechnic" as they incorporate collages, abstraction, lines, interventions on airplane tickets and more "technical" drawings to design spaces like the Observatory House [in Roca Blanca, Mexico].

What is the significance of having your first large-scale show at Museo Jumex now?

Eugenio López began acquiring my work long before the museum opened, so it is a pleasure to exhibit in a museum that has followed my practice for decades and is the result of a serious collecting practice. I was happy to accept Eugenio's invitation, as it honours the long-lasting connection with my practice and is a well-articulated and creative exhibition of my work.

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Le Journal des Arts.fr

Orozco à l'épreuve du temps

Le végétal et le géométrique composent, à travers l'empreinte et le recouvrement, le « journal des plantes » que l'artiste déploie à la Galerie Chantal Crousel.

Paris. Depuis 2014, Gabriel Orozco vit entre le Mexique (où il est né en 1962) et le Japon. Cela se voit depuis plusieurs années dans son travail et plus encore avec cette série d'une cinquantaine de petites œuvres sur papier présentées à l'occasion de la huitième exposition de l'artiste, en trente ans, à la Galerie Chantal Crousel. Réalisées au cours de ces deux ou trois dernières années, elles sont peintes à la gouache, tempera, encre et graphite sur de petites feuilles de papier. Et pas n'importe lequel papier puisqu'il s'agit d'un cahier de notes japonais qu'Orozco a abordé comme un carnet de voyage. *« Je me déplace toujours avec lui. Il est petit, se glisse facilement dans ma poche et est d'une utilisation très facile »*, nous précise l'artiste. Une sorte de journal et même un « Diario de plantas », ou « journal des plantes » selon le titre de l'exposition, qui permet à Orozco de conjuguer et de contracter ses deux thèmes essentiels : le temps et la nature.

Tous ces dessins évoquent en effet des motifs végétaux réalisés à partir d'empreintes de plantes, feuilles ou branches, la plupart du temps combinés à un dessin à main levée. Ce dernier figure souvent un anneau (ou ruban) de Möbius, à la fois questionnement de la notion de surface, introduction de la géométrie (qui a toujours fait partie du vocabulaire d'Orozco) dans la nature telle une effraction de l'ordre dans le végétal, et symbole de l'infini. Avec ce dernier point Orozco poursuit et élargit son approche et sa quête du temps dans toutes ses dimensions, celles du palimpseste aussi bien que de l'illimité, à travers des jeux d'échelle, passant de la structure de la feuille à celle de la branche. Et évidemment à celle de l'arbre qui a toujours été à la fois la racine, le tronc et la sève de son travail. *« Les arbres sont exemplaires et surprenants. Ils sont une sorte de machine parfaite, de corps parfait. Ils sont si étranges et mystérieux, quelquefois exotiques également »*, dit-il, enfonçant là quelques portes ouvertes. Dans le même registre, on peut lire dans le communiqué de presse : *« En un sens, mon rêve est de créer un jour un monde aussi fantastique et parfait qu'un arbre. »* Joli programme, un brin utopique.

Henri-François Debailleux
Orozco à l'épreuve du temps
Le Journal des Arts, September 21, 2022.
https://urlr.me/zat3kp

De très petits formats

Ces feuilles, de papier et d'arbres, sont ici complétées par quelques tableaux de format moyen et surtout par deux grandes toiles qui semblent l'agrandissement, l'approfondissement, l'aboutissement du travail sur papier. Ces toiles parlent également de temps, mais d'un temps plus long. L'une d'entre elles, dont la sœur est dans les collections du Musée national d'art moderne-Centre Pompidou, a ainsi nécessité une dizaine d'années de travail. Certes pas à temps plein, mais c'est la durée dont Orozco a eu besoin pour gratter, effacer, repasser, recouvrir, puis estomper, oblitérer à nouveau et ainsi de suite. Comme un mille-feuille, non pas en épaisseur mais en profondeur, nourri des strates d'une mémoire plus ou moins enfouie. Dans une gamme plus vive, dominée par des jaunes subtils, la seconde toile qui constitue la cime de l'exposition est d'une splendide complexité formelle et chromatique. Elle aussi fait du temps sa flèche et sa clef de voûte pour composer une improvisation construite (tel un compositeur de jazz), faire croire à un hasard qui n'en est pas un, mettre un peu d'ordre dans le chaos et peut-être inventer un sens au monde.

Cette toile vaut aussi son pesant d'or : 950 000 dollars (plus de 943 000 €). Quant aux petites feuilles, il faut compter 35 000 dollars pièce, une somme élevée pour de si petits formats [voir ill.]. Ces prix s'expliquent en partie par le parcours d'Orozco qui comprend des expositions personnelles ou rétrospectives organisées dans les plus grandes institutions internationales, du Centre Pompidou à Paris au MoMA de New York en passant, entre autres, par le Kunstmuseum de Bâle en 2010.

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art
press

GABRIEL OROZCO
l'atelier des écrits

Anne Bertrand

La publication d'extraits des carnets tenus par Gabriel Orozco entre 1992 et 2012 dévoile son processus de création, faisant de ces écrits l'atelier qu'il a toujours refusé d'avoir.

■ Né en 1962 à Jalapa au Mexique, Gabriel Orozco choisit tôt de ne pas avoir de lieu de création fixe, mais de voyager et de faire sur place avec les moyens du bord. Il réside principalement à New York, dans son pays natal, plus tard aussi en France, mais se déplace également à Londres, Courtrai, Milan, Berlin, Gwangju, en Inde, au Japon, à Quito, Buenos Aires… où il met en œuvre dessins, sculptures, photographies, installations, puis peintures. Dix-neuf carnets ont donné matière au livre *Written Matter* (1), dont les textes ont été choisis par l'artiste, de ses débuts à sa maturité, illustrés par la reproduction de pages où figurent collages, dessins et notes manuscrites, photographies, diagrammes.

Tout commence par cet extrait du Notebook I, daté Londres, 6 février 1992 : « Ne pas composer avec des objets, mais plutôt les rendre présents de la façon la plus évidente qui soit. Découvrir les choses comme elles ont été disposées par le hasard. […] L'art n'est pas toujours affaire de composition. Rien n'est parfait. Ma vision, mes critères, seront toujours erronés, alors pourquoi chercher la perfection ? La perfection n'est pas la vérité. […] Considérer l'art conceptuel comme l'expression de sentiments, l'appropriation d'un espace, d'objets […]. Chercher la poésie, ou un moment de poésie. Présences. Connaissance et acceptation de ce que nous sommes. Communiquer avec le monde. » Cela vaut manifeste.

Les passages retenus par Orozco, les images qui les accompagnent, établissent un contexte, décrivent son travail, suivent le cours de sa pensée. Des citations la nourrissent, de Borges ou d'autres auteurs. Une formule est récurrente, à partir de 1993 : « Solvitur ambulando », la solution vient en marchant. Le déplacement est à la fois le mot d'ordre des années 1990 pour toute une génération de plasticiens et une nécessité personnelle pour Orozco, dans sa quête existentielle.

Anne Bertrand
Gabriel Orozco, l'atelier des écrits
artpress, N°483-484, December 15, 2020, p.66-69.

Double page extraite de/*spread from:* Notebook 18, 10/01/2010 - 05/09/2012. Tous les visuels/*all pictures:* pages de carnets publiées dans/*pages from notebooks excerpted from* «Written Matter» de/*by* Gabriel Orozco. Copyright 2020. Reprinted with Permission from The MIT PRESS. Court. l'artiste, galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Marian Goodman, New York; White Cube, Londres

Dès les premières pages, *Yielding Stone* (1992) l'incarne, boule de plasticine pesant le poids de l'artiste, roulée dans la rue, absorbant poussière, saletés, accidents. Il y revient souvent, l'observe, matière à réflexion. «Transformable à l'infini. Supervivante et stérile en même temps. […] Un intermédiaire, pour faire ensuite quelque chose de définitif. Mais rien n'est jamais définitif, aussi la plasticine est-elle une condition même du temps et de l'instabilité. Matériau hautement vulnérable. Tout y adhère. […] Chaque main qui la touche y laisse sa marque. Peau vive. […] L'art paralyse le vivant. […] Pas naturelle, elle a l'air artificielle et organique en même temps. Solide et liquide. Laide. Horrible. Merde. Chewing-gum. Substance. D'un brillant d'huile. (Avec des cheveux ?) (Des brindilles ?) (Des graines ?) […] Ce n'est pas un monstre. Pas un monument. […] Pas un statement. Pas une sculpture. Pas de l'art. C'est une boule de plasticine. Sale. Elle peut être blanche, et devenir grise. […] Poussière.»

Ce dernier matériau fascine, obsède l'artiste. L'important n'est pas là, mais «d'aller au-delà de l'affirmation des matériaux et d'atteindre la cristallisation d'une idée à travers eux, dans un espace (qui parfois n'est pas traditionnel) exprimant l'existence d'un phénomène véritablement esthétique, qu'il soit artistique ou naturel. […] nous devons continuer d'explorer les lieux possibles de l'art, d'un point de vue social, historique, géographique, de même que notre attitude vis-à-vis de la réalité qui nous entoure, et les possibilités que nous avons de la révéler à travers l'art.»

Orozco se définit comme un «spectateur activateur», il dit encore «vigile». Ce qu'il produit résulte d'expériences. «Le mot art est un verbe. Comme courir, naviguer, regarder, respirer, manger […]. Les possibilités de l'art sont découvertes à travers cette action. Non dans l'objet fixe, fini, qui en résulte. Mais dans ce qui arrive avant, infiniment. L'objet final doit être le calme du geste qu'il contient.» Tour à tour philosophe, poète, l'artiste lit dans des taches de café la destinée de deux personnes, le cosmos. «Ne pas être un spécialiste, mais toujours un amateur, anonyme.» Le dernier mot sonne comme un défi.

D'emblée, Orozco parle d'«aller contre les attentes» qu'il suscite. Il entend pratiquer un «art de la confusion, du mélange, de la dissolution». 25 janvier 1993: «Être légion. N'être personne./ Travailler dans la rue, sur le toit./ Donner rendez-vous dans des cafés, ouvrir un carnet./ Parler. Écouter. Aller à la bibliothèque./ […] Construire toute chose n'importe où./ […] Atelier sans toit ni murs, mais avec un vaste sol./ Atelier sans objets, sans matériaux appropriés./ Atelier avec quoi que ce soit./ Avec tout ce qui l'environne./ […] Installer, prendre possession de, observer, se présenter. Disparaître au coin de la rue.» Il s'agit de ne pas avoir, mais d'être. De décevoir. «L'art de l'esquive. L'art de se perdre. […] L'art de ne pas être célèbre. L'art de rester tranquille. L'art de ne pas photographier. De voir et de disparaître. L'art de partir, d'abandonner. L'art de devenir disponible. L'art de s'enfuir; de ne pas communiquer.» C'est radical, magnifique d'humilité et d'orgueil mêlés, sans doute intenable. Mais il essaie.

REALIA

Des œuvres emblématiques apparaissent au fil des pages, à travers leur conception lente ou dans un éclair. 1er février 1993: «Biennale de Venise: Acheter une paire de chaussures. Garder la boîte. Aller se promener en les ayant aux pieds […]. Présenter la boîte vide.» En mars, Orozco dresse une liste d'actions pour son projet d'exposition à la Kanaal Art Foundation de Courtrai. Le 2 août à New York: «Oranges sur le bord des fenêtres d'appartements derrière le MoMA. […] Agrandir l'espace autant que possible. Au-delà de l'espace du musée. […] *Home run.*» D'octobre à décembre, il relate la naissance de *la DS* à Paris, concluant, un an plus tard: «*La DS* est un autoportrait.» Publier ces carnets suppose honnêteté, lucidité. C'est flagrant dans la relation, le 11 avril 1995, sur deux pages et demie, de l'échec d'*Habemus Vespam* (1995) – ou comment «une bonne idée devient un cauchemar concret». Faut-il pour autant la détruire ?

L'ombre de Duchamp plane (mais aussi celle de Cage): «C'est dans l'espace entre l'objet et celui qui le perçoit que se trouve l'art. Et tout ce qui maintient vivant ce qui advient dans cet espace entre la chose et celui qui la reçoit, la découvre et la crée, est encore de l'art.»

Dès 1996, Orozco présente à la Kunsthalle de Zurich l'installation *Working Tables 1991-1996*, où sont disposées sur deux plans, parmi les menus objets trouvés et artefacts conservés dans des boîtes à chaussures, en tant qu'ils préfigurent des projets à venir, des pages de ses Notebooks. Ceux-ci réapparaissent en 2006, au Palacio de Bellas Artes de Mexico, dans le cadre d'une rétrospective où les *Working Tables 1991-2006* constituent une pièce maîtresse. D'autres pages, nombreuses, illustrent le catalogue de l'exposition itinérante du MoMA de New York à la Tate Modern de Londres, de 2009 à 2011, passée par le Centre Pompidou à Paris. L'artiste y explique: «J'appelle mes carnets des *realia*, et je pense que les tables devraient peut-être aussi être considérées comme [telles]. […] ce ne sont pas à proprement parler des œuvres d'art; […] plutôt des œuvres en cours d'exécution: elles sont réelles dans le temps.»

Written Matter est donc hybride, non seulement production théorique, mais réalité concrète. En vingt ans, la création d'Orozco a, comme lui, changé; pourtant, le 20 mars 2012, à l'Instituto Superior de Arte de La Havane, il consacre un «séminaire [à] la poussière». La singularité de ses carnets reflète son attachement à l'organique comme à l'abstraction, à la vie du langage, à la géométrie comme au hasard, nous invitant à considérer son œuvre sous ces angles différents.

Qu'un étudiant en école d'art ou artiste, quelles que soient sa, ses pratiques, ouvre ce livre au hasard, presque à n'importe quelle page, il trouvera, comme tout autre lecteur, une idée, inspiration. ■

(1) Gabriel Orozco, *Written Matter. Work Notebooks 1992-2012*, traduit de l'espagnol (Mexique) en anglais par Gabriela Jauregui et The Song Cave, Cambridge (Ma.)-Londres, The MIT Press, 2020, 380 p., $39,95. Les extraits sont traduits par l'auteure.

Historienne de l'art et critique, Anne Bertrand enseigne à la HÉAR, Strasbourg.

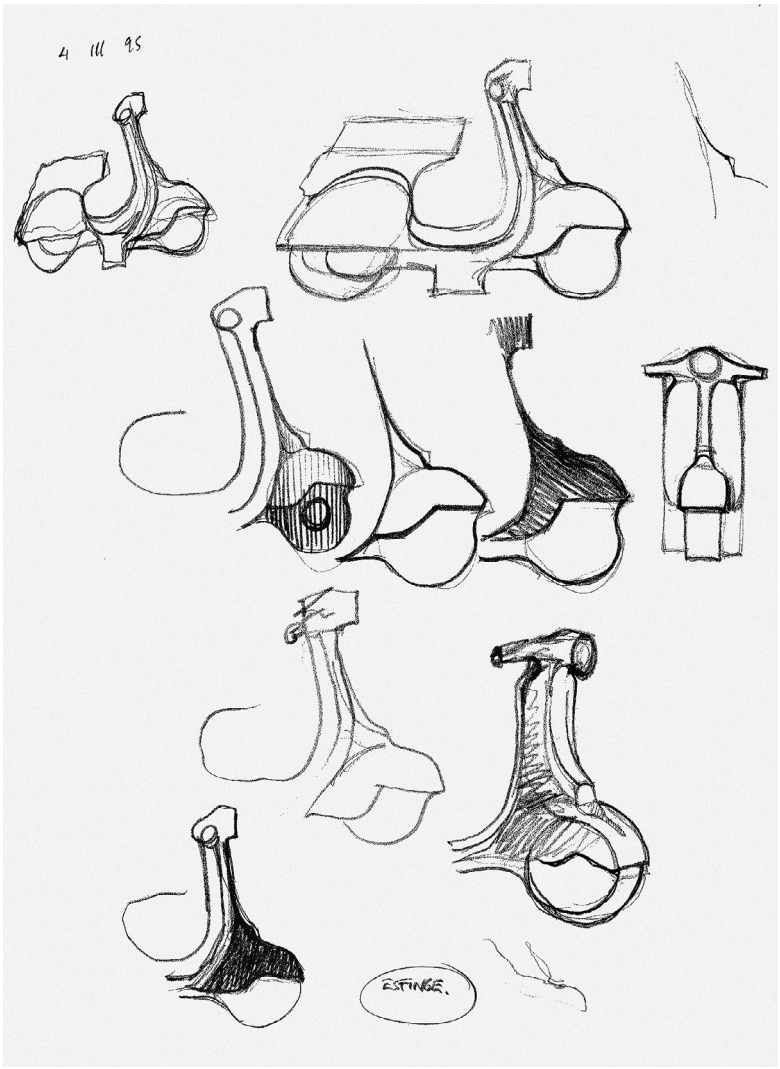
Gabriel Orozco
Né en/*born* 1962 à/*in* Jalapa, Mexique
Vit et travaille entre/*lives and works between* Tokyo, Mexico City et/*and* New York
Représenté par/*represented by* Chantal Crousel, Paris; Marian Goodman, New York; Kurimanzutto, Mexico; White Cube, Londres
Expositions personnelles récentes/ *Recent solo shows* (sélection):
2019 Kurimanzutto, Mexico; Chantal Crousel, Paris; XIII Bienal de la Habana, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana, La Havane
2018 Marian Goodman, New York
Expositions collectives récentes/ *Recent group shows* (sélection):
2020 *Duro Olowu: Seing Chicago*, MCA Chicago; *Des marches, démarches*, Frac Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Marseille
2018 *The Street. Where the World is Made*, MAXXI, Rome; *The Seventh Continent*, 16th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul

Anne Bertrand
Gabriel Orozco, l'atelier des écrits
artpress, N°483-484, December 15, 2020, p.66-69.

The Written Studio

The publication of excerpts from the notebooks kept by Gabriel Orozco between 1992 and 2012 reveals his process, turning these writings into the studio he has always refused to have.

Born in 1962 in Jalapa, Mexico, Gabriel Orozco chose early on not to have a fixed place of creation, but to travel and create on the spot, with the means at hand. He resided mainly in New York, in his native country, and later also in France, but has also travelled to London, Kortrijk, Milan, Berlin, Gwangju, India, Japan, Quito, Buenos Aires... where he created drawings, sculptures, photographs, installations, then paintings. Nineteen notebooks supplied material for *Written Matter* (1), the texts from which were chosen by the artist, spanning from his beginnings to his maturity, illustrated by the reproduction of pages with collages, drawings and handwritten notes, photographs, diagrams.
It all begins with this excerpt from Notebook I, dated London, February 6th, 1992: "Not to compose with objects but rather to make them present in the most evident way. To discover things as they are placed by chance. […] Art is not always composing. Nothing is perfect. My vision and criteria will always be a mistake, so why try to seek out perfection? Perfection is not truth. […] Conceptual art as the expression of feelings, appropriation of espace, of objects […]. Looking for poetry or a moment of poetry. Presences. Knowledge and acceptance of what we are. To communicate with the world." This can be taken as a manifesto.



Extrait de/*from* Notebook 7, 11/15/1994 - 08/02/1995

ROLLING STONE

The passages Orozco has selected, and the images that accompany them, establish a context, describe his work and follow the course of his thinking. Quotations feed them, from Borges and other authors. A recurring formula, from 1993 onwards: "*Solvitur ambulando*", the solution lies in walking. Displacement is both the watchword of the 1990s for a whole generation of visual artists, and a personal necessity for Orozco in his existential quest.
From the very first pages, *Yielding Stone* (1992) embodies this, a ball of plasticine heavy as the artist, rolled in the street, absorbing dust, dirt, accidents. He often comes back to it, observes it, food for thought. "Infinitely transformable. Superalive and sterile at the same time. […] An intermediary to afterwards do something definitive. But nothing is definitive, so plasticine is a condition of time and instability. Highly vulnerable material. Everything sticks to it. […] Each hand that touches it, leaves its mark. Live skin. [...] Art paralyzes the living. […] It's not nature, but looks artificial and organic at the same time. Solid and liquid. Ugly. Horrible. Shit. Cud. Substance. An oily shine. (With hair?) (With twigs?) (Weeds?) […] It's not a monster. It's not a monument. […] It's not a statement. It's not a sculpture. It's not art. It's a plasticine ball. Dirty. It can be white so it becomes grey. […] Dust."
This material fascinates, obsesses the artist. The importance isn't there, but "to go beyond an affirmation of the materials and to reach the concretion of an idea through them, in a (sometimes non-traditional) space that expresses the existence of a real aesthetic, artistic or natural phenomenon. […] We do need to keep exploring the possible social, historical and geographic locations of art, as well as our attitude in relation with our surrounding reality and the possibilities of its revelation through art."
Orozco defines himself as "an activating spectator", and furthermore a "vigil". What he produces results from experience. "The word art is a verb. Like running, sailing, looking, breathing, eating […]. The possibilities of art are discovered in that action. Not in the fixed, finished, resulting object. But in what happened infinitely before. The final object must be the calm of the contained gesture."
By turn philosopher, poet, the artist reads in coffee stains the destiny of two people, the cosmos. "To not be a specialist but always

Anne Bertrand
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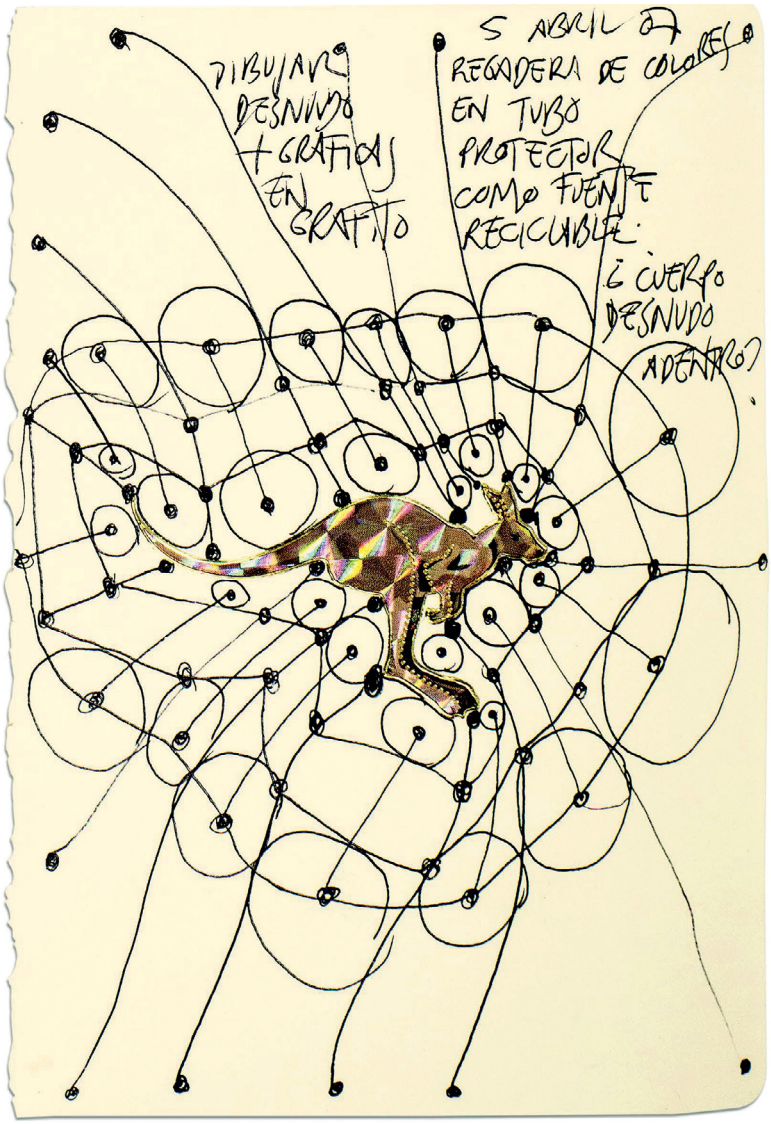


Extrait de/*from* Notebook 15, 12/03/2005 - 12/20/2007

an amateur and anonymous." The last word has the ring of a challenge.
From the outset, Orozco speaks of "break(ing) expectations". He intends to practice an "Art of bewilderment, mix and dissolution." January 25th, 1993: "Be many. Be no one/ Work on the street and on the roof/ Make appointments in cafés and open a notebook/ Talk. Listen. Go to the library/ [...] Build anything wherever/ [...] Studio without a roof, without walls and with a lot of ground/ Studio without objects and without proper materials/ Studio with whatever. Workshop with everything that surrounds it/ [...] To install, take possession, witness and present oneself. To disappear at the next corner." It's about not having, but being. About disappointing. "The art of avoiding. The art of losing oneself. The art of not being famous. The art of keeping quiet. The art of not photographing. Of seeing and disappearing. The art of leaving, of abandoning. The art of becoming available. The art of running; of not communicating." It is radical, magnificent mix humility and pride mixed together, undoubtedly untenable. But he tries.
Emblematic works appear throughout the pages, through their slow conception or in a flash. February 1st, 1993: "Venice Biennale: To buy a pair of shoes. Keep the box. Go stroll in them [...]. Present empty box." In March Orozco draws up a list of actions for his exhibition project at the Kanaal Art Foundation in Kortrijk. August 2nd in New York:

"Oranges on the windowsills in the apartments behind MoMA. Extend the space as much as possible. Beyond the space of the museum. [...] Home run." From October to December he recounts the birth of the *DS* in Paris, concluding a year later: "The *DS* is a self-portrait."
Publishing these notebooks presupposes honesty and lucidity. This is evident in the two-and-a-half-page report on April 11th, 1995 on the failure of *Habemus Vespam* (1995)—or how "a good idea becomes a concrete nightmare". Does this mean that it has to be destroyed?

REALIA

Duchamp's shadow hovers (but also Cage's): "In the space between the object and whoever perceives it, is where art is found. And whatever keeps alive what happens in that space between the thing and whoever receives it, discovers and creates it, is still art."
In 1996 Orozco presented the installation *Working Tables 1991-1996* at the Kunsthalle in Zurich, in which pages from his notebooks are arranged on two levels among the small found objects and artefacts kept in shoeboxes as a preview of future projects. These reappeared in 2006 at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, as part of a retrospective exhibition in which *Working Tables 1991-2006* is a centrepiece. Numerous other pages illustrate the catalogue of the exhibition that travelled from New York's MoMA to the Tate Modern in London, via the Pompidou Centre in Paris between 2009 and 2011. The artist explains: "I call my notebooks *realia*, and I think that perhaps the tables should also be considered [as such]. [...] they're not strictly speaking works of art; ... they're rather works in progress: they're real in time."
Written Matter is therefore a hybrid, not only theoretical production, but concrete reality. In twenty years Orozco's creation has, like him, changed; however, on March 20th, 2012, at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, he signed a "Seminar on Dust". The singularity of his notebooks reflects his attachment to the organic as well as the abstract, to the life of language, to geometry as if by chance, inviting us to consider his work from these different angles.
Whether art school student or artist, whatever their practices, whoever opens this book at random, almost on any page, will find, like any other reader, an idea, an inspiration. ■

Translation: Chloé Baker

(1) Gabriel Orozco, *Written Matter. Work Notebooks 1992-2012*, translated from the Spanish (Mexico) by Gabriela Jauregui and The Song Cave, Cambridge (Ma.)-London, The MIT Press, 380 p., $39.95.

Art historian and critic Anne Bertrand teaches at HEAR (Haute École des Arts du Rhin), in Strasbourg.

Anne Bertrand
Gabriel Orozco, l'atelier des écrits
artpress, N°483-484, December 15, 2020, p.66-69.

art
press

GABRIEL OROZCO

Entre dessins à l'aquarelle et sculptures en obsidienne, Gabriel Orozco conjugue le Japon et le Mexique dans des œuvres teintées de poésie.

Vivant de plus en plus entre le Japon et le Mexique, Gabriel Orozco présente cet automne à Paris de nouveaux travaux hybrides issus de la superposition, plus que de la symbiose, entre deux cultures – et autant d'histoires et de traditions – que tout sépare : celle de son pays de naissance et celle d'un nouveau pays presque d'adoption. On y retrouve surtout cette manière toute personnelle dont Gabriel Orozco expérimente la mémoire des lieux, des choses et des matières, recherches qu'il avait inaugurées dans les salles du château de Chaumont-sur-Loire il y a quelques années. Des dessins à l'aquarelle – *suisai* en japonais – de plus en plus elliptiques et évanescents sont ainsi réalisés sur des panneaux de calligraphie japonaise (*shikishi*) ou de la carte d'or ; ils nous apparaissent comme des souvenirs ou des fragments agrandis d'œuvres plus anciennes, voire des dessins simplement produits par les cycles du soleil, du vent, de l'eau ou le mouvement des végétaux eux-mêmes, de par leur évidence et leur limpidité. À l'instar d'une poésie de Paul Verlaine, tout dans ses aquarelles se pose et se dépose avec une délicatesse, une légèreté et une discrétion infinies : « Et dans les longs plis de son voile / Qui palpite aux brises d'automne, / Cache et montre au cœur qui s'étonne / La vérité comme une étoile. »

Charles-Arthur Boyer
Gabriel Orozco
artpress, October 1, 2019.
https://urlr.me/JU75dv

Vue de l'exposition Gabriel Orozco, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2019, Court. l'artiste et Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, Ph. Florian Kleinefenn

ÉTOILES

Le lexique propre à l'œuvre de Gabriel Orozco est néanmoins toujours présent à travers ses proliférations de demi-cercles à la surface d'un autre plan de représentation. Mais, sa palette étant devenue plus sourde et proche des teintes du paysage, l'effet de distanciation est moins saisissant entre son système spatial de pensée et le réel – ou la vérité – sur lequel il appose ses « étoiles » ; ici, les uns comme les autres flottent au sein d'une cosmogonie commune. Ce que renforcent de nouveaux fonds à l'aspect métallique, presque cuivré ou argenté, que l'artiste a frottés et travaillés jusqu'à obtenir l'atmosphère des choses plus que leur définition. À l'opposé, une suite de sculptures en obsidienne réunies sur une même table nous apparaît comme la réunion d'objets scientifiques dignes des expérimentations les plus savantes qu'a pu produire la Renaissance dans le domaine de la représentation géométrique dans l'espace. Si ce n'est, là encore, que, derrière leur forme apparente, pourtant admirable, leur nature est plus complexe. De par la spécificité et la qualité de l'obsidienne, leur aspect passe ainsi du noir le plus dense, opaque et absolu, à des irisations fragiles et translucides. Et si la célèbre « pierre de la mélancolie » de Dürer n'était que d'obsidienne ? Par des mouvements simples et subtils fondés sur la singularité et la spécificité de chaque chose, Gabriel Orozco transforme en profondeur, d'œuvre en œuvre, notre regard et notre appréhension du monde qui nous entoure, ses récits, son histoire, sa mémoire, ses richesses. Rien n'y fait du bruit, tout y est salutaire.

Gabriel Orozco, *Suisai LXVII*, 2019, groupe de 3 aquarelles sur carte d'or, 67 x 57.5 x 4.5 cm, Court. l'artiste et Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, Ph. Florian Kleinefenn

Charles-Arthur Boyer
Gabriel Orozco
artpress, October 1, 2019.
https://urlr.me/JU75dv

Le sens du détail.

Papier cadeau.

Par Roxana Azimi

Illustration Satoshi Hashimoto pour M Le magazine du Monde. Gabriel Orozco/ Photo Gerardo Landa Rojano

Gabriel Orozco, qui expose à partir du 7 septembre à la Galerie Chantal Crousel, à Paris, est une éponge, qui s'inspire de tout ce qui croise son chemin. *« Je suis en changement constant, comme un débutant,* confie le Mexicain nomade. *L'accident, l'improvisation, la décision immédiate, c'est ma méthode. »* Le hasard tient parfois à la course aléatoire d'une goutte d'aquarelle sur une feuille de papier. Vivant en partie à Tokyo, Orozco s'est entiché du *shikishi,* ces planches de papier de riz marouflé sur carton ceinturées de fil d'or, dont on se sert habituellement pour la calligraphie. *« Ce papier n'est pas blanc, il n'est pas neutre, c'est presque comme une peau »,* détaille-t-il. La demi-douzaine de nouvelles aquarelles qu'il présente à Paris reprennent son vocabulaire habituel de sphères, ellipses, courbes et contre-courbes. Le papier japonais leur donne toutefois un éclat différent. Et l'artiste de préciser : *« Ce support, qui est utilisé dans une pratique aussi contrôlée que la calligraphie, rend mes aquarelles plus organiques, plus ouvertes à l'accident. »* Le compromis idéal pour celui qui aime autant la géométrie que le chaos.

Gabriel Orozco, Galerie Chantal Crousel, 10, rue Charlot, 75003 Paris. Du 7 septembre au 5 octobre. www.crousel.com

Roxana Azimi
Le sens du détail. Papier cadeau
M, le magazine du Monde, August 31, 2019, p.78.

aperture

Gabriel Orozco

María Minera

Walter Benjamin described Eugène Atget as a photographer who "always passed by the 'great sights and so-called landmarks'" but instead was attentive to "a long row of boot lasts … or tables after people have finished eating and left, the dishes not yet cleared away." We could go on: nor would he overlook a flowery carpet hanging from a window to dry under the sun, or a bakery display with piled-up bread forming peculiar geometric patterns. That is, Atget was the rare kind of photographer who was interested not in human beings, but rather in the traces they left in the world.

An artist like Gabriel Orozco fits comfortably into this category. Instead of following in the steps of Mexican photographers dedicated, above all, to trying to penetrate "the country's soul"—as French Surrealist André Breton would say—by means of its people, Orozco focuses on the footprints of those people, or of others abroad, as he is a tireless traveler. Manuel Álvarez Bravo, in *Los agachados* (The crouched ones, 1934), portrays a group of laborers wearing ragged and dusty clothes, sitting on benches chained to the bar of an old diner. The men have their backs to the camera and the shadow produced by the metal curtain of the place cuts off their faces, making them appear crouched (with the double meaning of *agachado* because it refers also to people who allow themselves to be subdued).

Orozco, in turn, creates an image, *Sillas de espera* (Waiting chairs, 1998), that could almost be the same image, except in his work everyone is gone. On a visit to India, he captured a row of four empty plastic chairs, each one positioned under a dark circle on the wall—marks left by the sweaty heads of individuals who have waited sitting on those chairs throughout the years, now almost replaced by their own ghosts who sit patiently in that deserted space. In his approach, Orozco resembles Atget, preferring to show an unpopulated world, where there are only vestiges of human life.

The significant difference is that, for Orozco, all these traces function, above all, as sculptural matter. The photographic image is secondary. What primarily interests him is what is happening not as a photographic instant, but as a form. To him, that shot of a waiting room in India is only indirectly photographic. One could call it *collateral*, in that it accompanies a sculptural event.

Since the beginning of his career, back in the 1980s, Orozco saw himself as an artist whose working materials were not inside an atelier but rather out on the street. The type of sculpture that seemed possible to him was not made with a chisel, but discovered in the configurations taking place randomly in the world, without the artist's intervention—or, at most, subtle intervention. Like that mattress left on a sidewalk (*Futon Homeless*, 1992), which the artist perceives as a sculpture not because of its being a mass—which it is—but rather for the way it is rolled up on itself to the point of completely challenging the idea of a mattress as an object used to sleep on, and turning it into some sort of involuntary Henry Moore sculpture left to its fate on a New York street. Yet, Orozco does not take the mattress into an exhibition space—first of all, because he would need a moving truck. Rather, he takes a photograph that, while being a sign of something we can perceive happening in the real world, is also a signaling: literally, a way of pointing out that peculiar organization of matter in space, which is nothing but sculptural.

And, as a matter of fact, he sometimes decides to alter what is happening in order to precisely highlight the condition of an object. Another example, *Tortillas y ladrillos* (Tortillas and bricks, 1990): next to a gas cylinder, the artist finds a series of piled-up bricks. This composition could have been enough to him; these volumes of clay have sculptural traits on their own but, at the same time, lack specificity: they are nothing but towers of ordinary bricks, like the ones you would see anywhere. The artist

Maria Minera
Gabriel Orozco
aperture, Fall, 2019, p.70-77.

Maria Minera
Gabriel Orozco
aperture, Fall, 2019, p.70-77.

Top:
Sillas de espera
(Waiting chairs), 1998

Right:
Tortillas y ladrillos
(Tortillas and bricks),
1990

then proceeds to place a tortilla on top of each pile. A minimal gesture, but one that gives the scene that strangeness, bringing together, at the same time—as Benjamin would say—the absence of intention and the most absolute intentionality.

But is photography then not the work itself but a mere record? "It is the work indeed," says Orozco. "As, in some cases, it is the only way I have to present something, an idea, an experience. I do not use an image as a 'patronizing' document intending to show something important to the others.... That doesn't interest me. My intention is that the image presents itself as a chair, a tree, a fact: it is there." The thing is: that which "is there" is indeed there, but in an unsustainable present outside the photographic image. That is to say, it does not operate in the same way as does a statue in the park, which will be there every time you return. Orozco's statues are only there when he sees them. Afterward, they disappear, like that egg (*Sunny Side Up*, 2015) that has just been poured on a plate, which most probably ended up fried and in someone's stomach. However, for a few seconds, that sunny-side up could boast of being a colorful, viscous planet. Here we are seeing an image act as a transportable doppelgänger of a momentary sculpture.

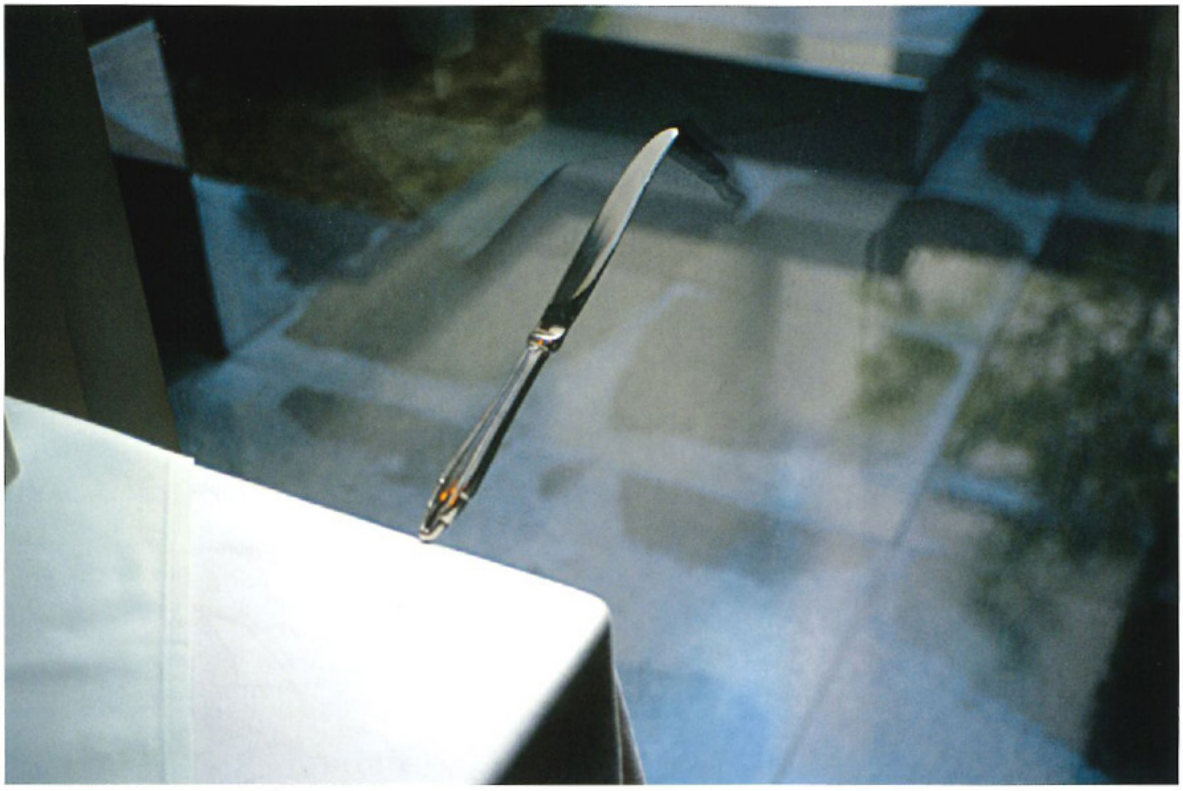
It is the photographic image that allows us to put ourselves in the sculptor's place and see what he saw, from where he saw it. The gravity-defying knife in *Knife on Glass* (2000) is there, floating in the air, but only if one looks at it from a very precise angle. Look a few centimeters beyond, and the trick of the glass that holds it is revealed. In that sense, photography can be seen as a second act that, while closely participating in the creation of the form, does not stop being an ulterior reflection that adds, through its unique point of view, a new condition of possibility to the work. To Orozco, not only does photography capture, but it also sculpts.

Orozco's work is about identifying the sculptural quality of certain spontaneous formations in space, and also about creating structures that express their sculptural value only when being captured. Nowhere does this become clearer than in *Piñanona en el muro* (*Piñanona* in the wall, 2013), an image in which the sculpture is made half of leaves, half of shadow, something that could by no means translate into sculptural volumes due to the elusive nature of the shadow. One begins to understand what Orozco has said about photography: that rather than a window, it is "like a 'space' that tries to capture situations." This is how his images are to be seen: as receptacles of transient and fragile, nonetheless forceful, material incidents.

María Minera is an art writer based in Mexico City.

Translated from the Spanish by Enrique Pérez Rosiles.

Maria Minera
Gabriel Orozco
aperture, Fall, 2019, p.70-77.



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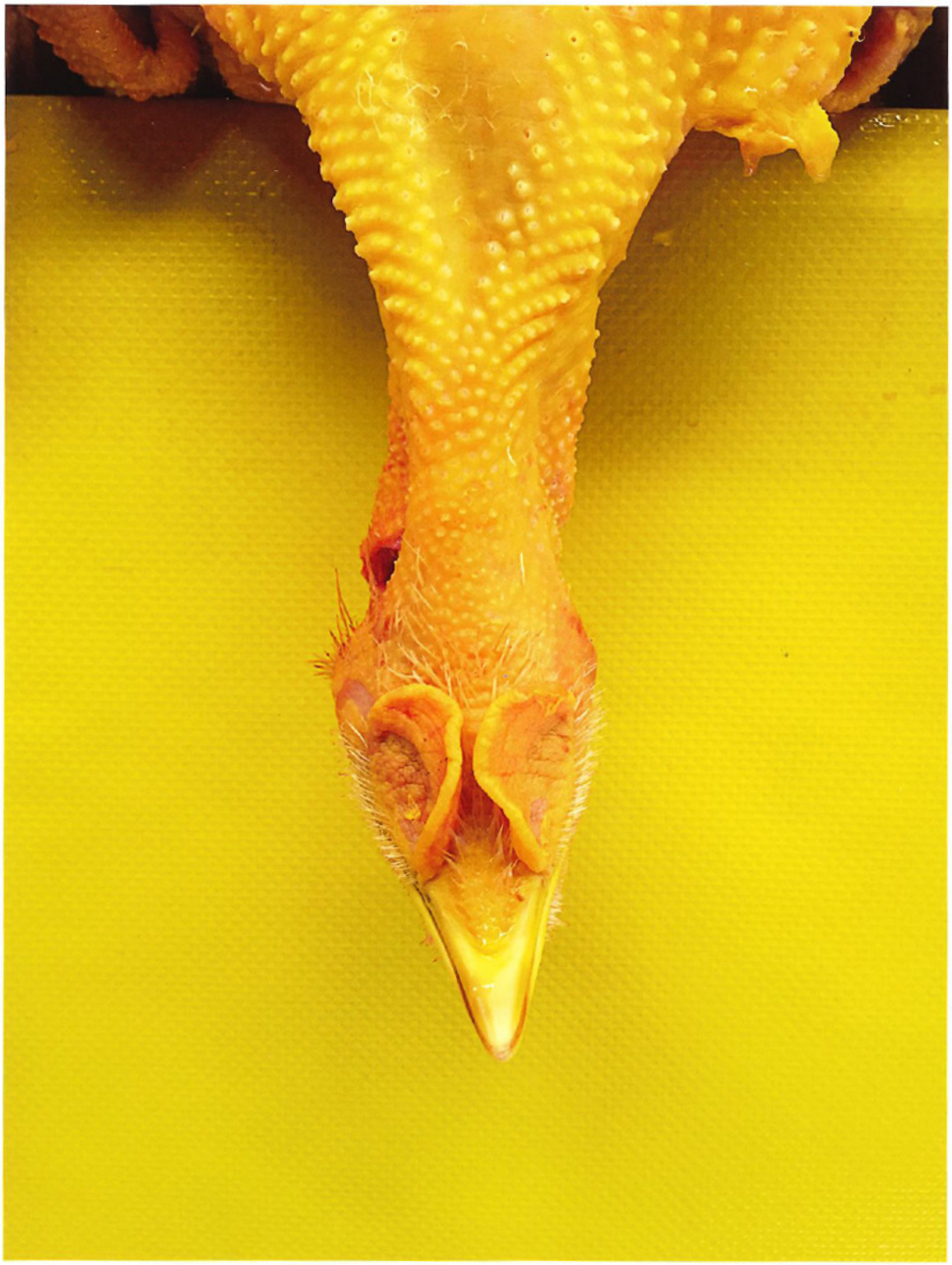


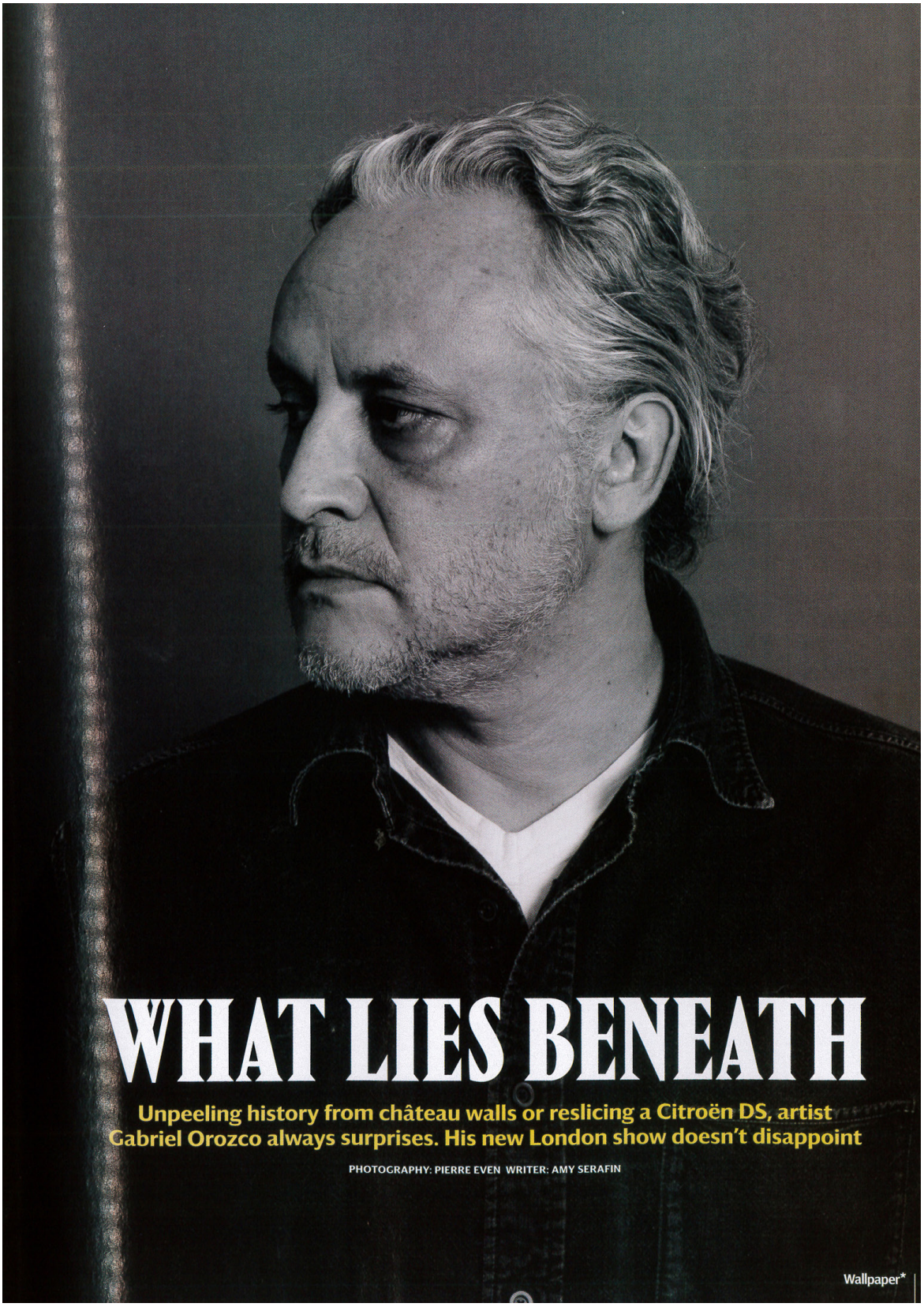
Maria Minera
Gabriel Orozco
aperture, Fall, 2019, p.70-77.

***Piñanona en el muro*, 2013**
Courtesy the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York

Maria Minera
Gabriel Orozco
aperture, Fall, 2019, p.70-77.

Wallpaper*

Amy Serafin
What lies beneath
Wallpaper, N°196, July, 2015, p.50-54.

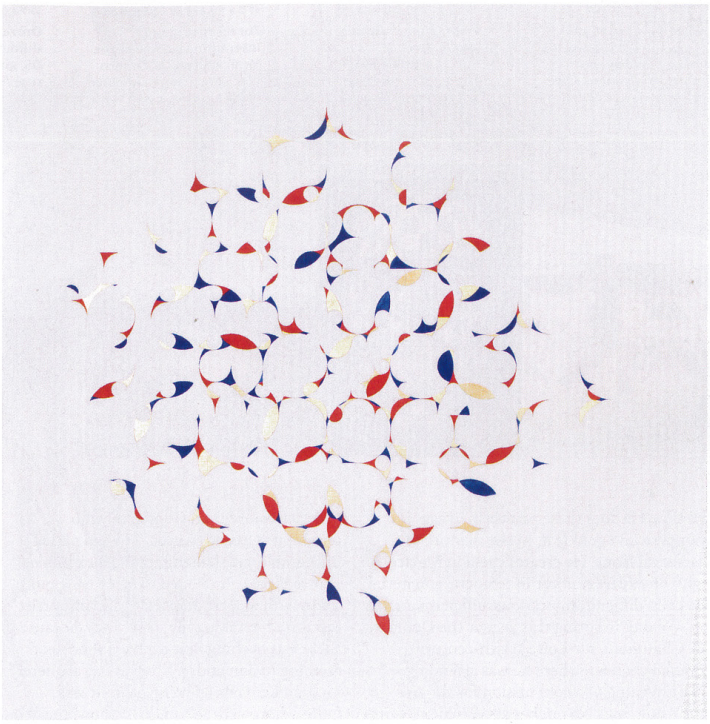


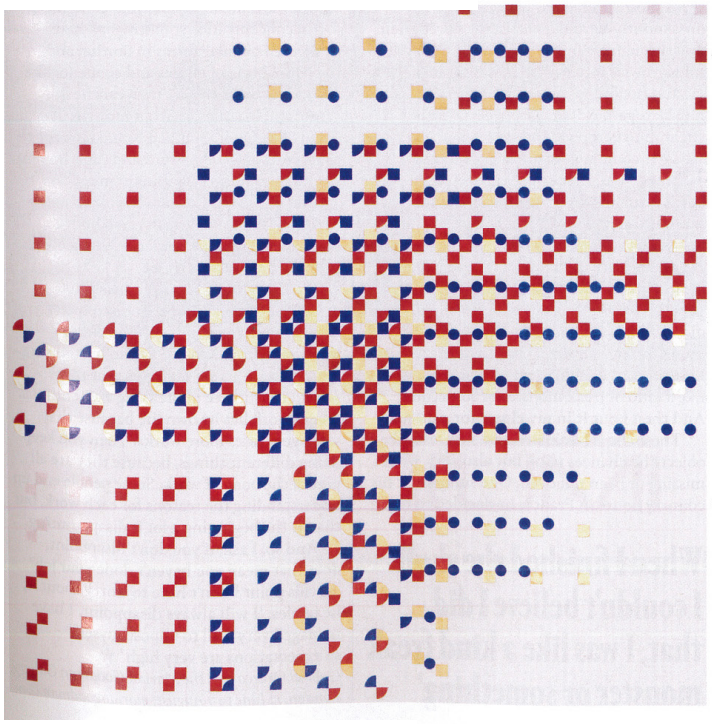
Amy Serafin
What lies beneath
Wallpaper, N°196, July, 2015, p.50-54.

Gabriel Orozco figured that being the subject of a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo this year was as good an excuse as any to move with his family to Japan. Which means that if you ask the artist where he resides, the answer is now even more convoluted than before, when he lived between Mexico City, Paris and New York.

Never knowing where Orozco is going to show up next is an apt metaphor for his career. The Mexican artist glides from photography to sculpture, from installation to painting, from conceptual to concrete, refusing to be categorised. 'I don't like to repeat myself,' he explains, admitting that he even grew weary of his recent mid-career retrospectives. 'If I see my work again and again, I start to get bored.'

'He manages to master each form while raising questions that go beyond the form, and that's what characterises a great artist,' notes Christine Macel, chief curator at the Musée National d'Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou, which hosted an Orozco retrospective in 2010-2011.





Orozco's latest work is showing this summer at the Marian Goodman gallery in London. As usual, part of it is made from objects he's chanced upon – this time scraps of fabric from *obis* (kimono sashes). He bought them in a shop in a small Japanese town because he found them beautiful and appreciates that fabrics are important in Japanese culture and Buddhist art.

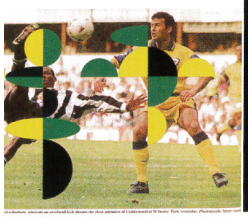
After studying them for a while and getting over his feeling that it would be 'sacrilegious' to cut them, he took a circular knife and cropped them, flipping them from front to back, to front again, to create geometric forms made of circles, vaguely reminiscent of mandalas. 'The embroidery is sometimes more beautiful on the back than on the front,' he says. He mounted the results on layered squares of paper on a Japanese scroll like a collage, the gold threads in the fabric reflecting the light.

Orozco is also presenting new paintings in London, part of his ongoing exploration of circular forms and grids, a system of sequencing colours taken from how knights advance on a chessboard. 'I like the knight's movement because it's a tri-dimensional proposition in a bi-dimensional game,' »

TWO OF OROZCO'S UNTITLED 2015 WORKS SHOWING AT MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY IN LONDON, BOTH TEMPERA AND BURNISHED GOLD LEAF ON LINEN CANVAS

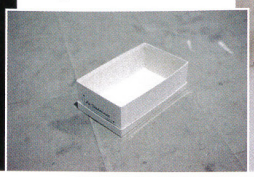
Amy Serafin
What lies beneath
Wallpaper, N°196, July, 2015, p.50-54.

1996 – *Atomists*
A series of computer-generated prints where newspaper sports images were overlaid with geometric circles



1997 – *Black Kites*
During a six-month convalescence, Orozco covered a skull in a chequerboard design using graphite pencil

1993 – *Empty Shoe Box*
For his first major international show at the Venice Biennale, Orozco placed an empty shoebox in his allotted space



1993 – *La DS*
Orozco removed the central third of a vintage Citroën DS, giving the car a super-streamlined shape

2014 – *Inner Cut: Small Bone*
A birchwood boomerang, handmade by Orozco and later reunited with its cut-out leftovers

he says. He does these paintings in egg tempera and gold leaf, in the manner of medieval icons. He creates them in Mexico with an expert restorer in tempera, a material he calls 'difficult, mysterious and permanent'.

We met in spring this year at the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, a 15th-century French château, where he was attending the unveiling of a commission for the site (showing until November 2015). When he first visited the château, what inspired him most was the layers of old wallpaper, dating back to 1875, peeling off the walls of the former guest bedrooms. He enlarged and copied the motifs using a machine from the 1970s that sprays oil paint on canvas, resulting in strange, blurry reproductions of the patterns and flowers. The work's name, *Fleurs Fantômes*, makes reference to the ghosts, or fragments, of a disappeared past.

Orozco's own personal history began in 1962 in Jalapa, Mexico, where he was born to a father who painted communist murals and a mother who played the piano. He decided to be an artist at an early age. 'I saw my father working every day, and he looked very happy painting, painting, all the time painting.'

He attended the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Mexico City, receiving a classic fine arts education. He then moved to Madrid, in 1986, where he took courses at the Circulo de Bellas Artes. In Spain he discovered works by the likes of Piero Manzoni and Joseph Beuys, and started to see that art was everywhere to be found, either ready-made or ripe to be manipulated. Taking particular inspiration from the detritus of human activity, he's since applied this philosophy to everything from fruit at an abandoned marketplace to tumble-dryer lint.

From the outset he refused to play it safe, even when his career began to take off internationally. For his first major show, the 1993 Venice Biennale, he pulled a shoebox out of his backpack and placed it on the gallery floor. Marian Goodman, who represents Orozco, recalls, 'He had placed his humble yet challenging shoebox in his allotted space. It seemed to be causing quite a stir, with at least one dealer and one artist interested in taking his space away, because there was nothing in it except a shoebox, seeming to demand, "Where is the art here?" I remember Gabriel being calm. It was quite a statement for an artist showing internationally for the first time.

That same year Orozco also created one of his most spectacular pieces. Every day for a month, he and an assistant sawed their way through a vintage Citroën DS. They cut it lengthwise into thirds, removed the middle section (including the engine), then put it back together. Though its fantastically streamlined proportions implied greater speed, it could no longer go anywhere.

In 1997 Orozco dealt with the spectre of his own mortality by turning a human skull into art. His lung had collapsed and he wanted to spend his convalescence alone. He spent nearly six months covering a skull with a chequerboard design using graphite pencil. This was a decade before Damien Hirst did his platinum and diamond skull, and even Orozco found it a bit disturbing. 'When I finished it I couldn't believe I did that, I was like a kind of freak monster or something. And then I put it in my closet for a month.'

The artist is fascinated not only with the objects he chances upon but also with what's missing or been removed. One summer at his country house in France, he decided to teach himself how to throw a boomerang, then cut his own, out of birchwood. 'I liked the leftovers,' he says. 'I put them aside and said, "Maybe I can do Matisse with this.' He flew his home-made boomerangs before hanging them on the walls of the Marian Goodman gallery in New York last year. 'I didn't know what to do with the cut-outs. Matisse is too good. But I didn't dare to trash them. So I put them back with the boomerang.'

'When I finished the skull I couldn't believe I did that, I was like a kind freak monster or something'

As for those circles that show up repeatedly in his works, he says, 'I believe the idea of movement, circulation, containers, focus, concentration, pointing, all have to do with circular forms in motion and the connecting of circles and elements like individual bodies.' Over the years he has created an installation from four circular yogurt lids; photographed round blobs of toothpaste-thickened spit; and superimposed circles onto images of athletes in motion.

Macel says that despite the artist's multiplicity of styles, his overall body of work is remarkably coherent. 'No medium is isolated from the others.'

But Orozco often finds himself in the position of a rock band that disconcerts its fans by changing styles. These days, for example, critics tend to pan his tempera circle paintings. He responds that there should be a degree of breaking expectations. 'Every work has its own life because that work generates more works. Then you keep doing different things, because they are all part of the body of work. Some people end up understanding the reasons for each work, but that at the beginning a lot is disappointing.'

And so, I ask, if you don't disappoint, does that mean you haven't done your job? 'At this point I don't have to worry about it,' he smiles. 'I will always disappoint. I have managed very well to impose myself, so expectations are very high.' ✱

Gabriel Orozco is at the Marian Goodman Gallery, London, 12 June to 7 August, mariangoodman.com

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PURPLE

GABRIEL OROZCO

man, play, and games

interview by OLIVIER ZAHM and ALEXIS DAHAN

portrait by MAGNUS UNNAR

Gabriel Orozco is a traveler, an artist inspired by materials and opportunity. Born in Mexico in 1962 to an artist, the product of a leftist society, he was sent to alternative schools, and his life began, like the lives of many kids, with chess playing and soccer. He began by walking, thinking, noticing, traveling (he and his father are francophiles). He lives in Mexico and New York City — taking pictures and making uncommon objects out of clay and terracotta, such as his hands for *My Hands Are My Heart* (1991). He narrowed the entire cross-section of a Citroën DS, for his seminal *La DS* (1993). He calculated geometrical paintings in red, blue, white, and gold for *Samurai Tree Paintings*, based on interrelated circles, like the fabled swordsmen twirling steel. He's reconceived boomerangs, soccer balls, ping-pong tables, bicycles, and has carefully collected and organized desert samples, rubbish, and things so seemingly disparate as to make him an avatar of whatever it is you want to call contemporary art. He's all of that, as if by accident, himself.

OLIVIER ZAHM — What was your childhood like in Mexico in the '70s? I just discovered that your father was an important painter.
GABRIEL OROZCO — It was a very nice childhood. I was born in '62, so it was full of left-wing people, artists; my father was a young painter teaching at the university in Veracruz. I was surrounded by politics, the '68 student movement, there as much as in France. My childhood environment was very artistic, full of photographers, artists, singers, music. My schools were like Montessori, so it was a very progressive education. My father was important, but not the famous Orozco, who was another generation and unrelated to us. But my father also painted murals and was politically active in the Communist party. That was my childhood.

OLIVIER ZAHM — The '70s was an important moment in art, with greater freedom.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes. On one hand, there was total freedom, abstraction, the women's liberation and hippie movements. On the other were movements that were not so much into abstraction but more Marxist and political. You remember the discussions about realism and figuration, for and against abstraction — the polemics against US imperialism were very important in the '60s and the '70s.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Was it forbidden to speak English at home?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Well, in my house, my father didn't allow it.

OLIVIER ZAHM — That's incredible.
GABRIEL OROZCO — We wanted to be independent from the US.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Was that one of the reasons you transformed the Marian Goodman Gallery into a Spanish school for your 2013 exhibition, "Spanish Lessons"?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes. A lot of my work comes from my childhood. In this project I was asking the public to learn another way of communicating and also to see language as an art form. So I organized conferences and readings in Spanish about Jorge Luis Borges. They could listen to Borges even if they did not understand it. I thought that was important. There are so many Spanish-speaking people in the US, especially in New York. Nobody makes the effort to learn the language. I wanted people to experience otherness through art.

ALEXIS DAHAN — When did you first aspire to be an artist?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Since childhood — since the beginning. I saw my father painting every day, and he was happy working. He loved to work. And also the environment of

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art-making was nice. He knew writers and musicians and filmmakers. I simply liked the idea of painting and drawing. I also wanted to be a Formula One race-car driver because I learned to drive very early. But in Mexico it was a bit hard to be that. We have hardly anything, and nothing like Formula One.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Do those early interests still influence you?
GABRIEL OROZCO — For sure. I still like fast cars and soccer. I've played soccer my whole life. A lot of my art comes from my childhood. Even mathematics and geometry, because I didn't have the classic teaching of mathematics and algebra. It wasn't about memory, it was more...

OLIVIER ZAHM — Poetic?
GABRIEL OROZCO — It was more visceral.

OLIVIER ZAHM — There's a strong geometric element in abstract South American art, particulary in Brazil. Was it like that in Mexico?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes. It was important in Mexico, too. But the South Americans are more famous, say in Venezuela or Argentina. Mexico in the '60s and '70s was not completely devoted to abstraction. It was still connected to muralism, and that's the art I grew up with: figurative painting, political art.

OLIVIER ZAHM — The idea that art is a form of popular education?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes, with content. With history. And abstractionism was...

ALEXIS DAHAN — More bourgeois?
GABRIEL OROZCO — More corporate American, in a school-of-economics way. It was a bit more evasive, formalistic. So there were the two oppositions in Latin America. But in France, you have a lot of abstraction that is connected to politics. And a lot of the art in Mexico was connected to Europe, particularly '60s French politics, which was much closer to us than the Americans.

OLIVIER ZAHM — In France, the influence of the American art critic Clement Greenberg pushed formalism and minimalism in French art, creating its own language outside of consumerism. But we also had Guy Debord saying art had to be political, on the street. He wanted to change the way people looked at movies, at advertising, at everything. Greenberg came from America, and Guy Debord... Even Daniel Buren was not really formal at the beginning. Artists wanted to change perception.
ALEXIS DAHAN — Along with getting out of the studio, as Buren did, which is probably something you relate to.

GABRIEL OROZCO — When I started to get bored in my studio, I looked at options. I went out, did this and that, started to look at Land art, at Robert Smithson's idea of landscape and public art. In the streets, Impressionism is important, the flaneur, the walking around, the idea of the individual in the urban landscape. I could react to reality without using tools; I could work outside but not have to bring anything with me, the way the Impressionists brought their paints.

ALEXIS DAHAN — What kind of tools?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I was using a camera as a way of documenting what I did. Sometimes the photo didn't capture what actually happened because sometimes photography is not enough.

OLIVIER ZAHM — How old were you when you did that?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Well, when I finished school, in '84 or '85, I was 22 and didn't want to do postgraduate studies, so I went to Europe. I was interested in Madrid because at that time, I had a close friend living there from my school who told me I had to come. I arrived in '85, '86 in Madrid, with no money, so I was actually not so much into the big party, La Movida Madrileña. I was more of an underground South American, and they were still very classist. It's a very classist society, even still. But it was a very formative moment because although I didn't connect with the art of the Spanish Movida Madrileña, I learned from other artists in the world...

OLIVIER ZAHM — La Movida was the best time in Madrid.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Best time ever, exactly. A crazy time. Madrid was very happy, a lot of things happening. At that time, it looked like it was going to be forever.

ALEXIS DAHAN — What were you doing there?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I started to look at books of Arte Povera and British sculpture from the '80s and Robert Smithson and John Cage. I read a lot about John Cage.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Did anything specifically about Cage interest you?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I read a nice little biography about Cage's early years, which was very important to me. It was my first understanding of a way of working that used chance operations, that accepted noise, accident, and reality in a very different way from so many other artists. Although I was not into music or even poetry, really, I tried to make accidents in my life in terms of not controlling — academically — the processes, and trying to generate processes that lead to other options, solutions, or resolutions. So to be

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in Europe was important to me. I also traveled to Italy and briefly to Paris. It was also important for me to be alone and to be exposed to the situation of not having a studio and forced to work and do things outside.

OLIVIER ZAHM — How did you survive in Madrid, at the age of 22 or 23?
GABRIEL OROZCO — After I finished school in Mexico, I did a show of my student paintings. I was not such a bad painter. I won two prizes in Mexico, one for drawing and one for painting, and people bought my works. If you see them, they are very different from what I do now. But there were some good ones. Also I had some savings, which would cover about six months, and then when I was in Europe, I sold a couple of pieces to survive. But I was living on very little money. At that time, it was easier.

ALEXIS DAHAN — You didn't have to get a job?
GABRIEL OROZCO — No, I never had a job — never in my life. I never had money from my parents, either, so I always managed.

school. I've been lucky, and maybe people liked what I was doing, and they were supportive enough to buy etchings.

OLIVIER ZAHM — From a very young age, were you conscious of your talent?
GABRIEL OROZCO — That's a good question. I think I've known since I was a kid that I was not stupid and that my brain was fast. For example, I play chess and won a championship in Mexico. I was sub-champion of my category when I was a kid.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Plus you were quite handsome.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Well, I never thought about it. I was surrounded by very, very beautiful people. All my friends were better-looking than me. The girls were very pretty. But I didn't have girlfriends until I was in high school because I was concentrating on soccer, chess, and things like that. I never considered myself handsome at all.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So you never played the role of the handsome artist?
GABRIEL OROZCO — No, never. Over time I discovered that girls were in love with me, but I never knew. Now, 20 or 30 years later, I realize I wasted a lot of time playing soccer. But from what people tell me, I was charming as a boy, friendly, healthy in general, and maybe for that a lot of people liked and supported me. At the same time, when I was in school, there were other painters who were better than me. I remember a couple of friends whose drawings were beautiful and precise. Even my father, when he was a student, he was a superior craftsman. His drawings were amazing. I can draw, but I could see in the school that I had something else in my work that was expressive, and people were connecting to it, but in academic terms, or in craft, I wasn't a virtuoso. But my ideas and the way I put art together, synthetically, solving problems, were very sober and accurate, and the work was expressive, which, I think, engaged people early on.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, early on you discovered the language of contemporary art.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yeah, I think around 24.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You mentioned Smithson, Cage. What about Piero Manzoni?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes, Manzoni came a little later.

OLIVIER ZAHM — And Gordon Matta-Clark. Was his work a total change of perspective?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Information at that time didn't circulate the way it does today. In Mexico, we didn't even have an art magazine. The Spanish-speaking world didn't have magazines to connect with the world until the '80s. Before that Spanish people were isolated from the American and English-speaking or French worlds. The information I got when in school was limited to classical art and traditional things.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Did that change in Madrid?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Madrid was changing, opening up. They translated many more books, and artists such as Tony Cragg and Richard Long were being invited from the UK. I saw their exhibitions. Also, the Arte Povera people started showing in Madrid. That was like a waterfall for me, a Niagara Falls of information. I was hungry for information, and I tell you, my brain was fast. I was reading books on chess and learning about artists. That happened in a year or two. I was able to assimilate and also connect my life to the necessities of the moment.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Why did you escape from the traditionnal work in a studio?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I didn't want to be in a studio, painting. It was existential, a necessity.

It's not so much that you adapt to the time, but the time gets adapted to you. You start to circulate in the world, and the world starts to circulate in you. Then you're part of the wave, like surfing; looking at the waves, and you need to reach one. Which one is the right wave for you to catch? That moment for me was in Spain. After that, around '86 or '87, I came home to Mexico. And in Mexico, my work was really different from Mexican art. In '87, I started to work in the streets. I was very alone there. Then photography became very important because many of my friends were photographers. I didn't have a camera; I borrowed them. Then snap cameras came out, a hundred dollars. It became cheaper.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Pocket cameras changed your life.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Completely. I could go to dangerous areas in Mexico City and take photos. I could travel.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Were you working alone or alongside friends?
GABRIEL OROZCO — A group of artists who were younger than me became interested in what I was doing, and they started coming to my house. We made a workshop, starting in '87. We made a kind of school. Not so much a collective because they were younger, still developing, not ready; so we studied art, in my house, for five years.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Did they look up to you?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes. They wanted to learn from me. They wanted to know what I knew. They wanted to sneak into my books. They wanted to get some beer. They were very charming.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You created a sort of alternative school?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes, by accident I became a teacher very early because they asked me to do it. They came on Fridays. Some days they'd arrive at 10 in the morning and spend the whole day with me, and other times friends came in the afternoon.

OLIVIER ZAHM — What was the effect of the earthquake in '85 in Mexico?

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View of the inside of the French studio
where the *Samurai trees* were produced as observed
on p.196 of the MoMa retrospective catalog

Ping-Pond Table (Detail), 1998,
modified ping-pong table, water lilies, soil, stones, and water

GABRIEL OROZCO — It was very strong. I was there. My house was not affected because we were living outside the city. We felt it, though. It was at seven in the morning. I was shaking, and then I fell asleep again because in Mexico we regularly have these things. And then at nine I woke up.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Did you discover the disaster on television?
GABRIEL OROZCO — No. I woke up and started to do my drawing — it was an elaborate drawing — and around 9:30 or 10 I turned on the radio to hear music, and that's when I realized there's no music. Everything was happening: dead people, ambulances, everything collapsed, the TV and the radio, but they managed to put together information, like in a war. That's when I realized the city was destroyed. I went out and started to help people and organize with friends, finding out who was okay. For two or three weeks, we helped people and organized things, but the notion of the city became one of fragile public areas. It's a monstrous city; only suddenly, it became like a little village, damaged but friendly. The idea of public space, the street, the anonymity of the big urban circulation became something else: a much more intimate connection with the city.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Were you conscious of the fact that, coming from Mexico, you had to fight for recognition? As if you came from a different perspective, with a different sensibility, to find an art world, especially at that time, that was mostly concentrated in New York, London, Paris, and maybe also in Italy and Germany. But basically the art world was very northern. Were you motivated to express something more Latin American?
GABRIEL OROZCO — No, because in Mexico the problem I was fighting was nationalism. Mexico was very strong in neo-Mexicanism, which was a kind of postmodern Mexican style, very kitschy, with a lot of painters using Mexican motifs. But it was like that all over the world.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So in the '80s you were reacting against national expressionism?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I was against any kind of nationalism, kitsch, stereotypes of America, Paris, London, and all that. So what I tried to do with my work was exactly not to act like a Mexican, saying *"Viva las enchiladas!"* I started to behave a little bit like a chess player, which is neither Mexican style nor American style. I was trying, in a way, to erase myself.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Did your Mexican friends criticize you for that?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes. Even in Mexico, many people criticized me because I didn't want to be seen solely as a Mexican artist. My work was international or whatever. Only now that I'm older, you can say there are Mexican aspects in my work.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You're not expressing something specifically Mexican, but maybe from outside Mexico you're able to create an approach that synthesizes different influences. You mentioned geometry, conceptual gestures, and chess, which is reminiscent of Duchamp. Then there's the more political art, oriented toward nature, the landscape, and even, say, the Situationists: the way you approach the street captures its poetic details. This very synthetic approach is quite unique. It's not specifically Mexican, but maybe your position outside gives you the possibility to embrace such different influences, which maybe a British artist, a German artist, an American artist, couldn't embrace...
GABRIEL OROZCO — Well, what I think is that every good artist is a combination of things. For me, there was a kind of triangulation between Mexico, Europe, and New York. I started to live here in New York in 1991. I was traveling a lot. I wasn't interested in staying here. People started to talk to me as if I was a New York artist. They started to do shows about New York, and they wanted to invite me, but I refused. I didn't like to be considered a New York artist. I kept my passport. I am Mexican. I'm not an American citizen or anything like that. I am a traveler. And I was always very much in touch with France, with Paris. My father was also a big fan of Paris. I traveled there when I was a kid and have loved it since then.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Since Alexis and I are French, there's pressure! We question our love for Paris.
GABRIEL OROZCO — That's part of the love, no?

OLIVIER ZAHM — Yes.
GABRIEL OROZCO — I know, I know. And now they made me an Officier des Arts [an award from the French government for eminent artists]. I was very happy about it. Which is not important for French people, but when you're going there and all that, it's a nice gesture.

ALEXIS DAHAN — You're talking about some kind of cosmopolitanism in art, not just of culture or language, but of art and different movements.
GABRIEL OROZCO — What's also interesting is that when you come from a powerful country, you can impose your mythology. You can talk about Mickey Mouse, and it looks important because it's from

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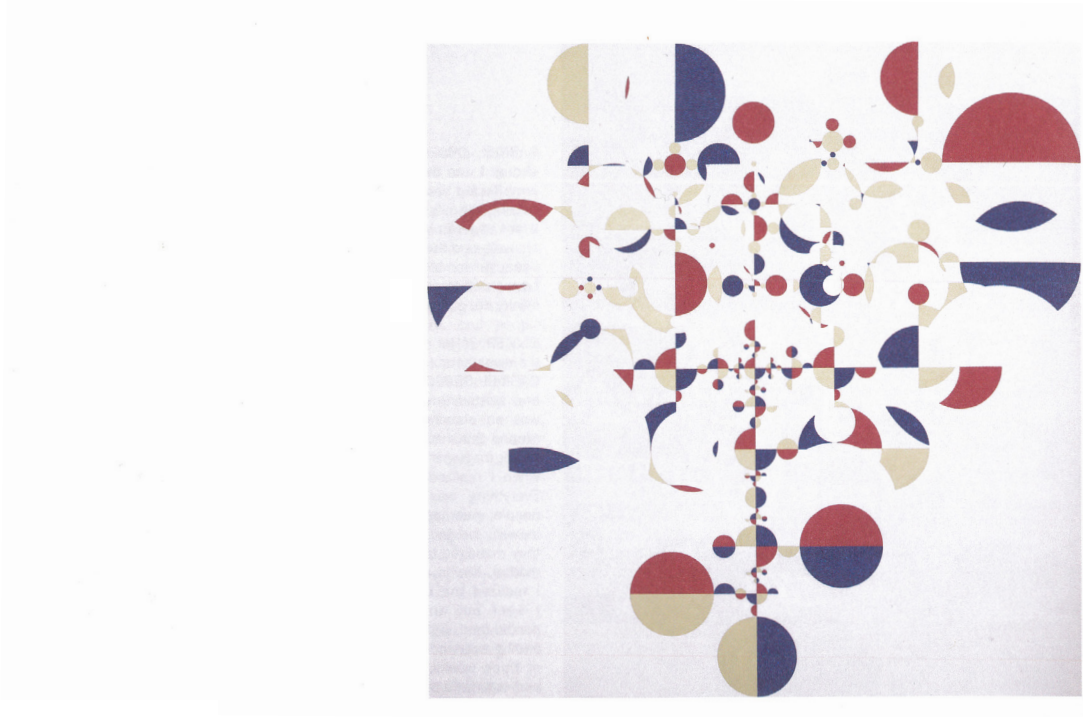
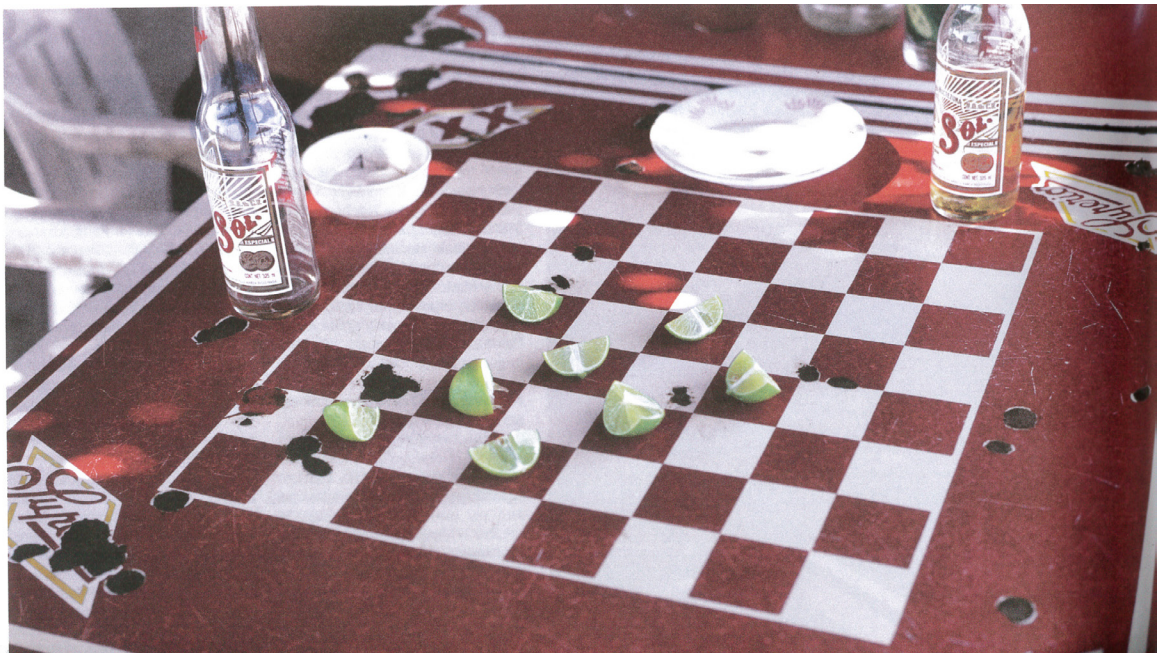


Kytes Tree, 2005, synthetic polymer paint on canvas



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Red Roots, 2008, tempera on canvas

America, and everybody listens. If I were to take folkloric or idiosyncratic elements of Mexican culture, it would look folkloric. But I was always — and many artists, like John Cage, have been — influenced by other spiritual movements, like Buddhism for example. Cage was influenced by Buddhism, philosophically speaking. I, too, was interested early on in Buddhism and also in Indian art. So my range of influences is very eclectic.

OLIVIER ZAHM — This is a powerful position because you don't come from a powerful country in terms of economics or politics or international influence. But what you have in Mexico is an amazing landscape, two seas, a climate that attracts people. You also bring this geography into your art in the way you deal with materials, such as food and clay.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yeah, material, a lot of materials. I was in France when I started to use clay. Maybe people say when I started to use clay, for example, that it was very Mexican, and I said, "clay?" It's Chinese, first of all, and the most important ceramics today are French or American, not Mexican. There are many preconceptions of what material is. If you think marble, you think Italy, and I guess if you think clay, you think Mexico — wine is France? I don't know — is that a material?

OLIVIER ZAHM — It could be with you!
GABRIEL OROZCO — There are many clichés about it. During the '90s, it was almost like a mission to make New York as powerful as Paris or London — it was very important to me to decentralize New York. When the '90s came, and I was here and my work started to have some weight in New York, and maybe at the same time in Paris,

for me it was very important to generate a decentralization of the powers, at least psychologically.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Can we speak a little bit about your interest in games? You've done a lot of work with games, ping-pong, chess...
GABRIEL OROZCO — And boomerangs. My last show is boomerangs.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Where does this interest in games come from? For me, it's very connected to the Surrealists, like Breton, Leiris, Caillois, etc.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes, of course.

OLIVIER ZAHM — They were fascinated by games as a form between fantasy and reality. You enter a world that is also changing the rules. Are games, or the boomerang, a metaphor?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Since I was a kid, I've loved to invent games. I liked chess and soccer, so I like teamwork. I like the ball. I like the idea of doing something with a very simple object. I was never much into jogging or solitary sports.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You like interaction.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Exchange and interaction. When I started to do my walks outside and then to move objects, I began to think a bit like a chess player, inventing a game with found situations. It's when you invent a ping-pong table, or you invent a game with socks or something, that it generates a position similar to a child trying to spend time in a different way using everyday life. I was also interested in how games and sports are a reflection of space and time in every culture. Every sport reflects what the culture is: how they conceive of the landscape, of time. That's why it's impossible to play cricket today. It's a game from the 18th, 19th centuries and its sense of time. Baseball is closer to us, even though it's also kind of slow. Basketball is faster. But if you see the evolution of sports and different board games like chess or Monopoly, every game and every sport represents the culture that invents it.

ALEXIS DAHAN — You explore and change the form of the games.
GABRIEL OROZCO — I change the memory of the game. So if you know how to play ping-pong and you come to the ping-pong table I did, your body will do movements that you remember, but this is not the same. You have to be slower, or higher, because the whole poetics of the game changes, and the body memory changes with that and has to adapt to a new set of rules.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, does an artist have to change the rules of a game?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yeah, I think so. An artist has to change the rules. Or invent the game.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Do you think that there's always a possibility to change the rules, to create new rules? To not accept rules?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So in a way, you're still a political artist.
GABRIEL OROZCO — I hope so.

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Asterisms, 2012, installation view, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin

Accelerated Footballs, 2005, one hundred sixty-five modified soccer balls

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OLIVIER ZAHM — Political art is very rare these days — the politics of form, of images.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Even the politics of protest. We grew up with a lot of political art that was about demonstrations, messages, pamphlets, which are still very important activities, but my work is not like that. My work is not about that.

ALEXIS DAHAN — What is it about?
GABRIEL OROZCO —

It's about changing the way you think. Making the rules more complex, which I think is stronger than just protesting or denouncing.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Your work defies today's super-expensive and more decorative art product.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Well, yes. It's more and more like that as a cultural symbol of powerful countries, where you have the infrastructure and museums and spaces and the market...

OLIVIER ZAHM — And the collectors?
GABRIEL OROZCO — And the collectors, too. It's almost like Disneyland — all the spectacle.

OLIVIER ZAHM — But it's like that in China, too.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yeah, because it's related to nationalism. You know the great American invention is publicity. That is the art form that Americans really created. The first was Warhol, and then all the rest is publicity. You need money to do that, and now, with publicity, you can be president. You don't need to be a politician. You really just need a good PR company, and you can be president.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You speak about gesture, and you have this sentence: "A simple gesture can be art or not." So when, for you, would it be art?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I also like to say that a very small gesture can be very powerful. I think it's art when it's received and has some impact on the landscape and on the public. A small gesture can move the eye of someone who suddenly smiles or move the eye and suddenly, boom, someone gets the message, and it's just amazing. I think that is an art: how to move, how to communicate through your body. Small gestures can be very powerful. And you know many people are very good at that. The same with art, it can be a very simple thing and generate a lot of impact in people. Sometimes you see amazingly big, very expensive sculptures, but they don't generate so much emotion. They're just big.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Because there's no gesture?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Probably because it has erased the process and the possibility of accident. And it has erased the body that makes the work. So it's alienated labor; it's a product of an industrial capitalist factory in which you completely erase the history of the piece.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So the body is still important for you.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Very.

OLIVIER ZAHM — What's the most beautiful piece you think you ever made?
GABRIEL OROZCO — As a piece? I think *My Hands Are My Heart,* the one with the clay.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Ah yes. It's just a simple gesture.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yeah, very simple, very common material. It was '91. It's just a strong, simple, basic gesture, but suddenly it's many things — it's symmetrical; there's gravity, but it's floating; then there's the body, but it's the negative space of the body.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It could be a Miró, prehistoric, or a child.
GABRIEL OROZCO — It could be from any country, I think.

ALEXIS DAHAN — So you make all these simple, poetic gestures. You create new games; you change landscapes. At the same time, since about 2004, you've developed a parallel practice of painting and drawing the *Samurai Tree.* How do you make those?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Going back to my childhood, when I was talking earlier about mathematics, I was interested in conjunctions and intersections and the idea of the circle and spaces that interconnect. I also love biology. I love the idea of cellular atomic connection and construction. Since I was a kid, if you see my drawings, there were a lot of circles and dots, very atomic. But at the same time, there was an awareness of the perspective: horizon, verticality, and gravity. But then, I didn't want it to be optical. So, I have a set of rules for how

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the colors are divided in four fields. I decided the colors would always be the same and jump like the knight in chess, so the circle grows by half or the double and always from the center of the field, and starts to expand to the limit. And then when you have it on the wall, you can see verticality, gravity, horizontality, and then different weights and fields. So you can have a possible landscape, a possible machine, a possible tree, a possible board game.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Or a possible jewelry.
GABRIEL OROZCO — A possible something that is very precise, but at the same time organic and kind of atomic but also like a plant.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It's your visual system.
GABRIEL OROZCO — I think it's my system, and it's a little bit obscure and a little bit exotic for the history of abstraction...

OLIVIER ZAHM — It's also beautifully decorative.
GABRIEL OROZCO — It's also kind of silly, and that's why it looks a little frivolous and, therefore, kind of decorative. But the funny thing is, behind it all is a set of rules.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Why did you call it *Samurai Tree*? That's very confusing.
GABRIEL OROZCO — It is very confusing. The idea of the samurai is that after you think a lot, you make a decision, and you have to follow that decision because you cannot hesitate in the middle of battle. If you do change your mind, you're dead. So, I applied that to making decisions about painting, which is full of little decisions — this color here is very boring, so I'll take one decision, and then the tree is there because in my work there is a center point that starts to have ramifications...

OLIVIER ZAHM — So "samurai" is the strategy, and "tree" is the organic.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Something like that.

OLIVIER ZAHM — And you're doing it with stones, too.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Some stones, yes, because the idea of time and erosion is important in my work. I love stones around rivers because they erode and take shape. So much time is contained there.

ALEXIS DAHAN — So for 30 years, these themes have been recurring.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Absolutely. Very organically.

OLIVIER ZAHM — We didn't speak about Duchamp because no one speaks about Duchamp now, but in the '90s he was a big name in the art world. Now he's sort of faded as a reference.
GABRIEL OROZCO — I don't think he's disappeared really. He's a bit like Borges for me. Every time I read his interviews, it's always very refreshing or stimulating for the brain, but he's not an artist that you will go and try to copy. That is impossible in a way because his works are all so different from each other and they are very specific. And the motifs of each work are very different. And even the sexuality of each work is in a very different sublimation system, and one that you cannot try to copy or emulate. It's a kind of system that was very particular in every work. And yes, there are works that are very useful for the thinking process of every artist in the world. Obviously the Readymade idea is extremely important. But he is an artist that is still mysterious. Still, not everybody understands him, not even the French.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Especially the French.
OLIVIER ZAHM — No, but the thing is his wordplay, his irony, is incredible.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Right.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It's a superior mind.
GABRIEL OROZCO — But a very French artist. It's amazing how he was here in New York for a long time, but his titles remained in French. The play on words is in French. He's super-French. Almost folkloric in a way. He's very intellectual, but in a way also very street.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Do you associate yourself with being both intellectual and street?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes. I'm intellectual because my life is like that, and I enjoy high levels of philosophy and reading and all that, and then the street-level, gang-style, trashy everyday life is very important for me, as well.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Would you say that your generation of artists, starting in the early '90s, was the last of the avant-garde in the political or experimental sense? Do you still believe in this idea of an avant-garde?
GABRIEL OROZCO — What a question! I think, yes. I still do believe in the avant-garde. I think it happens all the time, and there are moments that are more visible because the world for some reason is more transparent. You can see it better because it's not so foggy or full of dust from the bomb, not so permeated by interest in money. So I wouldn't say the '90s were the last avant-garde unless you are saying in terms of the 20th century. Then yes, you could say it's the last one, but also the last as the old idea of a group of artists that were obviously in the forefront.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Pushing the limit of art.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes, so my generation was also international and wasn't located in one city. And it was using the infrastructure that was growing at that point and pushing the limits of behavior, exhibitions, and communication, etc., of interaction. And in that sense it was an avant-garde. Everybody was looking at us — what would we do with that? It was influencing filmmakers as much as magazines and advertising. And then the market came, and a lot of things changed. After 9/11, the world turned out to be much more...

OLIVIER ZAHM — The world is more roduct-oriented?

GABRIEL OROZCO — **The world is also just foggier, noisier, and trickier. It's very hard to see. And for an artist who has avant-garde ideas today, it's really hard to really be visible. There are many fake avant-garde things.**

END

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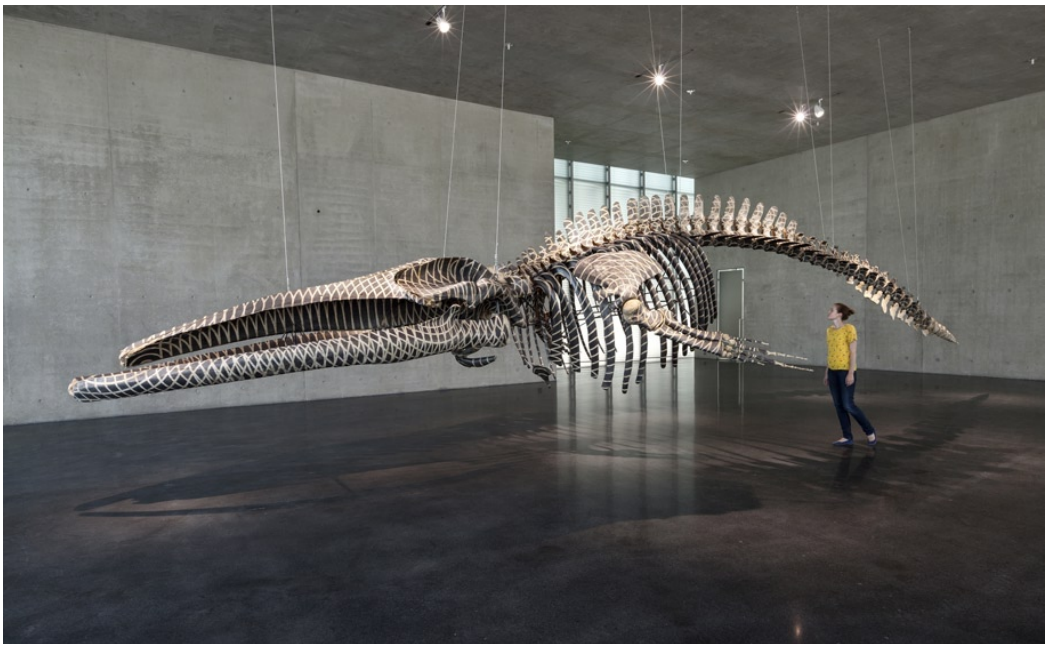
Gabriel Orozco, *La DS Cornaline*, 2013, Citroën DS modifiée, 489 x 122 x 147, vue de l'exposition «Natural Motion», Kunsthaus Bregenz, 13 juil-6 oct. 2013, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York



Gabriel Orozco, *Dark Wave*, 2006, carbonate de calcium, résine, mine de plomb, 304 x 392 x 1375, Klosterneuberg/Vienne, Essl Museum, vue de l'exposition «Natural Motion», Kunsthaus Bregenz, 13 juil-6 oct. 2013, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

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La Baleine et l'Automobile

Sur quelques œuvres de Gabriel Orozco

«(I am large, I contain multitudes.)»
Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself,* 51.

Dans ses *Vies et doctrines des philosophes illustres,* Diogène Laërce rapporte que son lointain homonyme Diogène de Sinope, le Cynique, lorsque quiconque soutenait devant lui que le mouvement n'existe pas, avait coutume de répondre en se levant et en se mettant à marcher. Réfutation abrupte, autant qu'imparable, d'un célèbre paradoxe de Zénon d'Élée, et origine de l'expression latine *solvitur ambulando* (littéralement «cela se résout en marchant»), laquelle connut une assez large fortune et se retrouve par exemple dans l'article de Lewis Carroll qui revisite l'argument de Zénon sur le mouvement («What the Tortoise Said to Achilles», publié par la revue *Mind* en décembre 1894). Moyennant un détournement burlesque, le titre d'une œuvre récente de Gabriel Orozco s'inscrit dans cette descendance. *Solvitur Boomerando* (2012) est une vidéo qui montre l'artiste au bord de la piscine circulaire de la *Observatory House* qu'il a fait construire à Oaxaca, au Mexique, en train de s'adonner à l'une de ses occupations favorites, à savoir le lancer de boomerang. Présentées comme il se doit en boucle, ces images nous livrent une sorte d'allégorie. Après avoir tracé une courbe sur le fond du ciel, le boomerang revient dans la main du lanceur (dont l'habileté se prouve par la récupération de l'objet sans cesse relancé), et les constellations virtuelles, toujours différentes, qui s'esquissent ainsi l'espace d'un instant dessinent la figure d'une conception de l'art fréquemment revendiquée par Orozco : «Je pense effectivement en termes de galaxie. Le monde créé par un artiste est fait de planètes et de constellations diverses. [...] La constellation propre au monde engendré par l'artiste, au monde que je cherche à créer, est constamment en mouvement. Le poids de chaque œuvre est sans cesse remis en question par les autres œuvres[1].»

L'éternel retour incarné ici par le lancer de boomerang ne participe donc en rien d'une ode à la pure répétition, d'une volonté de mise en ordre fixiste des éléments potentiellement innombrables qui sont susceptibles d'entrer dans l'œuvre afin de lui donner corps. Il suppose bien plutôt une ouverture fondamentale au chaos du monde, l'artiste ne se considérant pas comme une espèce de noyau générateur, de centre irradiant, mais à la manière d'un point de cristallisation situé sur une ellipse en transformation permanente[2]. C'est à la lumière d'une telle conception qu'il convient par exemple d'envisager les *Working Tables,* qui sont déterminantes pour comprendre la pensée d'Orozco et où celui-ci ne procède pas tant à une disposition classificatoire des divers objets présentés

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Gabriel Orozco, *Working Tables*, 1991-2006, technique mixte, dimensions variables, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

qu'à une *mise en tension* de ces éléments entre eux (*Five Tensions Between Two Tables,* une œuvre de 1994 où cinq grandes lattes de bois étaient cintrées à l'extrême d'un bord à l'autre de deux tables adjacentes, contenait déjà en quelque sorte le germe de cette idée). De même que *Asterisms* après elles, les *Working Tables* ne célèbrent qu'à première vue la ressemblance, la similitude et l'« air de famille » : leur principe est en réalité celui de la singularité irréductible, de l'absence de toute identité véritable entre une chose et une autre – cela sous l'effet d'une inflexion générale, mais à chaque fois unique, qui rappelle le *clinamen* cher à Lucrèce, cette « divergence fortuite » des atomes dont il avait fait le fondement de sa physique[3]. En conservant comme horizon l'attachement de l'artiste à cette tension dialectique entre le semblable et le singulier, le présent texte s'appuiera avant tout sur deux œuvres de la dernière décennie, *Dark Wave* (2006) et *La DS Cornaline* (2013), autrement dit l'alpha et l'oméga de « Natural Motion »[4], l'exceptionnelle exposition d'Orozco au KUB de Bregenz (Autriche) en 2013, afin d'examiner comment l'une et l'autre « se soupèsent », c'est-à-dire entrecroisent des fils – traits de pensée et traits formels – qui leur sont tantôt propres, tantôt communs. *Solvitur scribendo* (peut-être).

*

On remarquera d'emblée le caractère second, et cela au moins à double titre, par lequel se distinguent, chacune à sa manière, *Dark Wave* et *La DS Cornaline*. Tout d'abord, dans la mesure où l'une et l'autre se fondent sur un objet trouvé : *Dark Wave* est le moulage – elle l'emporte par là d'un cran dans la secondarité – d'un squelette de baleine échouée sur une plage mexicaine ; *La DS Cornaline*, plus proche d'un degré de son origine matérielle exogène, résulte de la restauration et du rétrécissement d'une automobile acquise auprès d'un particulier. Ensuite, parce que ces deux œuvres constituent des avatars d'autres œuvres d'Orozco : dans le premier cas *Mobile Matrix* (2006), qui est un véritable squelette de baleine (inscrit lui aussi, mais en positif, alors que le lacis complexe de *Dark Wave* sera figuré en réserve), aujourd'hui suspendu au sein de la José Vasconcelos Library de Mexico City ; dans le second cas *La DS* (1993), une Citroën DS 19 de 1970, grise (comme l'étaient les cétacés que l'on vient d'évoquer, deux spécimens d'*Eschrichtius robustus,* espèce

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Gabriel Orozco, *Five Tensions Between Two Tables*, 1994, 2 tables, bois, 170,2 x 150,5 x 160, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

communément appelée baleine grise), qui vingt ans avant la *Cornaline* (une DS 20 Pallas de 1968) avait subi exactement le même traitement.

À Bregenz, la « mise en tension » de *Dark Wave* et de *La DS Cornaline* était d'autant plus sensible que la première occupait le rez-de-chaussée du KUB et s'imposait au spectateur dès son entrée, tandis que la seconde trônait absolument seule au quatrième et dernier niveau du bâtiment. La connexion potentielle entre ces deux pôles de l'exposition se trouvait encore renforcée par le fait que le squelette de baleine est une œuvre suspendue, immense objet flottant dans l'air comme auparavant il flottait dans la mer, alors que la voiture, conformément là aussi à sa nature, repose sur le sol. Ce qui était en bas nous propose une élévation, ce qui était en haut connote avant toute autre chose la terre ferme et son attraction. (Cela n'allait pas sans conséquence, bien entendu,

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Gabriel Orozco, *La DS*, 1993, Citroën DS modifiée, 140,1 x 482,5 x 115,1, Paris, Fonds national d'art contemporain, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

sur le contenu des deux étages intermédiaires.) De surcroît : en bas, l'ordre animal, l'univers organique ; en haut, l'artefact, le monde de la machine. Les deux en apparence quelque peu « desséchés » (c'est le sens premier du mot « squelette »), en manque de chair aussi bien que de moteur, néanmoins en dernier lieu ranimés, réenchantés : épinglés parmi l'espace de l'art comme deux gigantesques papillons, mais promis à une nouvelle forme de vie sous les effets conjugués des transformations auxquelles l'artiste les a soumis et de l'attention que le regardeur leur accorde. Deux souvenirs ou images du mouvement, par ailleurs – mobile, vecteur, véhicule. Mêlant les registres légendaire, métaphorique et littéral, deux moyens de transport (dans toutes les acceptions du terme) en même temps que deux voies du salut.

*

Afin de saisir pourquoi *Dark Wave* ne nous confronte pas seulement à la structure d'un corps doué de mouvement, mais aussi à un imaginaire du transport au sein duquel la baleine fait figure de véhicule, il faut se rappeler l'histoire de Jonas telle qu'elle est racontée dans la Bible. Le Livre de Jonas, d'une extrême brièveté, appartient à ce sous-ensemble de l'Ancien Testament que l'on nomme les « petits prophètes » (« les douze » dans le canon de la Bible hébraïque). C'est un texte abrupt, plein de ruptures et de sauts, çà et là fortement teinté d'énigme (ainsi dans son épilogue), et auquel les traductions peinent particulièrement à rendre justice[5]. Tenons-nous en ici à ce qui concerne l'épisode avec l'animal que la tradition a fini par appeler la « baleine » (l'hébreu se contentant de parler de « grand poisson ») et à ce qui y conduit. L'histoire de Jonas est tout d'abord celle d'un homme qui désobéit à son Dieu. Adonaï vient à Jonas et lui ordonne de se rendre dans la ville de Ninive (Ninveh en hébreu, c'est-à-dire « la demeure du poisson »[6], sans doute du nom d'une déesse anciennement associée au poisson) afin de s'élever contre le mal qui y a surgi. Jonas part immédiatement dans la direction inverse et s'enfuit en s'embarquant à bord d'un bateau. Mais Adonaï le punit en soumettant le vaisseau à une tempête persistante. Jonas, qui pendant ce temps dort à poings fermés « dans les flancs de la carcasse du navire » (selon la traduction de Jérôme Lindon), est réveillé par les matelots qui désespèrent de pouvoir échapper à la tempête. Il leur suggère alors que le seul moyen d'y parvenir est de le jeter par-dessus bord, ce qu'ils finissent par faire. Le calme revient instantanément sur la mer. Jonas est avalé par un grand poisson dans les entrailles duquel il passe trois jours et trois nuits, implorant Adonaï de lui pardonner et promettant de lui obéir désormais. « Le salut est en Adonaï seul. Alors Adonaï parle au poisson et il vomit Jonas sur le sec[7]. »

La fortune de l'épisode de Jonas et de la baleine est considérable. Jésus lui-même y fait allusion et s'y identifie lorsqu'il dit aux Pharisiens « de même que Jonas a été trois jours et trois nuits dans le ventre du monstre, ainsi le fils de l'homme sera trois jours et trois nuits dans le cœur de la terre » (*Matthieu*, XII, 39-41 ; voir aussi en XVI, 4, et en *Luc*, XI, 29-32). Les peintres en donneront de nombreux échos, comme dans ce merveilleux panneau peint à la toute fin du XVI^e siècle par Jan Brueghel l'Ancien, qui montre Jonas au moment où la baleine le restitue sur le rivage (*Jonas entsteigt dem*

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Jan Brueghel l'Ancien, *Jonas entsteigt dem Rachen des Walfisches [Jonas sortant de la baleine]*, c. 1595, huile sur bois, 37,7 x 55,6, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte, © BPK, Berlin, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image BStGS

Rachen des Walfisches, Munich, Alte Pinakothek). Il ne manque pas non plus de grands textes qui, de façons très différentes, en assurèrent la reprise. La Sourate X du *Coran* s'intitule « Jonas », et c'est la Sourate XXXVII (« Ceux qui sont placés en rangs », 139-148) qui mentionne le séjour à l'intérieur de la baleine de celui que le même livre appelle ailleurs « l'homme au poisson » (XXI, 87, et LXVIII, 48). Le *Moby-Dick* (1851) de Herman Melville, qui scelle le mythe moderne de la baleine en tant qu'elle se relie au destin tragique de l'homme, se réfère évidemment plusieurs fois à la rencontre de Jonas et du monstre marin. Une phrase du Livre de Jonas apparaît ainsi dès les « Extracts » que Melville place en ouverture de son récit, et au chapitre 9 le père Mapple consacre à cette histoire le sermon qu'il délivre aux matelots se préparant à embarquer ; quant au chapitre 83, il porte le titre « Jonah historically regarded ». Comme l'a écrit Henri Meschonnic : « De tout temps allégorie, *Jona* a avalé ses commentaires comme le poisson a avalé Jona. Il en sort indéfiniment une parole[8]. » Un déluge de paroles, en quelque sorte.

« Jonah in the whale, Noah in the ark / What did they do just when everything looked so dark? » Question que pose la chanson écrite par Johnny Mercer et Harold Arlen pour le film de Mark Sandrich *Here Come the Waves* (1944), et à laquelle elle répond, américaine qu'elle est, par son titre même (*Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive*). La baleine, en effet, hérite de l'arche son caractère de maison, et le rapprochement entre Noé et Jonas, qui ne date pas d'hier, est loin d'être fortuit puisque le nom du second, en hébreu (Yônah), signifie « colombe » – la colombe que Noé envoie hors de son vaisseau voir si les eaux se sont bien retirées de la terre et qui devient ainsi « à la fois le signe qui sépare et le messager qui relie[9] ». Il s'agit donc ici, dans les deux cas, d'architecture, cet art de construire dont l'embarcation de Noé et de toute sa troupe a fourni un modèle premier (autant que fabuleux)[10]. Que la *Dark Wave* d'Orozco puisse évoquer – ne serait-ce du reste que par ses dimensions – un abri conçu à l'échelle

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Gabriel Orozco, *Maman*, 1998, 2 pianos, toit en ardoise, tuile, bois, métal, chaise et technique mixte, 304,8 x 264,2 x 139,7, Museum Moderne Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Leihgabe der österreichischen Ludwigstiftung, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

humaine, cela ne prend que plus d'évidence si on la considère en relation avec *La DS Cornaline,* qui tient quant à elle sans ambiguïté, comme n'importe quelle voiture, du mobile et de l'habitacle. Le motif originaire est toutefois particulier à la baleine, dans la mesure où celle-ci, en tant que demeure temporaire de Jonas, est, de même que l'arche de Noé, l'instrument (le véhicule) d'une (re)naissance. Rappelons-nous le titre de l'autre squelette de baleine transfiguré par Orozco : *Mobile Matrix*. L'architecture et le maternel : les deux fils étaient explicitement noués dans une œuvre antérieure, *Maman* (1998), qui se présente sous l'aspect d'un modèle réduit de maison « à la française » (toit d'ardoise, œils-de-bœuf, porte-fenêtre), flanquée d'un piano droit sur chacune de ses faces latérales, à la manière d'une paire d'oreilles encadrant une façade. Assis sur le siège placé à l'intérieur de cette chambre d'écoute miniature, un occupant unique peut se laisser bercer par le son des pianos (dont l'usage est libre). Quelqu'un voudrait-il bien jouer *Baby Won't You Please Come Home*?

« Le déjà-né, le déjà-mort » (« The ready-born, the ready-dead »), répondit Orozco en riant à Benjamin Buchloh qui, à propos de *Black Kites* (1997), l'interrogeait sur « l'idée derrière l'œuvre »[11]. *Black Kites* a été réalisé en dessinant à la surface d'un crâne humain un damier dont les déformations épousent certaines des courbes et accidents de son subjectile. (J'ai toujours vu là une condensation radicale d'un des chefs-d'œuvre les plus célèbres de l'histoire de la peinture occidentale, *Les Ambassadeurs* (1533) de Holbein, comme si le crâne gisant en anamorphose au premier plan de ce tableau avait été contaminé par les motifs géométriques – le tapis, le pavement – qui l'environnent[12].) C'est une œuvre dont la réminiscence se fait immédiatement sentir face à *Dark Wave* ou *Mobile Matrix,* qui exploitent aussi le squelette en tant que support d'un réseau linéaire, en écho cette fois au remous concentrique créé par tout corps pénétrant l'eau – quelque chose de semblable à une trace mnésique, restaurée par le dessin à même les os de l'animal. *Path of Thought* (1997), une photographie du crâne réquisitionné pour *Black Kites,* vu de l'arrière et encore inachevé, est à l'unisson d'une pareille idée, dont Rainer Maria Rilke avait déjà rêvé dans un texte où, laissant son imagination dériver devant un crâne, il retrouve une mythologie de l'enregistrement sonore : « Dans la lumière de la bougie, si souvent curieusement vive et brillante, la suture coronale venait de m'apparaître de manière très frappante, et, dès cet instant, je sus à quoi elle me faisait penser : à l'un de ces sillons restés dans mon souvenir, que la pointe d'une soie avait un jour gravé dans un petit rouleau de cire ! […] La suture coronale du crâne (ce qui, certes, resterait à étudier) présente – faisons cette hypothèse – une certaine analogie avec les ondulations serrées que la pointe d'un phonographe trace dans le cylindre récepteur en rotation. Supposons maintenant que l'on induise ce stylet à l'erreur, et qu'au moment de la restitution on le conduise sur une piste qui ne résulterait pas de la transcription graphique d'un son, mais existerait elle-même à l'état naturel – allons, n'hésitons pas à le dire ! –, qui serait précisément la suture coronale : que se passerait-il ? Il devrait se produire un son, une succession de sons, une musique[13]… »

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Au KUB, deux étages séparaient *Dark Wave* de *La DS Cornaline* en jouant d'un mixte soigneusement dosé de rupture et de progression. Juste au-dessus du cétacé et de son imposant volume en lévitation, Orozco,

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moyennant un renversement que chaque spectateur éprouvait de manière pleinement physique, avait installé les *45 Carved River Cobblestones* (2013), pièces de dimensions modestes posées directement par terre, isolées ou en groupes plus ou moins restreints, selon une distribution spatiale intuitive ou impossible à saisir en son principe. Retour au sol encore accentué par les huit petits tableaux de la série *Heraldico* (2013), des carrés de 20 x 20 centimètres, qui ponctuaient les quatre côtés de la salle, accrochés très bas (le bord inférieur à 55 centimètres du sol). L'effet d'ensemble était sidérant en ce qu'il suggérait un regardeur idéal d'environ 70 centimètres de haut, tout visiteur – à l'exception, peut-être, de quelques enfants – se changeant de facto en un *incredible expanding man* investi d'une soudaine inquiétante étrangeté dont il n'avait nulle conscience une minute auparavant. Très puissante également, l'impression de « science-fiction archéologique » qui se dégageait des pierres sculptées aussi bien que des tableaux. Science-fiction sans vaisseaux spatiaux ni robots, entretenue seulement par la somme d'incertitudes – généalogiques, conceptuelles, stylistiques – qui leste ces œuvres dès le premier coup d'œil. Renchérissant sur leur appartenance commune à l'élément aquatique, le titre et la forme de certaines *Carved River Cobblestones* faisaient par ailleurs penser sans détour à *Dark Wave,* ainsi *Whale* ou *Fish Bird* – d'où le fil rouge sensible entre leurs étages respectifs, quel que soit le violent contraste qui les séparait (enchaînement des plus subtils que préparaient également au rez-de-chaussée *Piñanona 2,* un tableau proche de la série *Heraldico*, et, dans la cage d'escalier, *From Roof to Roof* (1993), photographie montrant une vaste étendue d'eau sur un toit). Les *Terracottas* (2011-2012) du troisième niveau, disposées sur quatre plateformes gris clair, accompagnaient notre ascension en distinguant pour ainsi dire la terre (leur matériau) et le sol. De même, les quatre photographies aux murs de cette salle étaient accrochées à une hauteur standard. Persistait néanmoins une atmosphère insolite, comme une sorte de trouble du temps, un malaise dans la chronologie. Outre leur caractère d'artisanat vaguement extra-terrestre, en tout cas inidentifiable, voire partiellement ruiné, les céramiques d'Orozco ont l'archaïsme de toute chose où le toucher semble l'avoir emporté sur la vision.

Hans Holbein le Jeune, *Les Ambassadeurs*, 1533, huile sur bois, 207 x 209,5, Londres, National Gallery, © The National Gallery, Londres, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / National Gallery Photographic Department

« Surface, volume, densité, pesanteur ne sont pas des phénomènes optiques. C'est entre les doigts, c'est au creux des paumes que l'homme les connut d'abord. L'espace, il le mesure, non du regard, mais de sa main et de son pas », écrivait Focillon[14]. *My Hands Are My Heart* (1991), l'une des photographies présentées à proximité des *Terracottas*, ne dit rien d'autre, tout en impliquant de surcroît l'espace interne du corps dans son propre éloge de la main.

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Le sommet de notre parcours au sein du KUB correspondait à la découverte de *La DS Cornaline* rayonnant doucement au beau milieu de son écrin de béton somptueux. Ce dernier étage était le seul à contenir un unique objet, lequel, plus encore que *La DS* lors de son apparition initiale (entre les murs de la galerie Chantal Crousel, à Paris en décembre 1993), semblait tombé du ciel, bétyle industriel ou aérolithe « aidé » (comme on disait au siècle précédent de certains produits manufacturés recueillis par les musées)[15]. N'en déplaise aux amateurs d'étymologie, il y a loin, pourtant, de la Kaaba au KUB, même si, dans le cas qui nous intéresse, les « créatifs » qui travaillaient pour Citroën ont cru bon de redoubler l'allusion divine en

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Gabriel Orozco, *Mobile Matrix*, 2006, mine de plomb sur squelette de baleine grise, 196 x 1089 x 266, courtesy kurimanzutto, Mexico, vue de l'installation à la Biblioteca Vasconcelos, Mexico, 2006, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

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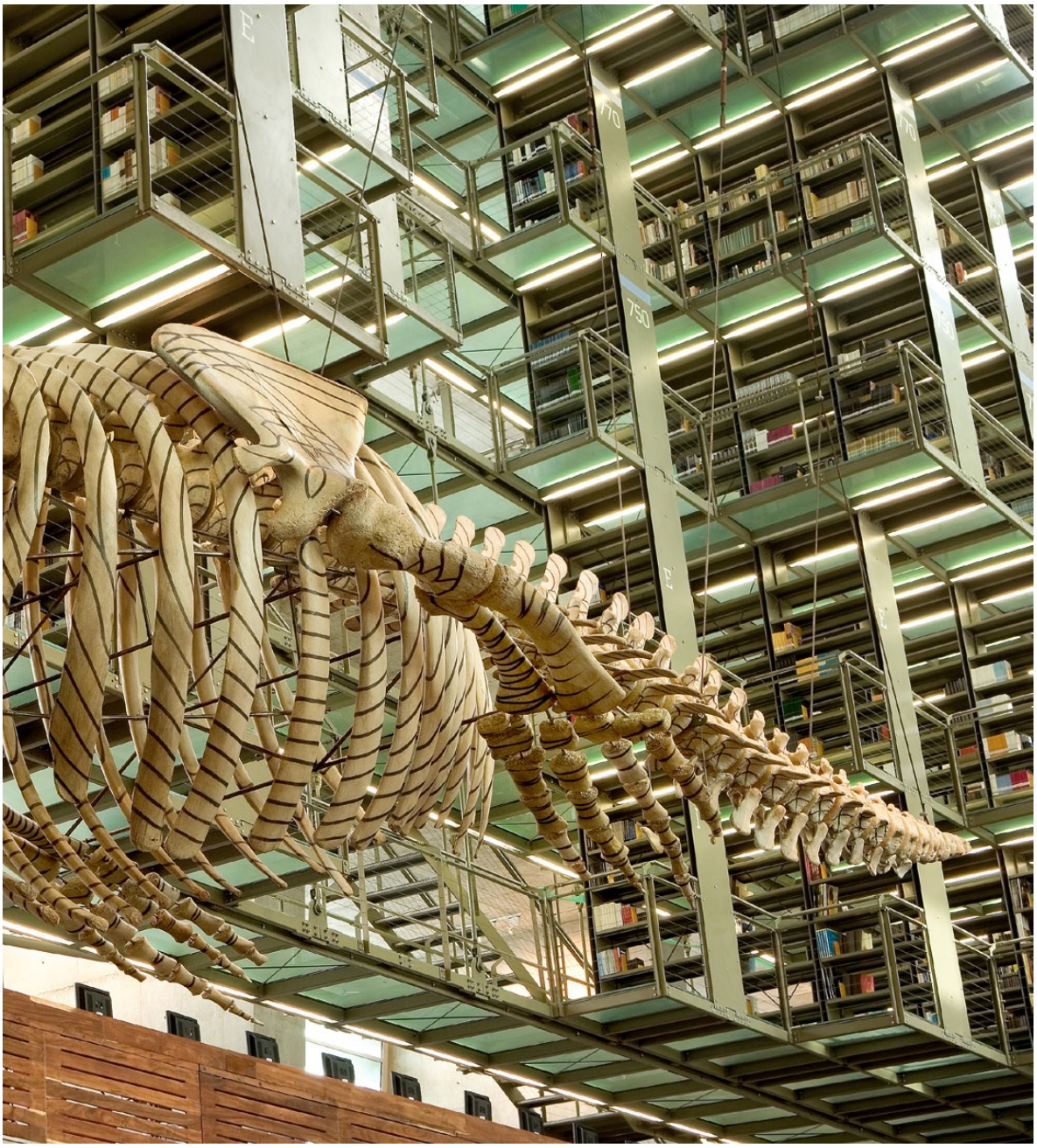

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Gabriel Orozco, *Fish Bird*, 2013, diorite, 16 x 35 x 11, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

baptisant « Pallas » ce modèle de DS : rien de moins qu'Athéna en tant que déesse de la sagesse, protectrice des sciences et des arts aussi bien. Sans doute en signe de gratitude, Botticelli a peint peu après 1480 une Pallas mémorable, grandeur nature (une femme, tout compte fait), en train d'empoigner par les cheveux un Centaure à l'air passablement contrit, dont les exégètes nous apprennent qu'il figure le renoncement à la débauche (le tableau, aujourd'hui aux Offices, était un cadeau de mariage).

Restons avec les artistes pour rappeler que Flaminio Bertoni, qui, s'inspirant de la morphologie d'un poisson, inventa celle de la DS après avoir dessiné pour Citroën la Traction Avant (1934) et la 2CV (1948), était également architecte et sculpteur[16]. Mais en la reconstruisant pour la priver de tout usage autre que celui de la méditation esthétique, Orozco transporte la DS dans le champ de la sculpture, auquel une automobile ne peut s'apparenter que de façon fantasmatique et finalement lointaine. « Quels rapports existe-t-il entre l'art de la sculpture et la beauté d'une voiture finie ? » Giacometti tenta de répondre à cette question que lui posait le magazine *Arts* en 1957 (quelques mois après la parution en recueil des *Mythologies* de Barthes) : « Quelquefois je me suis arrêté dans la rue pour regarder une voiture. Elle ressemblait à un crapaud, à un taureau, à une sauterelle. Peut-être comme je m'arrête devant un nuage qui ressemble à une tête ou devant un tronc d'arbre qui évoque un tigre. [...] Mais la voiture, pas plus que les autres machines, pas plus que tous les objets prémécaniques, n'a rien à voir avec la sculpture. Tout objet doit être fini pour fonctionner ou pour servir. Plus il est fini, plus il est parfait, mieux il fonctionne et plus il est beau. Un objet plus perfectionné détrône l'autre qui l'était moins. Aucune sculpture ne détrône jamais une autre. Une sculpture n'est pas un objet, elle est une interrogation, une question, une réponse. Elle ne peut être ni finie ni parfaite[17]. »

La DS nous offre le résultat d'une leçon d'anatomie, d'un exercice de *découpe*. Selon l'expression populaire, il faut tout d'abord « désosser » entièrement une voiture avant d'en recomposer les deux tiers latéraux pour produire cette sculpture effilée qui fait un pas supplémentaire en direction du poisson, de la graine ou de la flèche. Principe qui s'imposait *de visu* au printemps 2013, lors de la visite avec Orozco de l'atelier près de Paris où la *Cornaline* n'était encore qu'un squelette épars. Là aussi, la métaphore d'un sacrifice préalable à une renaissance venait à l'esprit,

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Sandro Botticelli, *Minerve et le Minotaure*, c. 1482, peinture à la détrempe sur toile, 207 x 148, Florence, Galerie des Offices, © Archives Alinari, Florence, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Nicola Lorusso

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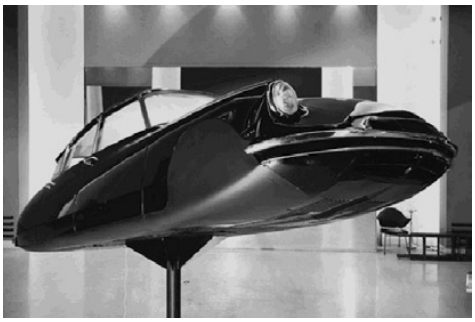

Flaminio Bertoni, maquette pour la DS Citroën, Triennale de Milan, 1957

comme si *La DS* procédait en premier lieu d'un déicide. Toute la chirurgie nécessaire à cette chaîne d'opérations n'est au demeurant pas seulement physique. Elle suppose une intervention sur le temps et une reconstruction d'ordre culturel, ainsi que l'artiste l'a lui-même suggéré : « Je crois que le caractère monumental de cette œuvre [*La DS*] est d'ordre culturel. Bien qu'elle ne mesure que trois ou quatre mètres de long comme n'importe quelle autre voiture, il s'agit d'un symbole culturel important (un objet légendaire). [...] C'est là pour moi le grand défi : comment parvenir à la monumentalité autrement que par la dimension ou par la production. Comment saisir la monumentalité à travers ses implications culturelles, sociales, politiques et conceptuelles[18]. » De manière intéressante à cet égard, Orozco évoquait devant la *Cornaline* en cours d'élaboration l'affinité qu'il pouvait ressentir avec *24 Hour Psycho* de Douglas Gordon, qui comme *La DS* date de 1993 et ressortit lui aussi à une sorte de chirurgie du temps exercée sur un monument culturel.

Hormis cette robe rouge qui lui vaut de porter le nom d'une pierre (laquelle renvoie par là au règne animal et aux espèces munies de cornes), *La DS Cornaline* est plus proche de *La DS* que *Dark Wave* ne l'est de *Mobile Matrix*. C'est dans l'ordre des choses, et conforme aux logiques distinctes qui présidèrent à leur production. À l'artefact nourri de connotations multiples, Orozco a souhaité enlever de la matière, alors qu'au vestige naturel il a par le dessin superposé quelque supplément (de la culture, en définitive). *Via di levare, via di porre* – antique dichotomie qui gouverne le geste artistique. Fruits d'une pensée soustractive, les deux *DS* prennent pour une part un aspect de modèle réduit, nous conduisant de la sorte du côté de l'enfance et de ses rêves[19]. Rêvent-elles, et à quoi? « Quand les autos penseront, les Rolls-Royce seront plus angoissées que les taxis », supposait Henri Michaux[20]. Le jour n'est pas encore vraiment venu, mais exhaussées au rang de la sculpture elles donnent d'ores et déjà, comme les baleines, beaucoup à rêver et à penser.

Notes

Ce texte a paru en anglais, en allemand et en suédois dans le catalogue *Gabriel Orozco. Natural Motion,* Bregenz, KUB/ Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 2013-2014.

1. « I do think in terms of a galaxy. A world of an artist generates planets and different constellations. [...] The constellation of the world that the artist generates, that I want to generate, is in constant movement. The weight of each work is constantly questioned by the others. » Voir « Crazy about Saturn. Gabriel Orozco Interviewed by Briony Fer », dans *Gabriel Orozco,* cat. d'expo., Mexico, Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Inba/Turner, 2006, p. 137 (ma traduction, comme chaque fois qu'il n'est pas fait de mention contraire).

Le titre de cet entretien découle de préoccupations apparentées qu'Orozco formule en ces termes p. 65 : « Je suis fasciné depuis l'enfance par l'idée des planètes. J'étais fou de Saturne à cause de l'unité propre à la boule de la planète, mais aussi à cause des anneaux en mouvement autour d'elle. » (« I have been fascinated since childhood with the idea of planets. I was crazy about Saturn because you have the unity of the ball of the planet but also the rings moving around it. ») Voir également le très intéressant article que Briony Fer a consacré à l'imaginaire « cosmologique » qui sous-tend toute l'activité artistique d'Orozco (« Sculpture's Orbit », *Artforum,* novembre 2006, p. 262-269), ainsi que l'entretien récent avec Joan Young où il déclare à propos de *Asterisms* (2012), vaste installation en deux parties (*Astroturf Constellation* et *Sandstars*) : « On forme une espèce de constellation à partir d'objets trouvés » (« You form a kind of constellation out of found objects »), et « This sort of configuration becomes a representation of the cosmos » (« Cette sorte de configuration devient une représentation du cosmos ») – « Make Your Own Constellation. Gabriel orozco on *Asterisms* », *Deutsche Guggenheim Magazine,* n° 20, été 2012, p. 9. Qu'une telle fascination pour les cercles, les disques et les sphères – ainsi que pour le type de mouvement ou d'arrangement qu'ils peuvent suggérer – entretienne quelque relation avec les trois « o »

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Gabriel Orozco, *Solvitur Boomerando*, 2012, HD video convertie en Blu-Ray, en boucle continue, couleur, sonore, env. 20', courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

ponctuant le nom propre de l'artiste n'a pas manqué d'être relevé par divers commentateurs. Voir notamment M. Catherine de Zegher, « The Os of Orozco », *Parkett,* n° 48, 1996, p. 55-67.
2. C'est ainsi de l'éternel retour tel que l'a défini Gilles Deleuze qu'il s'agit de façon exemplaire dans le cas d'Orozco : « Le secret de l'éternel retour, c'est qu'il n'exprime nullement un ordre qui s'oppose au chaos, et qui le soumette. Au contraire, il n'est pas autre chose que le chaos, la puissance d'affirmer le chaos. [...] Ce qui revient, ce sont les séries divergentes en tant que divergentes, c'est-à-dire chacune en tant qu'elle déplace sa différence avec toutes les autres, et toutes en tant qu'elles compliquent leur différence dans le chaos sans commencement ni fin. Le cercle de l'éternel retour est un cercle toujours excentrique pour un centre toujours décentré » (*Logique du sens*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969, p. 305).
3. Voir à ce sujet les propos très éloquents d'Orozco : « Il est surprenant et intriguant de voir comment les choses évoluent, comment les objets voyagent, et comment des choses, grandes et petites, deviennent très particulières. Prenez l'érosion : un objet est en mouvement constant, soumis à des collisions et à des changements permanents. L'érosion de l'objet a joué un rôle déterminant dans mon travail et mes recherches depuis *Yielding Stone* (1992) et je n'ai pas cessé depuis de me servir de matériaux formés par le mouvement de la vie quotidienne. La forme d'un objet résulte de rencontres accidentelles avec d'autres objets – heurts, porte-à-faux, mouvement continu. Ce processus a été pour moi très important. » (« It's surprising and intriguing to see how things evolve, how objects travel, and how little and big things become very particular things. Take erosion : an object is in constant motion, collision, and a permanent state of change. The erosion of the object has been very important in my work and my research since *Yielding Stone* (1992), and I've continued to use materials that are formed by the movement of everyday life. An object's shape is made out of accidental encounters with other objects, bumps, jarring, and constant motion – that process has been very important to me. ») Joan Young, « Make Your Own Constellation. Gabriel Orozco on *Asterisms* », art. cité, p. 7. Sur la question du mouvement dans l'œuvre d'Orozco, voir Jean-Pierre Criqui, « Gabriel Orozco, Like ARolling Stone » (1994), *Un trou dans la vie. Essais sur l'art depuis 1960*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2002, p. 181-193.
4. Titre qui, par les deux mots qui le composent, le nombre de lettres aussi bien que la physionomie de chacun, n'est pas sans un certain effet de miroir avec le nom « Gabriel Orozco ».
5. Outre quelques traductions courantes de la Bible, je me suis reporté à deux ouvrages consacrés spécifiquement au Livre de Jonas et qui en contiennent chacun une tentative de traduction nouvelle : Jérôme Lindon, *Jonas,* Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955 ; Henri Meschonnic, *Jona et le signifiant errant*, Paris Gallimard, 1981. Lui-même d'une concision et d'une acuité étonnantes, le livre de Jérôme Lindon, à qui Henri Meschonnic rend hommage en lui dédiant la seconde partie du sien, porte en exergue cette historiette anonyme qui n'est pas sans une certaine résonance savoureuse avec le cas qui nous occupe : « Sur la route de Kiew, voilà un vieux juif qui court, qui court. "Et où cours-tu donc comme ça? demande un passant. — Où je cours? Je vais à Kiew. — Et à Kiew, que vas-tu faire à Kiew? — Rien. Mais je crois que j'aurai une voiture pour revenir." »

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Gabriel Orozco, *Black Kites*, 1997, mine de plomb sur crâne, 21,6 x 12,7 x 15,9, Philadelphia Museum of Art, don (par échange) de M. et M^me^ James P. Magill, 1997, courtesy photo Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

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6. Meschonnic souligne le rapport symbolique qui s'établit ici d'emblée avec le grand poisson qui va par la suite avaler Jonas et note que ce dernier était sans doute lui-même tributaire de la figure d'un « homme-poisson » phénicien nommé Ouannès (*Jona et le signifiant errant*, *op. cit.,* p. 70). Il rappelle également que « le caractère cunéiforme pour Ninive (en akkadien *Ninva, Nina*) était un poisson dans une maison » (p. 78).
7. Traduction Lindon, *Jonas, op. cit.,* p. 39.
8. H. Meschonnic, *Jona ou le signifiant errant, op. cit.,* p. 77.
9. Selon l'éclairante formule de Jérôme Lindon, *Jonas, op. cit.,* p. 26.
10. Ce qu'a bien démontré Hubert Damisch en un essai décisif qui, partant de la constatation que l'article « Architecture », dans l'*Encyclopédie* de Diderot et d'Alembert, est à peu près trois fois moins long que l'article « Arche », analyse ce dernier pour conclure à une préséance supérieure à celle de l'ordre alphabétique, l'architecture n'ayant pu prendre place qu'après le Déluge (« L'Arche de Noé », *Critique,* nº 476-477, janvier-février 1987, p. 5-22).
11. « Benjamin Buchloh Interviews Gabriel Orozco in New York », *Gabriel Orozco. Clinton Is Innocent*, cat. d'expo., Paris, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998, p. 103.
12. Les catégories du volume et du plan, du mouvant et de l'inanimé, de la sculpture et de la peinture (ou du dessin), échangent constamment leurs valeurs dans la pensée d'Orozco. Voir par exemple ce qu'il déclare à propos de ses peintures géométriques, telles que les *Samurai Trees* : « Je ne pense pas qu'elles ressemblent à des peintures, mais à des mobiles. Cela m'est peut-être personnel, mais j'y vois quelque chose de flottant. On peut imaginer qu'elles sont en rotation ou qu'elles flottent à la manière d'un Calder. J'ai tendance à y penser comme à des mobiles plats. » (« I don't think it looks like a painting, I think it looks like a mobile. I mean, maybe it's just me, but I see something floating there. You could imagine that it is rotating or floating like a Calder. I tend to think about them as if they were flat mobiles. ») Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Megan Sullivan, « To Make an Inner Time : A Conversation with Gabriel Orozco », *October,* nº 130, automne 2009, p. 178. Sur les *Samurai Trees*, voir l'essai d'Yve-Alain Bois, « The Tree and the Knight », *Gabriel Orozco,* cat. d'expo., Mexico, 2006, *op. cit.,* p. 254-289.
13. « Bruit premier » (*Ur-Geräusch*) a été écrit et publié en 1919. Je cite ici la traduction de Rémy Colombat, dans le volume des *Œuvres en prose. Récits et essais* de Rilke, Paris, Gallimard, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 1993, p. 637-638.
14. Henri Focillon, *Éloge de la main,* en annexe de sa *Vie des formes* [1943], Paris, PUF, 1970, p. 108.
15. Rien d'étonnant à cela puisque cette qualité d'objet « tombé du ciel » appartenait déjà à la DS originelle, ainsi que Roland Barthes l'analysa lors de sa mise sur le marché en 1955, la comparant en même temps au sous-marin fantastique imaginé par Jules Verne dans *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* : « La "Déesse" a tous les caractères (du moins le public commence-t-il par les lui prêter unanimement) d'un de ces objets descendus d'un autre univers, qui ont alimenté la néomanie du XVIIIe siècle et celle de notre science-fiction : la Déesse est *d'abord* un nouveau Nautilus. » (« La nouvelle Citroën », *Mythologies* [1957], Paris, Éditions du Seuil, « Points », 1970, p. 151. Barthes a traité du Nautilus dans une autre de ses *Mythologies,* intitulée « "Nautilus" et "Bateau ivre" ».)
16. Bertoni, à qui l'on doit notamment des sculptures animalières, mit ses capacités inventives avant tout au service de l'industrie automobile. Un musée portant son nom est consacré à son œuvre d'artiste et de designer dans sa ville natale de Varèse, en Italie. Il convient de signaler aussi que Alison Smithson, l'architecte britannique connue pour les bâtiments qu'elle conçut avec son mari Peter Smithson dans la veine du « New Brutalism », publia en 1983 un livre des plus singuliers, *AS in DS. An Eye on the Road*, un « *sensibility primer* » tenant à la fois du journal de voyage (en Angleterre, à bord d'une DS) et de l'enquête ethnologique. Cet ouvrage, dont le profil reprend les contours d'une DS vue d'en haut, a été réédité en 2001 par les éditions Lars Müller, à Zurich.
17. Alberto Giacometti, « La voiture démythifiée », *Écrits*, Paris, Hermann, 1990, p. 79.
18. « I believe that the monumentality in that work [*La DS*] is cultural. It is an important cultural symbol (a legendary object) despite the fact that it measures three or four meters like any other car. [...] This is the big challenge for me : how to achieve monumentality, but not through size or production. How to grasp monumentality through its cultural, social, political and conceptual implications. » (« Gabriel Orozco in conversation with Guillermo Santamarina », *Gabriel Orozco,* cat. d'expo., Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2005, p. 144.)
19. « Quand j'étais gamin j'étais obsédé par les voitures de Formule 1. Je voulais devenir pilote de course. Je regardais les voitures dans la rue et j'imaginais qu'en les coupant en deux dans le sens de la longueur et en les réassemblant de manière à ce qu'elles aient une ligne plus effilée, elles auraient une allure formidable. » (« When I was a kid I was obsessed with Formula One racing cars. I wanted to be a race car driver. I used to look at the cars on the street and imagine if you could cut them in half and reassemble them in a thinner line as racing cars, they would look great. ») Orozco à Jessica Morgan, dans la monographie que celle-ci lui a consacrée, *Gabriel Orozco,* Londres, Tate Publishing, 2011, p. 36.
20. Henri Michaux, *Passages,* nouvelle édition revue et augmentée, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, p. 146.

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Jean-Pierre Criqui
La Baleine et l'automobile
Les Cahiers du MNAM, N°127, Spring, 2014, p.34-49.

connaissance des arts

Arts & Nature 2014

Gabriel Orozco, face aux empreintes du temps

Lors d'une visite au château, Gabriel Orozco s'est intéressé à certains de ses espaces intimes et à leur nature éphémère et fragile. Son travail, issu de cette observation, est à voir dans des lieux qui n'ont pas vocation à accueillir des œuvres d'art.

Par Myriam Boutoulle

Invité à créer une œuvre originale *in situ* au château de Chaumont-sur-Loire, l'artiste mexicain Gabriel Orozco a délaissé les salons historiques meublés pour leur préférer des espaces aujourd'hui désaffectés : les appartements des invités du prince et de la princesse de Broglie dans les étages. Fermées depuis 1938, ces pièces aux allures de belle endormie laissent entrevoir des couches successives de papiers peints déchirés, palimpsestes d'époques successives. *« Quand j'ai visité le château pour la première fois durant l'été 2013, j'ai été intéressé par la nature éphémère et fragile de ces espaces intimes accidentés par le temps, et par ces papiers peints aux motifs floraux liés au jardin alentour »*, déclare l'artiste né en 1962 à Jalapa, dans l'État de Veracruz (Mexique). Sensible aux empreintes du temps et aux traces, il a photographié ces fragments de tapisseries, les a agrandis avant de les transférer à une machine qui imprime ligne par ligne de la peinture à l'huile sur des toiles. Avec cette machine *« low tech »* utilisée dans les années 1980 pour créer des affiches publicitaires, l'auteur de la *Citroën DS modifiée* (1993) a produit vingt-sept peintures *« à la fois mécaniques et organiques »* qui font référence à la tradition des papiers peints de Matisse. *« Loin d'être une simple reproduction photographique, ce travail est une expérience plastique sur la mémoire de l'image »*, affirme le concepteur des *Samurai Tree* (2006), série de peintures géométriques conçue sur ordinateur et réalisée par des exécutants *a tempera* et feuille d'or sur bois. Ce qui intéresse Gabriel Orozco, c'est de concevoir des compositions, pas de les réaliser. Il aime aussi puiser dans le répertoire de la nature, très présente dans son œuvre depuis ses premières photographies jusqu'aux récents *Roiseaux* (2012), hybrides de branches de bambou et de plumes d'oiseaux. Comme en 1992 au MoMA à New York où il installa ses œuvres en dehors des galeries du musée, l'artiste nomade a placé ses toiles dans des espaces qui n'ont pas vocation à accueillir des œuvres d'art. Dès lors, le jeu pour le visiteur consiste à confronter l'original des papiers déchirés avec les détails agrandis et modifiés dans ces lieux chargés d'âme. Présentée au public pendant trois ans, cette œuvre est la troisième commande spéciale de la Région Centre à un artiste d'envergure internationale après Jannis Kounellis en 2008 et Sarkis en 2011. Gabriel Orozco, dont le travail a fait l'objet d'une rétrospective en 2010 au Centre Pompidou, doit créer de nouvelles pièces pour le château en 2015.

Gabriel Orozco devant les *Fleurs fantômes*, 2014, installation dans les appartements princiers (©ERIC SANDER). Page de droite : Gabriel Orozco, *Fleurs fantômes*, 2014, fragments de tapisseries anciennes (©ERIC SANDER).

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Gabriel Orozco, *Fleurs fantômes,* 2014, fragments de tapisseries anciennes (©ERIC SANDER).

Sphères et cercles

« Ce projet de deux ans est le fruit d'une relation personnelle unique avec un château chargé d'histoire. Toutes mes œuvres ont été conçues dans un contexte spécifique », ajoute l'artiste qui ne se limite pas à certaines techniques, encore moins à un style défini. Depuis ses débuts en 1981, il utilise tous les médiums : la photographie d'abord, puis le dessin, la sculpture, la vidéo, jusqu'à plus récemment la peinture et l'architecture. Artiste nomade, le monde est son atelier, avec toutefois trois points d'ancrage : la Bourgogne où il conçoit ses œuvres en terre, New York où il vit avec sa famille et *Observatory House,* une maison dominant la côte Pacifique du Mexique qu'il a lui-même dessinée en s'inspirant de l'observatoire Jantar Mantar à New Delhi. Dotée d'une piscine hémisphérique, celle-ci reprend à grande échelle le motif du cercle présent dans bon nombre de ses œuvres, de la sphère en caoutchouc vulcanisé *Recaptured Nature* (1990) aux formes circulaires dotées de mouvements rotatifs des peintures *Samurai Tree* (2006). *« L'artiste envisage le monde en tant que cosmos, du microscopique au macroscopique, en jouant de*

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(©ERIC SANDER).

GABRIEL OROZCO, BIOGRAPHIE

Gabriel Orozco est né en 1962 à Jalapa dans l'État de Veracruz au Mexique. Formé initialement à l'École nationale des arts plastiques à Mexico (1981-1984), il a étudié au Circulo de Bellas Artes à Madrid de 1986 à 1987. Pour cet artiste nomade, impossible de séparer l'art et la vie : il séjourne et travaille à New York, Mexico et Paris. Représenté en France par la galerie parisienne Chantal Crousel, il a exposé dans les plus grands musées à travers le monde. Il a participé à la Biennale de Venise en 1993, 2003 et 2005, ainsi qu'à la Documenta X (1997) et XI (2002). En 2010 et 2011, le MoMA à New York, la Tate Modern à Londres et le Centre Pompidou à Paris ont organisé une rétrospective de son travail. **M. B.**

la réversibilité des dimensions », souligne Christine Macel dans le catalogue de la rétrospective que lui a consacrée le Centre Pompidou en 2010.

Organique et géométrique

À l'échelle monumentale, Gabriel Orozco a dessiné en 2006 des cercles concentriques à la mine de plomb sur un gigantesque squelette de cachalot suspendu dans la bibliothèque Vasconcelos à Mexico (*Mobile Matrix*). Un jeu entre matière organique et dessin géométrique qu'il affectionne tout particulièrement, déjà présent dans *Black Kites*, un crâne humain minutieusement recouvert d'un damier noir et blanc dessiné à la mine de plomb. La *« skullpture »* (jeu de mot entre crâne et sculpture), créée par l'artiste en 1997 après avoir survécu à un pneumothorax, évoque la tradition iconographique des *memento mori* et l'omniprésence des crânes dans la culture mexicaine. *« En tant que sculpteur, Gabriel Orozco préfère modifier que créer du neuf, tactique récurrente dans pratiquement toute son œuvre »*, expliquent Paulina Pobocha et Anne Byrd dans le catalogue du Centre Pompidou. Sa pratique de

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Gabriel Orozco lors de l'accrochage des *Fleurs fantômes* (©ERIC SANDER).

morcellement et de réassemblage en est un exemple, à commencer par sa fameuse *Citröen DS modifiée,* « déesse » de la vitesse stoppée net par l'ablation du moteur et de la partie centrale, aérodynamique jusqu'à l'absurde. *Idem* pour *Four Bicycles* (*There Is Always One Direction*) qui repose sur cette stratégie qualifiée par Orozco d'*« extraction et reconfiguration »* : invité à participer à une exposition collective au Centre d'art contemporain Witte de With à Rotterdam en 1994, il achète quatre vélos hollandais dont il retire la selle et le guidon, avant d'assembler les cadres pour former une structure autonome.

Transformations sculpturales

Cette transformation d'objets du quotidien en sculptures se retrouve aussi dans *Elevator,* conçu en 1994 à l'occasion d'une exposition personnelle au musée d'Art contemporain de Chicago. Une équipe d'assistants récupère un vieil ascenseur, coupe la cabine dans le sens horizontal, en retire une partie et recolle les deux autres sections. *« L'idée n'est pas seulement de découper l'objet, c'est aussi de découper notre souvenir de cet objet, de transformer ce souvenir »,* note l'artiste mexicain. À la suite de l'opération, la hauteur intérieure de l'ascenseur est devenue équivalente à la taille d'Orozco. *« À l'instar de Borges, son auteur favori, il envisage le corps à la fois comme instrument de mesure et partie intégrante du processus qu'il observe »,* note Christine Macel. Son corps est l'étalon de certaines de ses œuvres, qu'il s'agisse de *My Hands Are My Heart* (1991), exécutée en moulant un tas d'argile entre ses mains pour lui donner une forme de cœur, ou de *Yielding Stone* (1992), une boule de plasticine dont le poids équivaut à celui de l'artiste. Un autoportrait en creux de ce nomade *« poreux à tous les souffles du monde »* (Aimé Césaire).

Ci-dessus et page de droite : Gabriel Orozco, *Fleurs fantômes*, 2014, fragments de tapisseries anciennes (©ERIC SANDER).

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PURPLE

ART

GABRIEL OROZCO on boomerangs

interview and photography by ALEXIS DAHAN

ALEXIS DAHAN — When and how did you start practicing the boomerang?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I guess about six years ago. I was spending summers in Burgundy, in France, buying kites for my son to fly. One shop sold boomerangs, which looked quite good, not like fake, touristy things that don't work. I bought a couple and I spent a whole summer trying to fly them. After that I became passionate about boomerangs. Now it's somehow my favorite sport. I have many different ones now.

ALEXIS DAHAN — How is a boomerang made? And could it be called a non-industrial object?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Boomerangs are non-industrial because of the limited demand. It's a difficult sport. It's not easy to throw. A lot of people are quickly disappointed because it's so hard to throw, and then it doesn't come back, and then you lose it and don't want to hear about it again. First you need a very big field to learn to throw one. It goes very far and many fly away. That combination makes it unpopular. And then there are many shapes and many different boomerangs made of different materials. The original boomerangs were made of wood, but even in wood there many different techniques for making one, from one piece, laminated, or strip laminated, which bends the wood in layers. They're also made of carbon and all kinds of plastics. They need a very precise design and it has to be cut and polished by hand. So it's not industrial and the market is very small. Very few people in the world throw boomerangs. You have championships, world cups, and all that — I've met these people — but it's a completely amateur sport. No one lives from boomeranging. They have jobs and most are engineers or mechanics or artists or scientists. I fly boomerangs at an airstrip. They fly planes; I fly boomerangs. Everybody flies something.

ALEXIS DAHAN — What makes a good throw?
GABRIEL OROZCO — You have to play with the wind and follow it. You first have to find the direction and then you have to move some degrees out of its current. You face the wind and, if you're right-handed, you move to the right, 10 degrees, 45 degrees, or 90 degrees, depending on the boomerang and the strength of the wind. You have to throw it vertically. Normally people throw it like a Frisbee, which doesn't work. You also have to tilt the boomerang some degrees and calculate the height of the throw, whether it's low or high up in the sky. Every boomerang is different, and you play with the tilt, orientation, and level in relation to the ground — and also to your strength. If you throw it perfectly it comes back to your hand.

ALEXIS DAHAN — So what makes a perfect throw.
GABRIEL OROZCO — The perfect throw, obviously, is one that you catch. For me it's like a Japanese archery ritual: the position of the body, how you breathe, how you feel the environment. To make the throw very accurate has something to do with body concentration and an awareness of the environment, because you're playing with the landscape and the elements.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Is it a ritual?
GABRIEL OROZCO — It's something like one. In the beginning, when you throw boomerangs, it's hard to catch it because you have to get to know the type of wind. You throw many times before you start to catch them. Then, too, every boomerang is different. Some you catch quickly, some go quite a long distance, some not so far. Normally when you throw it, it's very straight, kind of low, and flies in a perfect circle and then comes back to your hands. It has to come to your hands, without you moving. You have to throw it again and again. In medium-range boomerangs you always have to chase the boomerang when it comes back, because it's very rare that it comes back to exactly where you threw it. Normally you have to run. Then others you throw in the sky and they float a long time and the wind takes the boomerang and you catch it somewhere in a range of 50 meters from where you started. So the perfect throw is just the right strength, the right arc, and then it comes back to you.

ALEXIS DAHAN — It seems that one can link boomerangs with aspects of your art, such as circularity or playfulness. Can you tell us about that?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I ask myself why I didn't discover this sport a long time ago. It's perfect for me. The boomerang itself is a sculptural object — its dynamic is so beautiful. It's also a very precise instrument, and what you do is play with the landscape — you intervene with the landscape using a very simple gesture and an object that comes back to you. The elements, playing with the landscape and the circular process, which starts and ends at a beginning, is like my work when I play with or transform objects or take photographs — or even in my drawings, where there's a notion of an end right from the beginning.

ALEXIS DAHAN — How often and where do you play?
GABRIEL OROZCO — I try to play three times a week. When I'm in New York, I practice at Pier 40, on the Hudson River. It's close to my house, so I go there and practice when it's empty, normally at lunchtime.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Isn't that a soccer field?
GABRIEL OROZCO — It's two soccer fields together, because you need more than one soccer field for the medium-range boomerangs. On weekends I come out here to the farm and play long range. In France I go to my farm in Burgundy, and when I'm in Paris I sometimes go to the Bois de Boulogne. Some French boomerang throwers are very good. There's a little community of throwers in Paris.

ALEXIS DAHAN — You've said that art can be made from a simple gesture. Have you found echoes in your art from practicing the boomerang?

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GABRIEL OROZCO — Well, I don't believe in utopias, so in my art I always try to be realistic, dealing with real facts, everyday phenomena, and things that are happening. It's not like a preconceived idea. So the way I work is always changing, and it's also a way to be aware of the present time. I love games and sports, so I've worked with them in relation to landscapes and instruments. When I transform a ping-pong or billiard table, or photograph soccer players, I think of how games and sports re-create the landscape and create a connection with reality, even if sports are a kind of abstract human invention, with rules and an abstract use of landscape. I'm not pretending that boomerangs are a form of art; it's a private practice. I do it for myself, but the fact that I do it obviously influences things in my art. So this type of activity is, in a way, like driving a car. Driving, when you enjoy it, can lead you to discover things, to moments of pleasure, to some kind of aesthetic or philosophical aspect of reality. So, for example, I've never made my own boomerang, but maybe at some point I will. Until now I haven't been interested in fabricating one. What I do is look for very good boomerangs. Some are very old, some are new, some are in different materials. I'm interested in the throwing activity, the practice of the sport.

ALEXIS DAHAN — An activity that doesn't produce anything, which is pure in some way, but also renewing and exhausting itself all the time.
GABRIEL OROZCO — Yes, exactly. And it's always different. It's always the same, but it's also different, and for me it's quite fulfilling and rich. You're alone in an empty space, and it can be dangerous. If you hit a person with a boomerang you can really hurt them.

ALEXIS DAHAN — Was it a weapon in Australia?
GABRIEL OROZCO — Well, no. The boomerangs that return are not weapons. In fact, you cannot hunt with a boomerang that returns. They were probably used as a kind of magic sport or ritual. You can, however, scare birds if you throw one into a lake. They hunted with something like a hook, which had a similar shape to a boomerang, with one short arm. When you throw it, the dynamic makes it go very far away and very fast; so when it hits a kangaroo, it can kill it. But this is a straight shot; it doesn't make a curve. Boomerangs are also a pastime that began a long time ago. People believe it's from Australia, but some say they've found them in Poland, and some say the Egyptian pharaohs had boomerangs in their tombs.

ALEXIS DAHAN — I wonder about the etymology of the word.
GABRIEL OROZCO — I think it's Australian, because they were discovered in Australia, and the natives still used them. The word comes from these people.

END

Alexis Dahan
Gabriel Orozco on boomerangs
Purple Fashion, N°20, Fall—Winter, 2013.

ArtReview

It was bound to happen. Set inside a giant tent on the grounds of a Mexican Army compound, amid sweaty Lanvin suits, wilting gowns, tequila-flushed faces and unbuttoned egos (not to mention the celebrity photo wall, a semi-grand classical orchestra in white-face and copious refreshment), what the *New York Post* later pumped as a titanic 'clash' took place between two Amex Black Card-carrying members of the global superrich. The Page Six kerfuffle pitted oil heir Brandon 'Greasy Bear' Davis against the hired muscle of an unnamed local millionaire: a tempest in a juice bottle if ever there was one. To quote William Makepeace Thackeray, the lapel-creasing showdown – if not the entire Gatsbyesque experience that was the over-the-top opening of Mexico City's Museo Jumex – epitomised today's gilded global artworld as 'a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretensions'.

Thankfully, the official blowout for the museum – a David Chipperfield-designed, travertine-filled, deluxe gem that cost a reported $50 million – was not the final word on Mexico City's newest art institution. That came hours later, in the form of an electronic query during a Sunday midday conversation held at the museum: 'Why does contemporary art choose to privilege kitsch, frivolousness, and the banal during a time that demands profound answers with respect to interiority, spirituality, and poesis?' The panellists, who included novelist Juan Villoro, artist Abraham Cruzvillegas, art critic María Minera, Colección Jumex director Patrick Charpenel and moderator Gabriel Orozco, appeared momentarily flummoxed. Perhaps it was a matter of clearing the previous night's cobwebs. Far more than glittery parties, boldface names or even a fabulous signature building, answering that prickly question will prove key in choosing a direction from within Museo Jumex's split personality.

above Gabriel Orozco, *Oval Billiard Table*, 1996. Courtesy Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City

preceding pages, from left Two views of the Museo Jumex opening night party in Mexico City, November 2013, photos: Billy Farrell Agency; exterior view of Museo Jumex, photo: Rene Castelan Foglia, courtesy Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City

Started 15 years ago by Eugenio López Alonso, sole heir to the privately owned Mexican juice giant Grupo Jumex, the Fundación Jumex has amassed what is reputed to be the largest collection of contemporary art in Latin America. Made up of 2,700 pieces valued at some $80 million, the foundation's uneven holdings range from Dan Flavin light fixtures and Donald Judd stacks to the messy outpourings of West Coast artists Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley. Also included are storehouses full of second-rate stuff by artists like Richard Prince, Rudolf Stingel, Maurizio Cattelan and Urs Fischer (these pieces are best described as checklist art). To date, the stronger contributions of contemporary Mexican and Latin American artists play a largely underappreciated role in the collection. Purchased often with great care thanks to López's devoted local patronage, it's largely these works that truly demonstrate Jumex's sustainable aspirations as an important international collection.

Proof that a disconnect exists between the foundation's actual strengths and its in-crowd anxieties is visible immediately in several of the museum's five inaugural exhibitions (a sixth show, a terrific survey of the Danish collective Superflex, is on view at Fundación Jumex's original space, located inside the company's juice factory in suburban Ecatepec de Morelos). Most prominent among these is *A Space in Two Dimensions*, a selection of 50 mostly mismatched pieces from the collection that also includes a group of seven architecture-enhancing string sculptures by the late Fred Sandback (organised with help from New York powerhouse David Zwirner). Curated by Charpenel (who also organised the Superflex display) and arrayed inside the museum's top floor, the exhibition features a who's who of important art-market names (Damien Hirst, Carol Bove, Thomas Ruff), alongside a mere handful of bona fide auction-house jewels (Robert

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Gober's *Flying Sink*, 1985, Jeff Koons's *Three Ball Total Equilibrium Tank*, 1985, and Andy Warhol's blue *Jackie Smiling*, 1964). More misses than hits, the collection highlights function as an all-too-familiar grouping of trophy art. Despite the effort to turn Sandback's sculptures into an exhibition through-line, it's hard to shake the idea that this kind of flashy loot can easily be picked up in a day of conspicuous shopping at Frieze, the Armory Show or Art Basel Miami Beach.

A Space in Two Dimensions, in fact, does not so much 'weave two separate exhibitions into a single space' as make plain a rather unseemly MOMA-lite agenda. In a phrase, Jumex does not have the discriminating goods to convincingly represent contemporary art history. Tellingly, the collection's high points emerge in direct contrast to this cheeky ambition. This is mainly thanks to genuine surprises, courtesy of works by artists like Minerva Cuevas (*Drunker*, 1995), a video of the artist downing an entire bottle of tequila), Francis Alÿs (a painted diptych of a man in a blonde wig), Teresa Margolles (a gold reliquary containing a splinter from a home destroyed by the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan) and, of course, Orozco – the Johnny Appleseed of contemporary Mexican art. That his 1996 *Oval Billiard Table* is the collection's most emblematic piece makes a pair of treasure-house truths supremely evident. First, a museum is only as good as its collection. And second, Jumex, like all leading institutions, is best served by highlighting its unique holdings and relationships.

Mention of Orozco, in fact, also begs the question as to why Mexico's most happening museum would choose to devote its marquee inaugural solo exhibition to a notable but marginal artist like James Lee Byars rather than celebrate a far more prominent homegrown talent (Orozco is hardly the only artist who fits the bill here). The answer, alas, may lie in the wall text's fine print. Organised in conjunction with MOMA PS1 (the exhibition curators are Jumex's Magalí Arriola and PS1's Peter Eleey), the Byars show – pegged as 'the most comprehensive survey' of the artist's work in North America since his death in 1997 – is due to travel to Queens in autumn 2014. This is the kind of museum deal that afflicts rookie institutions with bouts of temporary nearsightedness. Seen from the vantage point of Jumex's junior project, PS1 today looks not like a poorly renovated schoolhouse, but more like MOMA's Yoshio Taniguchi-renovated 53rd Street building.

Which is not to say that the Museo Jumex, in its proper context, is not what one judicious attendee of that now famous lost weekend would rightly call 'an institution without rivals in its own country'. Set inside a jewel of a building that negotiates international-style white cube requirements with a local embrace of inexpensive marble and copious sunlight, the museum has instantaneously acquired a global cachet most international institutions would envy. But something of a mystery remains about what role it will cultivate in the one Latin city that boasts numerous contemporary *museos* (there's the Museo Tamayo, the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, the Museo de Arte Moderno, the Museo Experimental El Eco and the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros). A collection long identified with social and financial clout as well as its fundamental role in seeding a generation of celebrated Mexican artists, the Fundación Jumex and its new museum will henceforth have to choose a credible, sustained and coherent direction for its future. From now on, it can either follow in the wake of today's ephemeral art values, or continue to lead Mexico and the world in shaping the art of tomorrow. **ar**

James Lee Byars, *½ an Autobiography*
Courtesy Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City

A Place in Two Dimensions: A Selection from Colección Jumex + Fred Sandback *is on show at Museo Jumex, Mexico City, through 9 February, alongside* James Lee Byars: ½ an Autobiography, *on show through 13 April.* Superflex: The Corrupt Show and the Speculative Machine *is on view at Galería Jumex, Ecatepec de Morelos, through 2 February*

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ARTFORUM

GABRIEL OROZCO

Gabriel Orozco talks about “Asterisms”

Gabriel Orozco, *Astroturf Constellation* (detail), 2012, 1,188 found objects, including plastic, glass, paper, metal, and other materials, and thirteen photographic grids, framed, each comprising 99 chromogenic prints. Found objects: overall dimensions vary with installation; photographs: each print 4 x 6”, each grid 48 1/2 x 58 x 2”.

Gabriel Orozco’s “Asterisms,” at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, presents two recent bodies of work that encapsulate several recurring ideas in his output: erosion, everyday materials, and a friction between the natural environment and society. Throughout, the exhibition emphasizes Orozco’s delicate observation of how we construct private and individual systems of categorization. The show runs through January 13, 2013.

IN 2008, I went to the Isla Arena in the bay of Guerrero Negro, Mexico, to collect whale skeletons for the National Library in Mexico. It’s an island, a national park, and a protected area—a sanctuary for all the whales that travel down to Baja from way up north. There’s a lagoon where they can swim in calm water and do their mating and procreating. But there is also a lot of death. Isla Arena has a sand bank, which is also a cemetery—a twenty-five-mile-long beach. It’s all sand, not even one palm tree. So you have all these animals landing on the shore from the currents there. But I also saw lot of interesting artifacts and remains washing up. It’s not a pool of pollution or anything like that—because it’s protected, there aren’t people collecting stuff or exploring. I wondered if there might be some very interesting, old, and untouched things coming ashore. These currents come from all over—China, Japan, Alaska—and they somehow manage to cross the Pacific.

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Gabriel Orozco
Artforum, November 10, 2012.
https://urlr.me/jT26ue

We asked permission to collect this debris. We spent a week on-site, and had to hire two boats, three motorcycles, two trolleys, and a team of six people. We mapped the island out, divided it up, and did a kind of exploration, almost like an archaeological dig. After that, the trolleys were transported to Pennsylvania, because I have a studio there and a big barn. I catalogued all of the objects we found, making grids and photographs of them, in the barn.

Around the same time, I was working on a project for Pier 40 in Manhattan, which is the field where I play soccer with my team. At some point, I also started to throw my boomerangs there, usually when it's empty at lunchtime or very early in the morning. Being alone in the field, searching for my boomerangs, I noticed all these little objects in the Astroturf, and I collected one or two because I found them interesting. I took them to my house and made macrophotographs of them. I decided to assemble a big collection of all the objects that I found on Pier 40—pieces of clothing or buttons or cleats, or other sports-related stuff. The Astroturf is a big carpet.

There are resonances between these two projects, and I found that using photography and setting up a grid seemed the best way to capture their echoes. The grid is useful in terms of quantifying accumulation. But as you know, you can cluster the world in so many ways. I decided to do so taxonomically, just to have this platform with all the objects on display grouped first by type then by color then by size. Obviously the idea of the boomerang as a cycle, as an elliptical and circular shape, is important to me, too. Circularity, movement, dynamics, symmetry, asymmetry, and awareness of the wind, landscape conditions: It's all there in my work.

As for "asterisms," I landed on this word after thinking about the grid and the constellation. When you put together a group of objects, regardless of their origin, you form a constellation: a group of associations that somehow belong to you. On the other hand, the landscape is *always* there. And when you start to look carefully, you begin to see all these little particles or encounters in the sand or turf. They become a little bit like stars. You start to see one star, and then another, and then you start to look for these stars and try to read the sky or the landscape. You make a grid in your mind in relation to the sky; that is your asterism. I think also it's a technical term in astronomy, but it's a good name for the way these objects are found, displayed, and how they relate to one another, across the two projects.

These are the asterisms I made from two recent explorations: one from a place a few blocks from my house, and the other one from a very remote area, very far away. But you can find asterisms everywhere. Right?

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Le Monde

Orozco, le goût du déplacement

Au Centre Pompidou, un inventaire des réalisations de l'artiste né au Mexique

Art

Il est à peu près impossible de décrire l'œuvre de Gabriel Orozco pour une raison simple : il n'y a rien que l'on puisse appeler son style ou sa manière ou ses habitudes. Chaque pièce est la réalisation plastique d'une idée ou d'une envie différente. Chacune répond à une impulsion venue d'une chose vue ou lue, d'un lieu ou d'une situation. Orozco, 48 ans, né au Mexique, travaille entre Mexico, New York et Paris. On ne lui connaît pas d'adresse fixe. Ce goût du déplacement est aussi sensible dans ses travaux que dans son mode de vie.

La présentation de son exposition est en ce sens d'une exemplaire clarté. Sur les murs, des photographies, des dessins et des peintures se succèdent, dans l'ordre chronologique. Sur trois longues tables qui se suivent sont disposés ensemble objets, sculptures et *maquettes*. Sur une ligne parallèle, au sol, sont placées les pièces de plus grandes dimensions. Entre elles, comme sur les tables, sont disposées des images dans lesquelles on reconnaît des photographies de Lartigue redécoupées.

C'est sobre, très sobre, et cette absence d'effet dans la scénographie devient l'effet le plus troublant. Le visiteur doit se faire un devoir de comprendre ce qui peut relier entre eux une abstraction de *cercles colorés très soigneusement* peinte, des modelages brutaux, un échiquier où toutes les cases sont occupées par des chevaux, une cage d'ascenseur posée par terre, une chaussure sans semelle, quatre vélos assemblés par leurs cadres et la pièce la plus célèbre d'Orozco, une DS Citroën qui n'a plus que ses deux ailes accolées, monoplace encore plus effilé que le modèle original et, évidemment, incapable de rouler.

Ce début d'*inventaire suggère* une réponse. Orozco aime à vider les produits de l'industrie de toute utilité. Quelques manipulations, discrètes ou plus spectaculaires, les font basculer du côté de l'inerte et de l'absurde. On peut n'y voir que la réactivation – une de plus – du ready-made inventé par Duchamp. On peut penser aussi que cette activité de sabotage silencieux a des sous-entendus politiques et sociaux et qu'Orozco n'a que peu d'admiration pour le système économique dominant. Quand il entasse caisses et débris devant la *skyline* de Manhattan et les photographies selon un angle tel que la ligne des débris et celle des tours soient identiques, le symbolisme est évident.

Le fantôme de l'exotisme

Il l'est à peine moins quand il fabrique un faux arbre aux feuilles blanches et vertes en plastique et papier, noie un coquillage dans le plâtre, enferme des insectes dans des cônes d'argile ou dessine un damier sur un crâne. La nature et le vivant ne sont pas mieux traités par lui. Il les fige et les fossilise. Marcher le long des tables couvertes de ses fabrications rappelle d'autres promenades, dans des musées d'histoire naturelle ou des beaux-arts décatis. Il n'y manque même pas le fantôme de l'exotisme : un tronc d'arbre renversé, donné pour un pied d'éléphant, est piqué d'une multitude d'yeux de verre, fixes et morts.

Il suffit donc de rester assez longtemps dans l'exposition pour éprouver ce qui fait l'unité d'un si vaste étalage d'*artefacts* aussi disparates de taille, de matière et de motif : une certaine tonalité, humoristique à la surface, plus inquiète et inquiétante par en dessous. Il y a, de façon inattendue, quelque chose de comparable entre les natures mortes mélancoliques et métaphysiques de De Chirico et les installations d'Orozco, une même poétique légèrement funèbre. ■

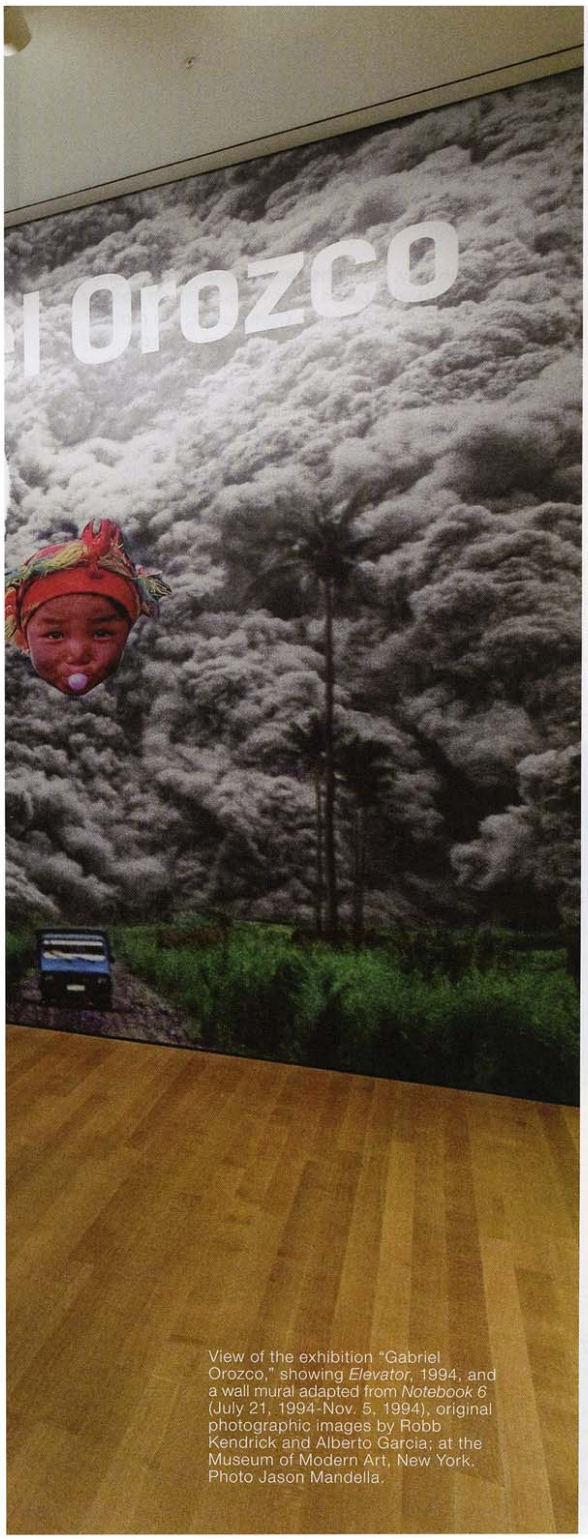
Philippe Dagen

Gabriel Orozco. Centre Pompidou, place Georges-Pompidou. Paris 4e. M° Rambuteau. Tél. : 01-44-78-12-33. Jusqu'au 3 janvier 2011. Ou mercredi au lundi, de 11 heures à 21 heures. 12 €.

« Black Kites » (1997), de Gabriel Orozco. PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Philippe Dagen
Orozco, le goût du déplacement
Le Monde, September 19-20, 2010.

Art in America



View of the exhibition "Gabriel Orozco," showing *Elevator*, 1994, and a wall mural adapted from *Notebook 6* (July 21, 1994-Nov. 5, 1994), original photographic images by Robb Kendrick and Alberto Garcia; at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo Jason Mandella.

GAME CHANGER

For the first stop of a traveling survey, Gabriel Orozco rewrote the rules governing midcareer retrospectives. In the process, he played with the meanings of his own works, too.

BY NANCY PRINCENTHAL

JUSTLY ACCLAIMED THOUGH HE IS for his conceptual agility and visual imagination, Gabriel Orozco may distinguish himself most by his provocative approach to site specificity. Rather than simply responding, as the term implies, to an exhibition venue's physical qualities or historical particulars (though these sometimes play a role), Orozco makes a series of calculations about audience expectations. He gauges assumptions about his work and its context, about contemporary art and visual experience. Then he positions objects and images, both old and new, in a process that he describes as "almost like a life-size board game—a *solitario*, let's say."[1]

That, at any rate, is what he did, with great wit and skill, for a survey that opened at New York's Museum of Modern Art and travels (presumably with changes along the way) to Basel, Paris and London. And while games are an important motif in his work—chess, Go, pool, Ping-Pong and soccer have all provided ready-made objects, subjects and/or strategies—he chose to omit a few examples that are among his most ambitious and satisfying. *Ping Pond Table* (1998), in which two customized tables are assembled into a cross and joined at the center by a square pond stocked with water lilies, was not at MoMA. Nor was *Carambole with Pendulum* (1996), an oval billiard table on which play is complicated by a ball swinging just above its surface. No simple run of greatest hits, then, for New Yorkers, who think they're too sophisticated for mere spectacle, nor for hapless tourists who get waylaid en route to *Starry Night*. Did the choice

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THE EMPTY SHOE BOX AND YOGURT-CUP LIDS ARE CLASSIC OROZCO GESTURES, AT ONCE AGGRESSIVELY VACANT AND MILDLY TUTTLE-ESQUE. THE ARTIST SAYS THEY ARE MEANT TO BE "CLEANSING."

disappoint? If so, the response made Orozco happy. Frustration is a reaction he actively courts.

Not that big effects were banished at MoMA. The survey there began with a bang, in the form of a blockbuster photomural enlarged from a collage made on the page of a 1994 notebook, one of the many Orozco has kept and shown. Spanning two walls, the image features a massive, billowing cloud of gray volcanic smoke. Hovering in midair is the disembodied head of a child in colorful, generically "native" headgear, looking sassy and blowing a bright pink bubble-gum bubble. Beneath, a diminutive blue truck trundles down a narrow road between soon-to-be-devastated palms: a marker for us viewers, perhaps, trying to get out before the blast hits, and our odds are not great.

Arguably, this billboard-size image—it is also on the cover of the handsome exhibition catalogue—is something of a joke about Orozco's perceived identity as a cultural outsider. Born in 1962 in Jalapa, Orozco was raised in Mexico City. His father was a successful mural painter (he worked with David Alfaro Siqueiros on various commissions) and an outspoken Communist; his mother a classical pianist. Orozco's education was progressive, his milieu cosmopolitan. When Benjamin Buchloh, a devoted advocate of Orozco's work who has insisted from the outset on addressing its putative *mexicanismo*, asked, in a 2004 interview, how the artist explained his use of "materials, positions, and practices . . . that have been denied, prohibited, devalorized" and wanted to know, "Is it because you're an outsider in terms of the Western canon?," Orozco replied, "Being an outsider

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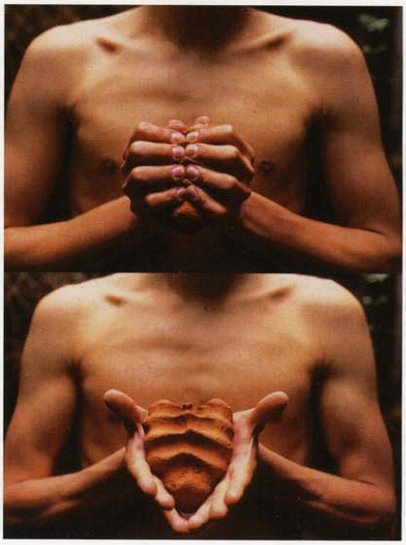
Above, exhibition view, showing (left) *Tuttifruti*, 2008; (rear) *Eyes under Elephant Foot*, 2009; and (foreground) *Four Bicycles (There Is Always One Direction)*, 1994. Photo Jason Mandella.

Left, view of *Yogurt Caps*, 1994, four yogurt lids, each 3⅛ inches in diameter; at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Inset, detail. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

Right, *My Hands Are My Heart*, 1991, two chromogenic prints, each 9⅛ by 12½ inches. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.



would not be the answer because I've grown up in the Western culture. The education and information that I have as a Mexican is very much the same that a European kid would have. . . . I grew up in the art world."[2]

The photomural is the exhibition prologue's background; occupying the entry space proper is an assisted readymade, *Elevator* (1994). Another instrument—to use a favorite Orozco term—of menace, it replaces the pictured eruption's overwhelming vastness with claustrophobia, in the form of an actual elevator car sliced horizontally and shortened in its reconstitution. A cramped cube of fluorescent-lit, unhealthy-seeming air, *Elevator* condenses a beginner's urban experience: no windows, no privacy, built like a fallout shelter, it gets you where you need to go. In short, this introductory pair of works contrasts the terrifying power of nature with the mortifications of culture, both ironized.

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La DS, 1993, modified Citroën DS, 4½ by 15¾ by 3¾ feet. Fonds national d'art contemporain, Paris.

THE NEXT OBJECT ENCOUNTERED was an empty shoe box (1993), placed casually on the floor before a blank wall and much kicked around by viewers, inadvertently or otherwise. In the room beyond was a quartet of clear plastic yogurt cup lids (1994), one per wall. Both works are classic Orozco gestures, at once aggressively vacant and mildly Tuttle-esque. Linking them were four drawings made of ink, toothpaste and spit (1993)—graceful doodles on graph paper of nothing much, plus a covert little ejaculation of contempt. Something of a Beckett suite, this sequence of art in existential crisis seemed poised on the verge of comedy. During a Dec. 15, 2009, panel discussion at MoMA, Orozco said the passage was meant to be "cleansing."

Soon the exhibition opened onto a more visually generous prospect and more flexible groupings. The two warm-toned color photographs in *My Hands Are My Heart* (1991) are an almost sentimental offer of emotional connection; they show the artist holding his hands together in front of his bare chest, then spreading his fingers to reveal a heart-shaped lump of clay. (The object was shown in a vitrine nearby.) These images were flanked by color photographs featuring animals, each a semaphore of gentle resistance, including a sleeping dog of 1990 (let him lie) and a 1992 image of a saddled horse, his withered rump foremost (never approach a horse from the back). A little army of cats, pictured on the labels of identical cat-food cans, regard the camera vigilantly from the watermelons atop which they've been placed (1992).

The cats' eyes rhymed formally with single oranges placed on the serried tables of an empty outdoor market in an adjacent photo titled *Crazy Tourist* (1991), and were also echoed in a deeply unnerving new sculpture. In *Eyes under Elephant Foot* (2009), Orozco studded the funky, weedy surface of what looks like an upturned elephant's foot (it is actually a kind of cactus stem) with dozens of glass eyes in various colors. These several artworks that stare back seem purebred surrealism, which Orozco claimed to dislike at the panel discussion, and it is possible that both their uncanniness and their lurking humor are enhanced by the artist's manifest ambivalence.

In this company, it is especially hard to avoid anthro-

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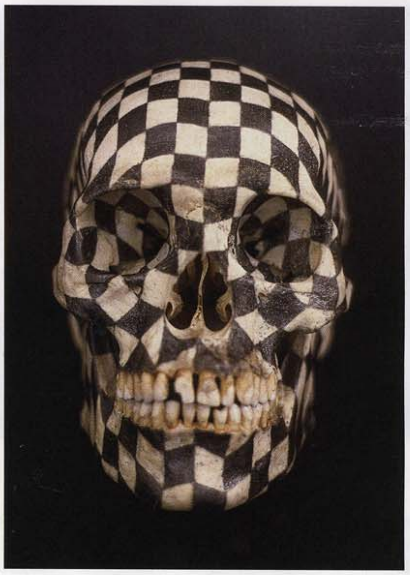
OROZCO'S CITROËN IS NOT JUST GLAMORIZED, IT IS ALSO WEAPONIZED, REBUILT AS A LEATHER-UPHOLSTERED BOMB BUILT FOR TWO: DR. STRANGELOVE'S AUTOMOBILE.

pomorphizing *La DS* (1993), the lustrous gray Citroën DS that Orozco sliced lengthwise, compressed and rebuilt as an even sleeker car, its four headlights rendered gimlet-eyed and just slightly manic. One of Orozco's most highly crafted (and celebrated) sculptures, it was first shown in France, where this particular Citroën was long worshiped: hence *La DS*, phoneticized as la déesse (the goddess). But Orozco's version is not just glamorized, it is also weaponized, reconfigured as a leather-upholstered bomb built for two (the driver, and a single passenger in the back seat): Dr. Strangelove's automobile. Read another way, it is function confounded in the service of form, a twist on the modernist operation of intensification. Similarly, Orozco linked four bicycles into a three-dimensional puzzle (1994) of balked mobility and structural elegance; the assemblage is balanced by a single kickstand.

No work in this exhibition returned the viewer's gaze more challengingly than the much acclaimed *Black*



Above, *Black Kites*, 1997, graphite on skull, 8½ by 5 by 6¼ inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Left, *Eyes under Elephant Foot*, 2009, Beaucarnea trunk and glass eyes, 57⅞ by 56⅞ by 55⅛ inches. Charpenel Collection, Guadalajara.

Kites (1997), a human skull on which a checkerboard has been carefully penciled, its units deformed into elongated or compressed diamonds by the curvature of bone. The pattern continues deep into the wells of the eye sockets, creating a fairly terrifying image of vitality defeated. Or, as it has been described, of nature confronted by culture in the form of the grid. Preceding by a decade Damien Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull of 2007 (and the many other cranial sculptures that, weirdly, followed)—a connection often noted—*Black Kites* is also discussed in relationship to the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead.

The connections Orozco himself established in his pre-

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OROZCO HAS CALLED *WORKING TABLE* "AN EXPLOSION" THAT MIRRORED THE MURAL AT THE EXHIBITION'S ENTRANCE, AND THE GALLERY THAT HELD IT DID HAVE A COMBUSTIVE FEEL.

sentation of this fraught object were to a handful of quiet photographs from the early '90s hung just behind, all of them about invisibility, ephemerality and disappearance. One captures the moisture of breath on the polished surface of a piano. Another, particularly subtle and beautiful, frames a couple of puddles on asphalt, a patched square of sidewalk and the circular tracks of a bicycle driven repeatedly through the water; trees are reflected in both puddles. A third photograph features a sculpture called *Yielding Stone* (1992), an irregular ball of plasticine the weight of the artist's body that was positioned on the floor nearby. Orozco had rolled it down Broadway in New York (an earlier version had been pushed through the streets of Monterrey, Mexico), allowing it to pick up schmutz and imprints along the way; in the photograph, it bears the marks of the sidewalk grate on which it rests. The final photo in this suite was of a spur of the West Side highway in Lower Manhattan, mid-urban-renewal, with a little found sculpture of junk in the foreground.

The unprepossessing assemblage mimics the skyline behind it, which is dominated by the World Trade Center towers, rendered into dust since. A little triumph of complexity and mutual reinforcement, this ensemble of images and objects was deeply affecting.

The survey's final room, a cul-de-sac, was dominated by a large *Working Table* (2000-05) of sculptural sketches in clay and plaster; it also supported a variety of found objects, most altered, including several conch shells bearing drawings, and an apparently untouched straw hat. Additional small sculptures, some assisted readymades and some made of fired clay, were arrayed on a long shelf; small works on paper hung above, among them several jewel-like photocollages. At the MoMA panel, Orozco called *Working Table* "an explosion" that mirrored the mural at the entrance, and the gallery that held the table did have the combustive feel of work going forward at full steam in a confined and windowless space. But the rear wall brought the outside in with a grid of 40 color photos (1995), each featuring the extremely popular yellow Schwalbe motor scooter Orozco drove while resident in Berlin, paired every time with a same-model scooter he encountered in his travels through the city. In other words, these are photos of bikes, mated. (Think chess.)

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Above, *Working Tables, 2000-2005* (detail), 2005, unfired clay, straw, egg container, bottle caps, bark, polystyrene foam and mixed mediums, dimensions variable. MoMA.

Opposite top, *Yielding Stone*, 1992, plasticine, 14½ by 15½ by 16 inches.

Left, *Island Within an Island*, 1993, silver dye bleach print, 16 by 20 inches. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

IT IS A LITTLE UNUSUAL for museum exhibitions to dead end. The arrangement meant viewers experienced the show twice, presumably more quickly on the return. One gallery easily missed the first time held the altered chessboard *Horses Running Endlessly* (1995) along with several paintings, drawings—including a few on paper currency—and photocollages. The chessboard, with four times the regulation number of squares, holds only knights, in four colors. Orozco has noted that the knight in chess jumps, which he takes "as a representation of three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional field"[3]; it is a feature of particular interest to a sculptor. But he has also used the knight's one-up, two-over (or the reverse) movement to determine the patterning of a series of paintings called "Samurai Tree Invariants" (2004-ongoing), which was sampled in this gallery. Crisply executed (by assistants) in blue, red, white and gold leaf, they show circle segments deployed across canvases that look a great deal like playing boards.

In an interview quoted in the survey's catalogue—a book which, unlike the show, offers a comprehensive chronological summary of Orozco's career—art historian Briony Fer commented on what she felt to be the riskiness, for him, of painting on canvas. Orozco replied, "People forget that I want to disappoint. I use that word deliberately. I want to disappoint the expectations of the one who waits to be amazed."[4] Ann Temkin, the exhibition's curator, also notes, in an essay focusing on Orozco's challenge to traditional studio practice, that the canvases "initially shocked his admirers and still cause considerable misunderstanding."[5] In other words, the paintings, perhaps Orozco's most conventional works in terms of medium, bring into sharpest focus his con-

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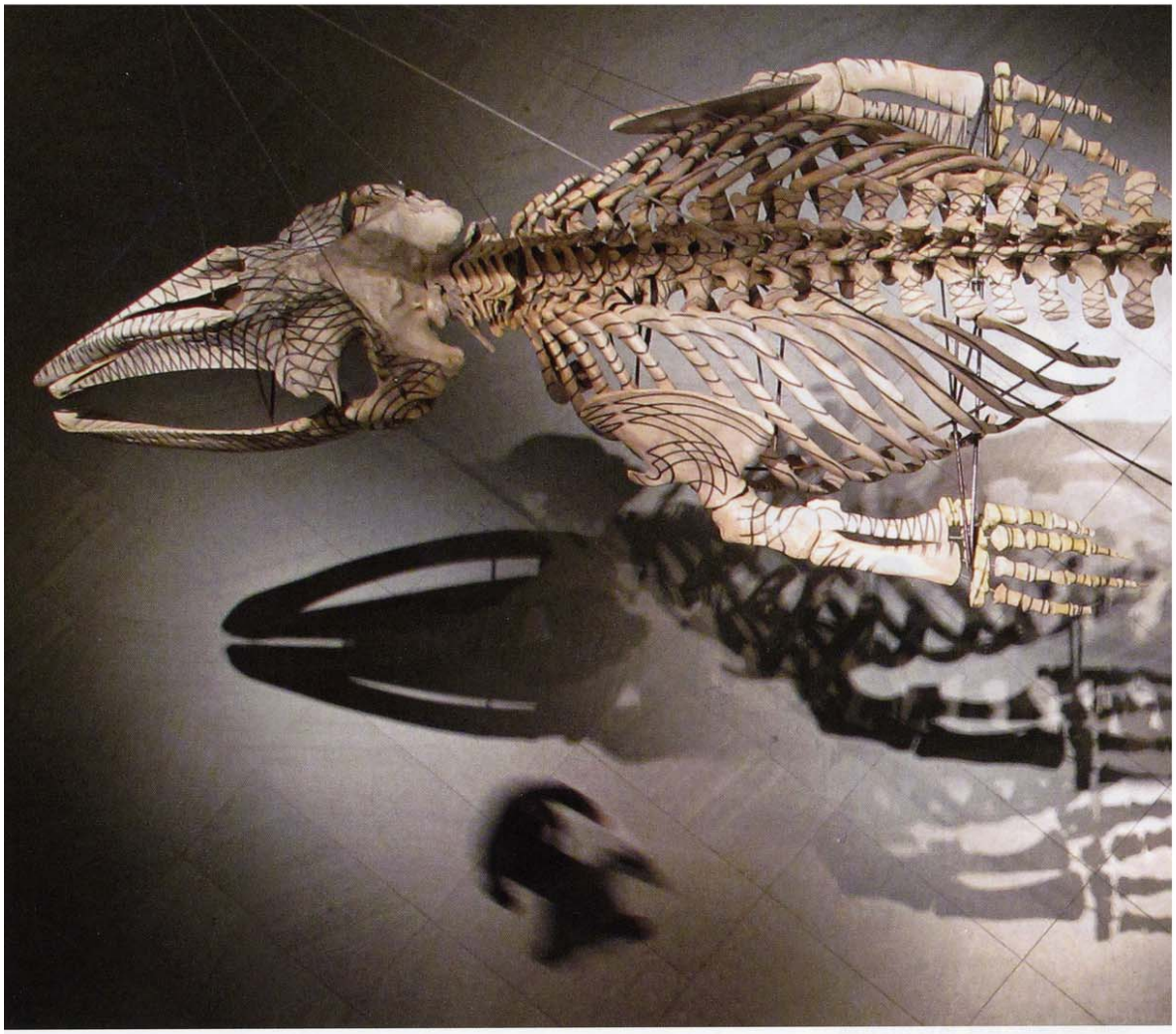

cern with audience assumptions. And though he has said that he favors the circle as "an instrument" that "represents . . . how the universe works,"[6] and also credits Tantra with providing a paradigm for integrating the body and geometry,[7] the paintings as installed at MoMA seemed calculated to propose themselves as an Orozco product line; at a stretch, the gallery in which they were displayed could be seen as a match for MoMA's little sixth-floor merchandise mart positioned at the survey's entrance.

Elsewhere in the museum, there were two outposts of the exhibition that echoed the explosive mural with which it opened. The second-floor Prints and Illustrated Books gallery held a dazzling installation of 460 of the 672 digital prints (2006) that comprise every possible move in the "Samurai Tree Invariants" series, which was also illustrated here in a digital animation presented on a flat-screen monitor. In MoMA's notoriously vast atrium, Orozco installed *Mobile Matrix* (2006), the skeleton of a massive whale (found in Baja California) on which concentric and overlapping circles are inscribed in graphite. Suspended overhead, it resonated with *Spume Fin* (2006), a roughly fin-shaped sculpture made of poured polyurethane hung from the ceiling in the show's main gallery. *Mobile Matrix*, a commission for the atrium of the Vasconcelos library in Mexico City, may evoke for New Yorkers the beloved blue whale that hangs overhead in the city's natural history museum. These latter connections tend to recast MoMA as a kind of steroidal cabinet of curiosities, a Modernized *wunderkammer*.

For the most memorable component of his "Projects" exhibition at MoMA in 1993, Orozco stepped outside the institution, asking cooperative neighbors to put oranges (which he replenished weekly) on the sills of windows

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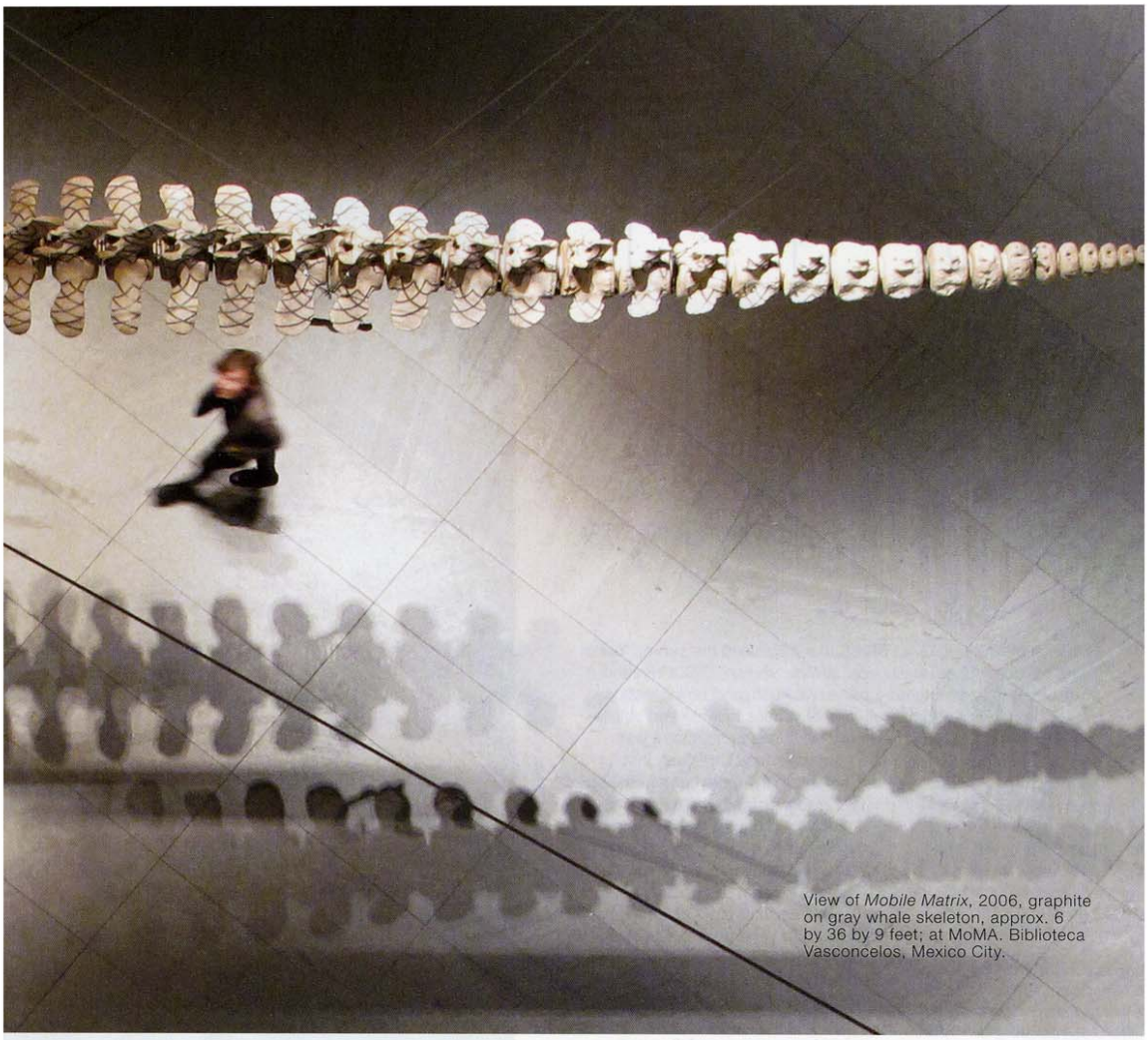

View of *Mobile Matrix*, 2006, graphite on gray whale skeleton, approx. 6 by 36 by 9 feet; at MoMA. Biblioteca Vasconcelos, Mexico City.

facing the museum. In an informal talk at the survey's opening, Temkin recalled asking the artist if he would consider reprising the gesture. She admitted she was not altogether surprised when he declined, explaining to her that the first was a sunny, extroverted, warm-weather show, while the survey, a winter exhibition, would have a more interior orientation. In other words, his work is time-based to the same degree that it is site specific. No context remains fixed. At the forefront of a cohort of artists (they range from Urs Fischer to Rebecca Quaytman) who act as curators of their own heterogeneous output, cross-breeding thematic and monographic exhibitions, Orozco is a revisionist historian of his own career. "I don't know how much I can change the future," he said at the MoMA panel discussion, in response to a question about his influence, "but I'm sure I can change the past." ○

1 E-mail correspondence with the author, Jan. 14, 2010. **2** "Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin Buchloh (2004)," in *October Files 9: Gabriel Orozco*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, MIT Press, 2009, pp. 105-06. **3** Ibid., p. 118. **4** "Crazy about Saturn: Gabriel Orozco Interviewed by Briony Fer (2006)" in *Gabriel Orozco*, Mexico City, Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes/Turner, 2006, p. 109, cited in *Gabriel Orozco*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2009, p. 193. **5** Ann Temkin, "Open Studio," *Gabriel Orozco*, New York, p. 18. **6** "Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin Buchloh (2004)," pp. 115-16. **7** Ibid., p. 119.

"Gabriel Orozco," organized by Ann Temkin with the assistance of Paulina Pobocha, opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York [Dec. 13, 2009-Mar. 1, 2010]. It travels to the Kunstmuseum, Basel [Apr. 18-Aug. 10], the Centre Pompidou, Paris [Sept. 15, 2010-Jan. 3, 2011], and Tate Modern, London [Jan. 19-Apr. 25, 2011]. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue with essays by Temkin, Briony Fer and Benjamin Buchloh, and a chronology by Pobocha and Anne Byrd.

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