

FRANCIS ALÿS

Born 1959 Antwerp, Belgium. Lives and works in Mexico City

Paradox of praxis 1: Sometimes making something leads to nothing 1997

video, colour, sound

9:54 mins

Arriving in Mexico City in 1986 after evading a military draft by the Belgian government, Francis Alÿs wandered around the bustling streets of the city's *Centro Histórico*, observing its daily dynamics in his now trademark walks. There, in local markets and workshops, he noticed how every individual found a place on the social chessboard, in an urban situation which Alÿs encountered as a small universe to experiment with his newly-found practice as an artist. In 1997, Alÿs pushed a block of ice around the city centre of Mexico City for more than nine hours. Unsurprising to casual observers, Alÿs seemed to *just be doing his job*. What starts off as an arduous task requiring the strength of most of his body weight, soon becomes a ludic activity as the block dissolves into an ice-cube that he kicks around like a soccer ball, meanwhile casually smoking a cigarette with an attitude so blasé as to come off as a worker after his shift. The watery traces left on the street are quickly evaporated by the implacable sun but Alÿs' video testimony of the futile pursuit remains as an enduring reminder of perseverance.

ANDREW BIRK

Born 1985 Portland, USA. Lives and works in Mexico City

Baby K 2015

aerosol enamel on canvas

200.0 x 150.0 cm

Courtesy the artist

Centro de Tlalpan (Maxfield Parrish) 2015

aerosol enamel, Xerox pigment, bond paper, silicone, ballpoint pen
and wheat paste on canvas

200.0 x 150.0 cm

Courtesy the artist

ANDREW BIRK

Born 1985 Portland, USA. Lives and works in Mexico City

Te amo nena (Zona de hospitales) 2015

aerosol enamel, found flyers, packing tape and wheat paste
on canvas

150.0 x 120.0 cm

Courtesy the artist

Alien 2015

aerosol enamel and Bondo filler on canvas

200.0 x 150.0 cm

Courtesy the artist

Viaducto Tlalpan 2015

aerosol enamel, vinimex, lost dog flyers, bond paper, permanent marker, ballpoint pen, silicone, wheat paste and spray adhesive
on canvas

200.0 x 150.0 cm

Courtesy the artist

Hatboi patois 2015

aerosol enamel and felt-tipped marker on canvas

200.0 x 150.0 cm

Courtesy the artist

Living in the southern outskirts of Mexico City, Andrew Birk routinely walks a long solitary procession to his studio in the central Condesa neighbourhood. Along this route, on pedestrian-unfriendly streets with heavily polluted air, Birk came to understand the textures of the hostile metropolis. In 2016 he presented *Callejero*, a site-specific installation that filled and transformed a gallery space to reflect fragments of his daily outings: broken glass bottles that act as security fences, walls resembling black-and-white outlined volcanic rock and dried bougainvillea leaves scattered on the floor. Synthesising this saturated scenario, Birk produced a series of paintings in a formal exploration of Mexico City's urban mood (or moodiness). With photocopies of missing dogs, graffiti in diverse typographies, degraded layers of paint and patterns, and even a lighter hanging from a cord, Birk seeks to capture the pictorial details and texture of this chaotic urban geography.

RAMIRO CHAVES

Born 1979 Córdoba, Argentina. Lives and works in Mexico City

XXXXXXXXXX 2014

risographic prints

200 sheets: each 28.0 x 28.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra, Mexico City and San Juan

Living in Mexico City since 2002, Ramiro Chaves takes a special interest in how traces of cultural memory can be seen in architectural forms and legacies. **XXXXXXXXXX** 2014 is Chaves' personal investigation of the implications of the letter X in Mexico's history. The X's adoption in the Castilian language being a central discussion in the times of the Spanish colony, this letter symbolised the meeting point of the Pre-Hispanic tradition with the Spanish population and the creation of a new 'unified mixed race' [*Mestizo*]. In the beginning of the twentieth century, this identity myth would be used to reinforce the idea of a modern integrated Mexico with architects and urbanists using the X in their planning of urban structures and geometric, gridded ornamentations. Chaves registers these inheritances in an almost atlas-like compendium of 200 risographic prints of drawings, photographs and archival documents, which have been both created and recorded as they recur throughout the city. Chaves' exploration and research into the semantic morphology of the graphic X form encompasses Mayan, Aztec and Catholic references and mythologies, reflecting the ideological structures of modernity and the identity construction of the community and the self.

TRANSLATION OF FRONTISPIECE

XXXXXXXXXX is a personal atlas of the ways in which the letter X has been used in contemporary Mexican architecture.

The discussion around the letter X goes back to the Spanish conquest. At the core of the debate was whether to spell the colony's name 'Mexico' or 'Mejico'. To make a long story short, at a given point spelling Mexico's name with an X was officially accepted.

The X became a symbol of the junction of the pre-Hispanic tradition and the new mestizo identity, a symbolic icon of the birth of the modern Mexican state. Shortly after the Mexican Revolution of 1917, the state's architects and urbanists used the X as a resource to think, project, build, and reinforce structures.

The marvellous history of the X in Mexico is the foundational fiction of the country's modernity. This is the point of departure for my project, an excuse to engage in a playful reflection on the construction of my own identity and to speak about history, poetry, the image, space, love, the body, God, time, language, and nothing in particular.

An oxymoron: this is both an ambitious and small project.

Why architecture? Because it provides a conceptual framework and a representation of the play between structure, language, and my body.

Why Mexico? Though I was born in Argentina, I live in Mexico. To activate this duality and vision is to reactivate the idea of America as an archetype of utopia.

I do not seek to establish an encyclopaedic truth. I want to develop a cosmography that documents my relationship to history in a poetic way.

This work can be a chaos of movements in multiple directions but, at the same time, operates as the epicentre of an experiential system. It's like getting something off my chest. A negotiation between who I am on my own and what we are as a social and historic body. This is also the form that confusion and desire have taken.

Ramiro Chaves

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS

Born 1968 Mexico City. Lives and works in Mexico City

Autoconstrucción 2009

HDV video, colour, sound

63:00 mins

Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City

Growing up in the inhospitable volcanic-rock terrains of the Colonia Ajusco, in the south of Mexico City, Abraham Cruzvillegas saw himself immersed in a community-built neighbourhood that expanded organically, without adhering to architectural rules. The improvised edifices formed in the area became a consistent subject of his work. Commonly known as *autoconstrucciones* (self-constructions), these structures are made of readily-available materials that grow according to what necessity dictates and what economic possibility can supply. An urbanism developed to provide primordial shelter and privacy, each particular residence becomes an articulation of individual identity. Motivated by a childhood memory of seeing his parents having intercourse, Cruzvillegas confected a sixty-three-minute filmic portrait of his family neighbourhood, interspersed with footage of four couples in the act of carnal intimacy, to reveal an ensemble of diverse architectural contexts, subjectivities and intimate encounters.

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS

Autoconstrucción 2009

ADVISORY NOTE

Please note that this video contains sexual imagery of an explicit nature.

Not suitable for visitors under the age of 18

CHELSEA CULPRIT

Born 1984 Paducah, USA. Lives and works in Mexico City

Charm bracelet 2017

neon, chain, electrical cable

120.0 cm x 330.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and BWSMX, Mexico City

The American-born, Mexico City-based artist Chelsea Culprit brings a specifically nocturnal character to the metropolitan nature of *Dwelling Poetically*, in work which draws from popular culture and personal experience. The artist's 'colourful' past as professional dancer in Chicago strip clubs informs her practice as a performer, painter and sculptor, as it does her theatrical, symbolic imagery drawn from nightlife and urban signage for sex, alcohol and commerce. Working variously with painting, neon light and sculptural assemblage, Culprit's work constitutes an aesthetics of attraction, resonating with *machismo* as much as pop and queer aesthetic cultural traditions. The neon *diablita* in *Charm bracelet* 2017 was first shown at Barba Azul, a cabaret-style nightclub active since the 1950s, the stage for some of the city's most exuberant salsa and merengue. The little devil figure refers as much to the traditions of neolithic matriarchal goddess cultures as to the romantic, erotic dancing figures of the cheras, who doubly exist as characters of fiction and national myth. Moving freely between the pictorial imagery of folk art and the materiality of the real world, Culprit's accompanying paintings have an especially haptic quality, composed of feelings as much as descriptions, at the intersection of social space and emotional memory. Her vibrant portrayals of elaborately heeled women with hyperbolically exaggerated physiques refer us to libidinous economies of theatricality and desire which allegorise the potential for corruption lurking in the night of the city.

CHELSEA CULPRIT

Born 1984 Paducah, USA. Lives and works in Mexico City

Feng Shui 2010–13

oil and mixed media on canvas

152.5 x 152.5 cm

Courtesy the artist and Queer Thoughts, New York

Slow Monday 2014–16

oil and mixed media on canvas

269.0 x 190.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and Queer Thoughts, New York

EKTOR GARCIA

Born 1985 Red Bluff, USA. Lives and works in Mexico City and New York City

empezar 2018–ongoing

steel, leather, copper, ceramics, sinew, suede, crochet, rubber
dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Mexican-American artist ektor garcia's work synthesises an interest in queer culture and arts and crafts traditions with strong roots in Mexico. Although ostensibly a sculptor, his works tend to be so elaborately installed and convoluted that it is hard to say where things end or begin. Evocative of a homemade altar, collection of ritual or fetish objects, garcia's environments feature artefacts fashioned from an amalgam of techniques including leather-making, ceramics, sewing, welding, crochet, embroidery and collecting. The objects themselves range from handmade ceramic objects to leather cock rings and dog muzzles, which are often combined with recycled and appropriated materials to engender hybrid forms resisting classification. When not appropriated, everything is crafted by the artist, who makes a point of learning each and every technique he uses, however imperfectly. The work is liable to bring to mind the assemblages of Bruce Conner, the homoerotic leather culture of Robert Mapplethorpe, the personal mysticism of Paul Thek, and the mute or adumbrated violence of a homemade torture chamber. Moody, sensual, strangely elegant and disturbing, garcia's is an aesthetic of the minor in every sense of the term; from the marginalised arts and crafts techniques that he employs, to the scale of his work, and the cultural interstices among which the work and the artist circulate. It is at once weird, oddly familiar, and refreshingly unclassifiable.

YANN GERSTBERGER

Born 1983 Cagnes-sur-Mer, France. Lives and works in Mexico City

Black palms 2018

cotton, natural dyes (grana cochinilla), synthetic dyes, glue, reclaimed vinyl banner

290.0 x 250.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and Sorry We're Closed, Brussels

Living in Mexico City since 2012, Yann Gerstberger has created a body of work composed of fragments of everyday objects and produced with an artisanal craftsmanship inspired by popular, folk and indigenous art traditions. Likewise, his 'tapestries', incorporating everyday materials, are made with a technique he developed, in which the artist collects threads found in mops from street-markets, hand-dyes the strands and fibres with different artificial and natural pigments such as the American cochineal red, and then glues the threads individually to a vinyl surface. With this process, which operates between painting, weaving and collage, Gerstberger creates semi-figurative images, or in another way, folkloric abstractions, that reflect the artist's surroundings and influences from diverse urban conditions, cultural traditions and art histories. Due to their repeated linear patterns, and radiating, variegated colours, Gerstberger's works promote dynamic optical effects, tending towards the appearance of corrupted images, in which there's a mystery of something not entirely visible.

YANN GERSTBERGER

Born 1983 Cagnes-sur-Mer, France. Lives and works in Mexico City

Landgèt Manmanw 2016

cotton, natural dyes (grana cochinilla), synthetic dyes, glue, reclaimed vinyl banner

280.0 x 240.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and Sorry We're Closed, Brussels

Living in Mexico City since 2012, Yann Gerstberger has created a body of work composed of fragments of everyday objects and produced with an artisanal craftsmanship inspired by popular, folk and indigenous art traditions. Likewise, his 'tapestries', incorporating everyday materials, are made with a technique he developed, in which the artist collects threads found in mops from street-markets, hand-dyes the strands and fibres with different artificial and natural pigments such as the American cochineal red, and then glues the threads individually to a vinyl surface. With this process, which operates between painting, weaving and collage, Gerstberger creates semi-figurative images, or in another way, folkloric abstractions, that reflect the artist's surroundings and influences from diverse urban conditions, cultural traditions and art histories. Due to their repeated linear patterns, and radiating, variegated colours, Gerstberger's works promote dynamic optical effects, tending towards the appearance of corrupted images, in which there's a mystery of something not entirely visible.

JAKI IRVINE

Born 1966 Dublin, Ireland. Lives and works in Mexico City and Dublin

Se Compra: Sin é 2014

HD DVD, colour, 5.1 surround sound, free-standing screen, stools
17:37 mins

Courtesy the artist; Frith Street Gallery, London; and
Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

Jaki Irvine has a propensity for seeing everyday situations and interactions with a certain strangeness and a very specific sensibility. Well-known to Mexico City's inhabitants, street vendors are easily discernible from the sounds of their particular musical instruments. This sociological convention is explored by Irvine in an eighteen-minute video that portrays the music of the city. The sound of the sweeping of streets, the gas vendor's deep voice, the knife-grinder with his pan flute, the piercing vapour whistle of the sweet potato trolley, and the emblematic voice that yearns to buy your old scrap metal, are all accompanied by a cello, piano, violin and traditional Sean Nós Irish-singing vocals. The resulting ensemble is at once a touching, comic and melancholic depiction of the city's recognisable daily rituals – that of voices bellowing into an urban abyss in the hope that someone hears them, and falling silent after a prolonged pursuit of the sunset only to resume their multifarious entreaty the following day.

KATE NEWBY

Born 1979 Auckland, New Zealand. Lives and works in Auckland and New York City

***Am I nuts or is this the happiest moment of my life?* 2018**

pink silver, wire

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

***I love everything this chooses to be* 2018**

white brass, silver

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

***We've all been hot and needed to cut off a pair of our own jeans* 2018**

bronze, wire

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

***All the stuff you already know* 2017**

high red stoneware, glaze

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

***I'll be here Sunday* 2017**

high red stoneware, glaze

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

***Okay I'll Call You / Yes Call Me* 2017**

high red porcelain, glaze

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

***The fresher air of street-level* 2017**

high red porcelain, glaze dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

***Were there no impossibilities* 2017**

bronze

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Michael Lett, Auckland; and Fine Arts, Sydney

Working with a variety of media including installation, textile, ceramics, casting and glass, New York-based artist Kate Newby is a sculptor who is committed to exploring and putting pressure on the limits and nature of sculpture. As such, she is interested in not only space, volume, texture and materials, but where and how sculpture happens. Varying in scale, works are liable to take place in someone's pocket – as in the case of her ceramic skipping stones which she has asked gallery attendants to carry; or on the street in a given city, as in her concrete, poured puddles; or in the gallery proper, in subtly, but noticeably present architectural disruptions of the space itself. In every case the work bears a strong link not just to the everyday, but to lived experience – collecting and registering the traces of the passing world, which it incorporates and is incorporated into. It is for this reason that if the handmade plays a very important role in her work, it is not merely romantic or even retrograde, but rather the aesthetic by-product of a position that shamelessly embraces direct experience over the mediated. For *Dwelling Poetically*, Newby exhibits a selection of new hanging, totemic sculptures. Fashioned out of ceramic and bronze, the works superficially resemble so many improbable vertebrae, as they dangle from the ceiling. Their irregular surfaces have been imprinted with textures of objects and the landscape found in the city.

ISABEL NUÑO DE BUEN

Born 1985 Mexico City. Lives and works in Hannover and Mexico City

Extracted segment: North section (undetermined) 2018

Extracted segment: South section (undetermined) 2018

Extracted segment: East section (undetermined) 2018

Extracted segment: West section (undetermined) 2018

Extracted segment: Orienting arrow (undetermined) 2018

steel, wire, papier maché, plaster, foam, Styrofoam, rubber, cardboard

installation dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

The sculptural practice of Isabel Nuño de Buen is inseparable from her experience of growing up in Mexico City, which is continually morphing and expanding. The artist deploys a variety of media and materials, including drawing, sculpture, plaster, papier maché, steel, welding, watercolour and paint, to create what resemble outsized maquettes of a decidedly maniacal and lyrical nature. Understanding architecture as the formal syntax of a given civilisation, Nuño de Buen draws on a variety of interests including German expressionist architecture, urban planning, cultural anthropology, and neo-concrete sculpture to make her work. Personalised, plastic allegories of myth and meaning arise from the combination of these discrete sources. The artist's process, which is governed by a strong internal logic and systemisation, is inseparable from the intrinsically open-ended theoretical nature of her work. Composed of modular fragments which can be reconfigured at will, her installations, much like a city, are never finished; they remain in a state of continual, albeit hypothetical evolution (she has been known to reuse elements from former pieces in new constellations). Much like a constellation, the finished work is a whole composed of particulars that are at once distinct from, and constitutive of the overall piece. Provisional, mutable and rationally irrational, her installations privilege no specific point of view, presenting instead endless permutations and possibilities – situations of endless construction, collapse and reconstruction.

MELANIE SMITH

Born 1965 Poole, England. Lives and works in Mexico City

Spiral city 2002

single-channel video, b/w, sound

5:50 mins

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich

Melanie Smith arrived in Mexico City in 1989 to live, along with many other foreigners, in the turmoil of the city's centre. Smith was immediately intrigued by the *Centro Histórico*'s chaotic surroundings; streets with vendors enchantingly selling the products found in their specialised stores. If you take a leap into these crowded worlds, you can find a whole spectrum of similar goods, all arranged in an orderly way, yet differing slightly from one another. Much like the logical entropy of the displays in these small businesses, the micro perspective reflects the macro view of the city seen from atop in Smith's *Spiral city* 2002. A direct reference to Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Smith's work, filmed in a broad spiral from a helicopter over the dense area of *Iztapalapa* in the south-east of the city, exhibits an expansive grid-like urban landscape of natural evolution and corrosion that seems to have no beginning or end.

MARTIN SOTO CLIMENT

Born 1977 Mexico City. Lives and works in Mexico City

Luster butterfly, La revuelta 2018

aluminium blinds, enamel paint

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Known for his irreverent and eclectic use of materials, such as women's clothing, domestic furnishings and vintage photography, among other things, Martin Soto Climent is an inveterate recycler. However, his work is less about valorising the overlooked, neglected and everyday than it is about transforming it. These transformations, which are marked as much by humour as they are by something which fluctuates between an understated sensuality and a gleeful perversity, bear a decidedly Freudian, if anthropomorphic tenor. It is as if the material world that surrounds Soto Climent conceals a latent desire, which his eye is uniquely capable of perceiving and his hands of releasing, like a *Djinni* from a lamp. It is for these reasons that parallels to surrealism are often drawn to what he does. That said, his impulse to erotically anthropomorphise the world around him is not so much about psychology, repression and de-sublimation, but much more concerned with what makes us human: desire, and the ways we use it to negotiate, distort and dominate the world. For *Dwelling Poetically*, Soto Climent has created a site-specific installation from domestic venetian-blinds which speaks to the division between the public and the private, desire and the city itself.