

FRIEZE

Pedro Reyes's Iconographies of the Future

Inspired by Mesoamerican culture and Mexican modernism, the artist's materially lush sculptures and drawings aspire to a time beyond geopolitical violence



In Pedro Reyes's first exhibition with Lisson Gallery in Los Angeles, centuries-old artistic practices are carefully interwoven with quietly insistent calls to political action. A new body of volcanic basalt sculptures stands surrounded by paintings on amate – a form of paper made from tree bark using an indigenous technique. Though the work's hybrid abstract and figurative forms cull from Mesoamerican visual languages, Reyes's sustained concern with non-violent activism brings it into the precarious present moment of global hostility.



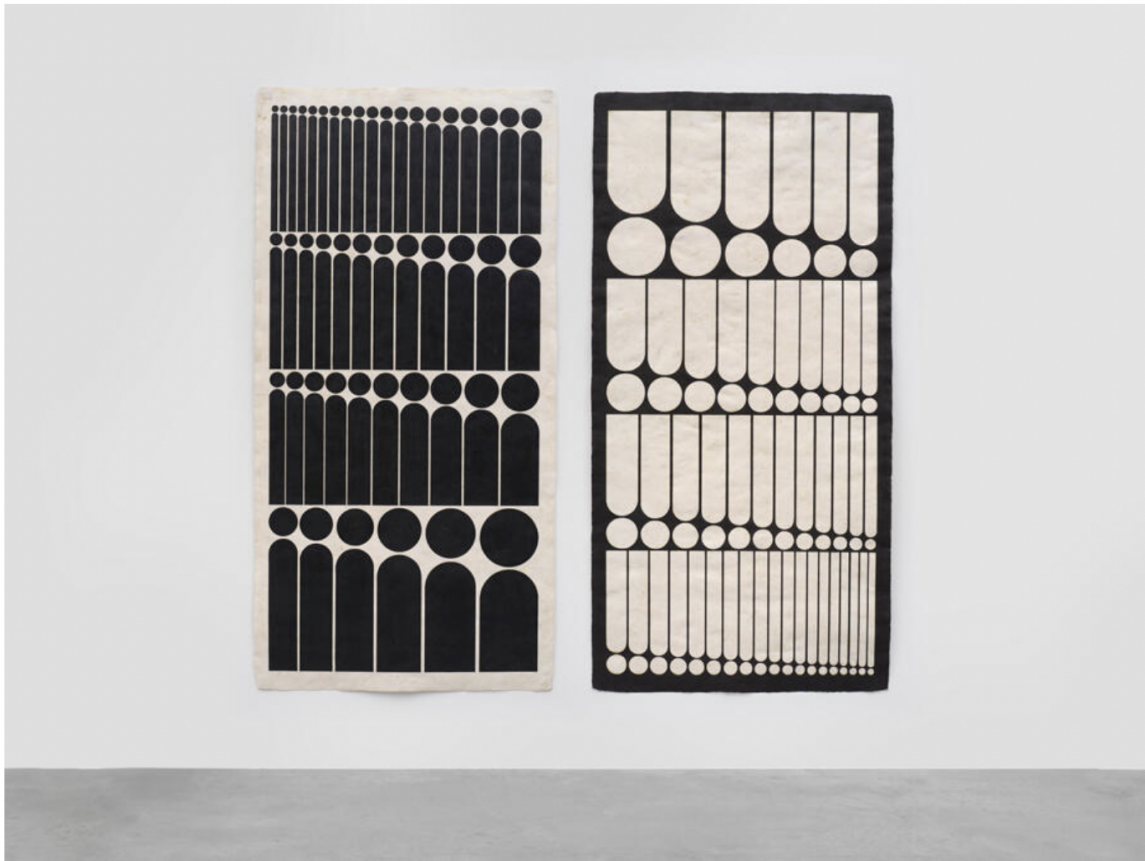
Pedro Reyes, *Tsontekotl*, 2022, volcanic stone, 78 × 70 × 75 cm. Courtesy: © Pedro Reyes and Lisson Gallery

A number of Reyes's sculptures – especially *Tsontekotl* (2022), with its smooth, extra-terrestrial-like bust atop a jagged mound – are reminiscent of the early Olmec colossal heads (c.1,200–500 BCE) that were made of the same volcanic basalt. Its polished symmetry, however, deviates from such ancient Mesoamerican representations, and Reyes's stylized skull is a visual marker of death that expands a legacy of busts commemorating the living and the recently deceased. The production of these works transcends time-bound notions by adapting indigenous practice and tradition while subverting contemporary industrial processes: take *Tlapacalli* (2021), for instance, in which tezontle has been hand-polished in the artist's studio to generate spotlessly smooth stacked geometric shapes. Within this material conversation between past and present, Reyes seems to be looking to a future in which these objects can be housed in a more benevolent society than that in which they were created.



Pedro Reyes, *Detente*, 2023, installation view, marble, 55 × 114 × 43 cm. Courtesy: © Pedro Reyes and Lisson Gallery

Détente (2023) builds on the tradition of tezontle carving while speaking to a wave of labour movements in the United States. Historically a symbol for peace, the white dove is here abstracted to appear as an open hand, perhaps co-opted from the raised-fist symbol utilized in historical movements such as the Industrial Workers of the World (1905–ongoing) to signify solidarity and unity. In doing so, Reyes also nods to the history of Mexican modernism that drew from Marxist ideals and iconographies to create a post-revolution national identity that looked to indigenous culture for its values. This legacy is evident in *Cihuacóatl* (2022), a large-scale bust in volcanic stone that represents the Aztec fertility goddess. Such works carry increased charge at a time when another presidential campaign cycle sees Republican Party candidates embrace militarized action against Mexico.



Pedro Reyes, *Signos*, 2023, installation view, oil on amate paper, each 2.4 × 1.2 m. Courtesy: © Pedro Reyes and Lisson Gallery

Providing a counterbalance to the volcanic sculptures, Reyes's abstract paintings recall mid-20th-century, Brazilian neo-concretism in their emphasis on colour, rhythm and movement. Here, however, on handmade amate paper, the forms take on new life. For instance, *Signos* (2023), a black and white diptych on amate bleached to resemble canvas, creates an optical equilibrium via mirroring and inversion. Elsewhere, on amate that retains its original brown hue, *Quipú* (2023) – named for the titular device used to record information by Andean South American civilizations from 2,300 BCE – suggests a contained history of the universe via its nebulous network of connected circles branching from a central point.



Pedro Reyes, *Yerma*, 2023, installation view, oil on amate paper, 2.4 × 1.2 m. Courtesy: © Pedro Reyes and Lisson Gallery

Meanwhile, the oil-on-amate *Yerma* (2023), which masterfully captures the texture and geometry of carved rock in a network of intersecting rectangular prisms, is one of the most successful works in the show. The shapes undulate and weave into each other in no set pattern, like the matrix of threads in amate paper. The longer you look, the more you are rewarded with movement and optical illusion. *Yerma* captures the essence of the show as a whole: a network of subtly charged works with a shared connection to tradition, memory and legacy that is best revived via a collective practice of patience and diligence. For it is through these values that we can chart a path toward community and societal progress.

Pedro Reyes is on view at Lisson Gallery, Los Angeles, until 1 September.

Main image: Pedro Reyes, Quipú, 2023, oil on amate paper, 2.4 × 1.2 m. Courtesy: © Pedro Reyes and Lisson Gallery

LISSON GALLERY

Los Angeles Times
28 June 2023

Los Angeles Times

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

As Ukrainian ballet dancers find refuge on the Segerstrom stage, a new ‘Giselle’ prevails

On My Mind



"Pedro Reyes" at Lisson Gallery. (George Darrell / Pedro Reyes and Lisson Gallery)

On Wednesday, I went to **Lisson Gallery** in Hollywood to see **Pedro Reyes'** new exhibition. His work is heavily influenced by Mexican culture and history, pulling inspiration from sculpture styles like chacmool and authors that include **Francisco Tario**. The result is a gallery filled with stone sculptures and works on amate paper (a popular Mexican bark paper made by peeling, boiling then beating bark with a flat stone).

His work "**Detente**" especially stuck out to me. The marble sculpture resembles both a dove and a hand, symbolizing peace and solidarity. He attributed the work to Brazilian activist and theater practitioner **Augusto Boal**, who promoted "peace, not passivity" and penned "**Theater of the Oppressed**," a social justice theater practice. Reyes' work often addresses social and political issues. During my visit, he explained how he conducted workshops that brought a group of people together to rewrite the 2nd Amendment, identifying how people view the law and its potential future. Reyes' exhibit is mesmerizing in its simplicity, but upon further investigation, it holds rich history in every detail. The **free** exhibition runs until **Sept. 1** and the gallery is open from **10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday**. More information on Reyes' show can be found on the [gallery's website](#).

LISSON GALLERY

The Hollywood Reporter
27 April 2023



Lisson Gallery Debuts First Los Angeles Outpost in Buzzy Sycamore District

The globe-spanning gallery's inaugural L.A. show is a series of seven paintings by Cuba-born American artist Carmen Herrera, who found art-world fame in her 90s and died last year at age 106.

"This was a sex club called The Zone. So a lot of good vibes in here," says Lisson Gallery CEO Alex Logsdail, as he gives a tour of Lisson's newly opened space in Los Angeles' ever-growing Sycamore District, the globe-spanning art business' first outpost on the West Coast.

Lisson found the location after The Zone, which catered to gay and bisexual men in L.A., closed in 2020. Its transformation into a high-gloss art gallery fits into the larger conversion of the neighborhood where it's located, which *WWD* has called "L.A.'s newest luxury retail destination" and the *L.A. Times* has called "L.A.'s coolest new neighborhood." The area's one-time warehouses and industrial shops have in the last few years been renovated to become buzzy retail shops, restaurants and art galleries, including Jeffrey Deitch, Gaga & Reena Spaulings and Carpenters Workshop.

"It's a great area," says Logsdail, who stresses that what sealed the deal when it came to choosing the location were the particulars of the two-story building itself. "It was just a great raw space and it just had a lot of immediate potential I could see. It just naturally had really excellent ceiling height. The ceilings were actually tall enough that we had to lower them." In their renovation of the space, design-architecture firm Ashe Leandro (who have created homes for the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow and Seth Meyers) not only lowered the ceiling but also installed deep skylights throughout the 4,455-square-foot building, located at 1037 N. Sycamore Avenue. "The skylights create these really deep light wells, which give us really flat, even natural light into the space. The light in L.A. is so fabulous that making use of that was really important."

For the second show in L.A., Lisson will present works by Mexico City-based artist Pedro Reyes ("His first show in L.A.," says Logsdail), followed by exhibits by artists Sean Scully and Hugh Hayden.

He continues, "Something we're doing that's really special in L.A. is that all of the artists we're showing in the first year have either never shown in L.A. or haven't shown in L.A. in decades and that's really fun and it's nice to be able to bring something new to the city." *WTR*

LISSON GALLERY

Curate LA
23 June 2023



Pedro Reyes

Lisson Gallery ✨

1037 N. Sycamore Ave.

Jun 23, 6 PM - 8 PM — ends Sep 01, 2023

For his first exhibition in Los Angeles, Pedro Reyes presents a new series of sculptures and works on paper that focus on the concept of monumentality, drawing inspiration from the traditions of Mexican stone carving and Pre-Columbian civilization and indigenous communities. Through these works, Reyes credits the enduring influence of the Aztec traditions and the language of Nahuatl, which has been spoken in Mexico for centuries. The exhibition follows Reyes' exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Monterrey, Mexico (2022) and SITE Santa Fe (2022-2023).

El País
24 June 2023

EL PAÍS

ART >

Pedro Reyes and his nostalgia for the past arrive in Los Angeles

The Mexican artist is holding his first exhibition in LA at the Lisson Gallery, focusing on monumental sculptures and references to pre-Hispanic cultures



LUIS PABLO BEAUREGARD

Los Angeles - JUN 24, 2023 - 02:35 GMT+1



Pedro Reyes' exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in LA combines his graphic work on amate paper with monumental sculptures carved in volcanic stone.

GEORGE DARRELL (CORTESÍA LISSON GALLERY)

At the center of his new exhibition, Pedro Reyes placed *Detente*. The sculpture is a large white dove carved from marble; here, [the most recognizable symbol of the anti-war movement](#) is also an open hand, the worker's essential tool. The piece was inspired by the message with which the Carioca playwright Augusto Boal signed his letters: Peace, not passivity. "We lack symbols or ways of talking about the need to curb bellicosity," explains the Mexican artist. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered a race among European countries to arm themselves, undoing a lot of what the world's peace organizations had advanced since the 1960s.

Among the exhibited works there is an appreciation for a generation of diplomats who fought to limit the strength of the world powers. In *The Treaty*, a 6.5-foot-tall sculpture carved from volcanic stone, two hands join in a handshake that closes an agreement. "It represents two peers at the same height; there are no hierarchies," says the sculptor, who points out that the majority of the 95 countries that have signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of [Nuclear Weapons](#) are mostly nations from Scandinavia and the global south such as Latin America and Africa. "We cannot wait for the change to come from the north. The countries of the south have significant influence. We live as hostages of the threat of nuclear winter due to [tensions between the United States, Russia and China](#)," says the creator, who has been involved with this issue for some years.

The Treaty, a sculpture that he completed this year, [is becoming increasingly relevant](#). At the end of November 2023, the second meeting of the state parties to the treaty will take place before the United Nations Council. Mexico will be the president of the event. According to Reyes, this continues a diplomatic tradition of non-intervention and the fight to stop the proliferation of weapons that experienced its best moment in 1967 in [Tlatelolco](#), Mexico, with the signing of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean. This milestone earned Mexico its only Nobel Peace Prize, which in 1982 went to Alfonso García Robles, a diplomat who had world peace among his obsessions.



Pedro Reyes in front of his sculpture 'Tlatoani.'
LUIS PABLO BEAUREGARD

The exhibition will be open to the public at the Lisson Gallery from Saturday, June 24, until September, with the most recent pieces that expand the themes that the artist and sculptor has been working on for a long time. It is surprising to learn that this is the first solo exhibition that a Los Angeles gallery devotes to Reyes, a prominent figure in the United States; this is thanks, perhaps, to the explosion of spaces that has occurred in the last

year (Lisson itself arrived from London in mid-April), an indicator of the burning temperature of the market in one of the richest areas of the country. Before Reyes was done giving the tour to the press, a collector in sportswear and running shoes had already purchased one of his sculptures.

Reyes' nostalgia for the past does not end in the Mexico of the Treaty of Tlatelolco; it goes back several centuries. Among the pieces, made in the last three years in his house and studio south of Mexico City, there is also a jadeite *Chac Mool* figure, a red tezontle rock sculpture and some large paintings made on amate paper, which is made from the pulp of tropical trees, boiled in water with lime and flattened with rocks. Also, a sizeable piece depicting a human skull, one of the objects that, Reyes admits, "obsesses Mexicans."

One of the corners of the gallery is occupied by the oval face of a pre-Hispanic woman. It is *Cihuacóatl*, one of the fertility goddesses of the ancient Mexicans. The deity brings to mind one of the controversies that Reyes faced recently. Last fall, Claudia Sheinbaum, the head of government of Mexico City, announced that the artist was working on a piece that would replace an important statue of Christopher Columbus, a character whose historical relevance has shifted in the light of this century. When he revealed the model he was working on, that of a woman with indigenous features, the response was not as expected. The controversy forced the authorities to withdraw the commission from Reyes, who in 2022 unveiled a giant sculpture of a Nahuatl woman along the River Walk of San Antonio. *Citlali* was also commissioned by the authorities of the Texan city.

Reyes considers his work as a sculptor to be a synthesis of the clash between the great schools of Mexican art. On one side is the nationalist school, headed by artists like Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who were inspired by the labor movements and the Marxist proletariat as a form of resistance to the capitalist drive. Meanwhile, La Ruptura (the Breakaway Generation) modified the technique and the creative influences for decades. With a long list of exponents, among them Vicente Rojo, Rufino Tamayo, Pedro Coronel, Manuel Felguérez, Francisco Toledo and several others, the generation had many disciples.

Reyes stands between those forces. The artist, however, has inherited forms of work that unite the two groups. For example, the stone carving made by human hands in a time in which where most rock sculptures are done with robots. “Every time this happens, six people lose their jobs,” says the artist. His production in his stylized house in Coyoacán, south of Mexico City, has managed to revive a centuries-old trade. Many of the artisans who work with him are relatives of members of the influential School of Sculpture and Direct Carving, established in Mexico in 1927. “It is a viable form of employment. I think that what is done by hand, paradoxically, has a lower risk of disappearing with artificial intelligence than someone who studied computer systems engineering,” he concludes, laughing.

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Hyperallergic
3 July 2023

HYPERALLERGIC

Art

10 Art Shows to See in LA This July

This month: Martha Alf, Kenzi Shiokava, Pedro Reyes, Hélio Melo with Alison Saar, and more.



Matt Stromberg July 3, 2023

Pedro Reyes



Pedro Reyes, exhibition view (© Pedro Reyes; photo courtesy Lisson Gallery)

Pedro Reyes excavates recent and ancient Mexican history with his current show at Lisson Gallery. The show features monumental sculptures carved from volcanic rock and geometric paintings on amate paper, materials used in pre-Columbian and Indigenous artmaking traditions. The works reflect the tension between different schools of Mexican modernism — nationalist muralism versus abstraction — while alluding to symbols and glyphs from Nahuatl codices, pointing to a shared aesthetic tradition that predates European colonialism.

Lisson Gallery (lissongallery.com)

1037 North Sycamore Avenue, Hollywood, Los Angeles

Through September 1

LISSON GALLERY

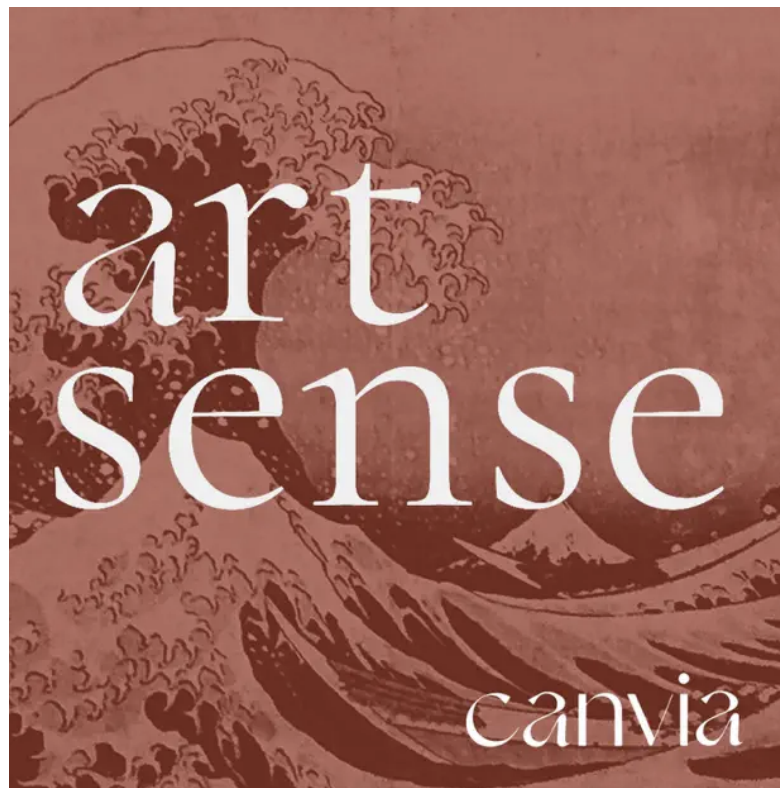
Art Sense Podcast
11 July 2023

Apple Podcasts Preview

Ep. 104: Artist Pedro Reyes

Art Sense

Visual Arts



A conversation with artist Pedro Reyes. Reyes has garnered international acclaim for his large-scale projects that address current social and political issues, including gun control and nuclear nonproliferation. Although he describes himself as a sculptor, his varied practice also utilizes performance, video, design, and activism. He utilizes his artwork to explore the power of individuals and collective organizations to create change through communication, creativity, happiness, and humor.

<https://www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/pedro-reyes-0ea83219-ea33-4d28-a216-fa307bfb4087>

<http://www.pedroreyes.net/>

<https://art21.org/artist/pedro-reyes/>

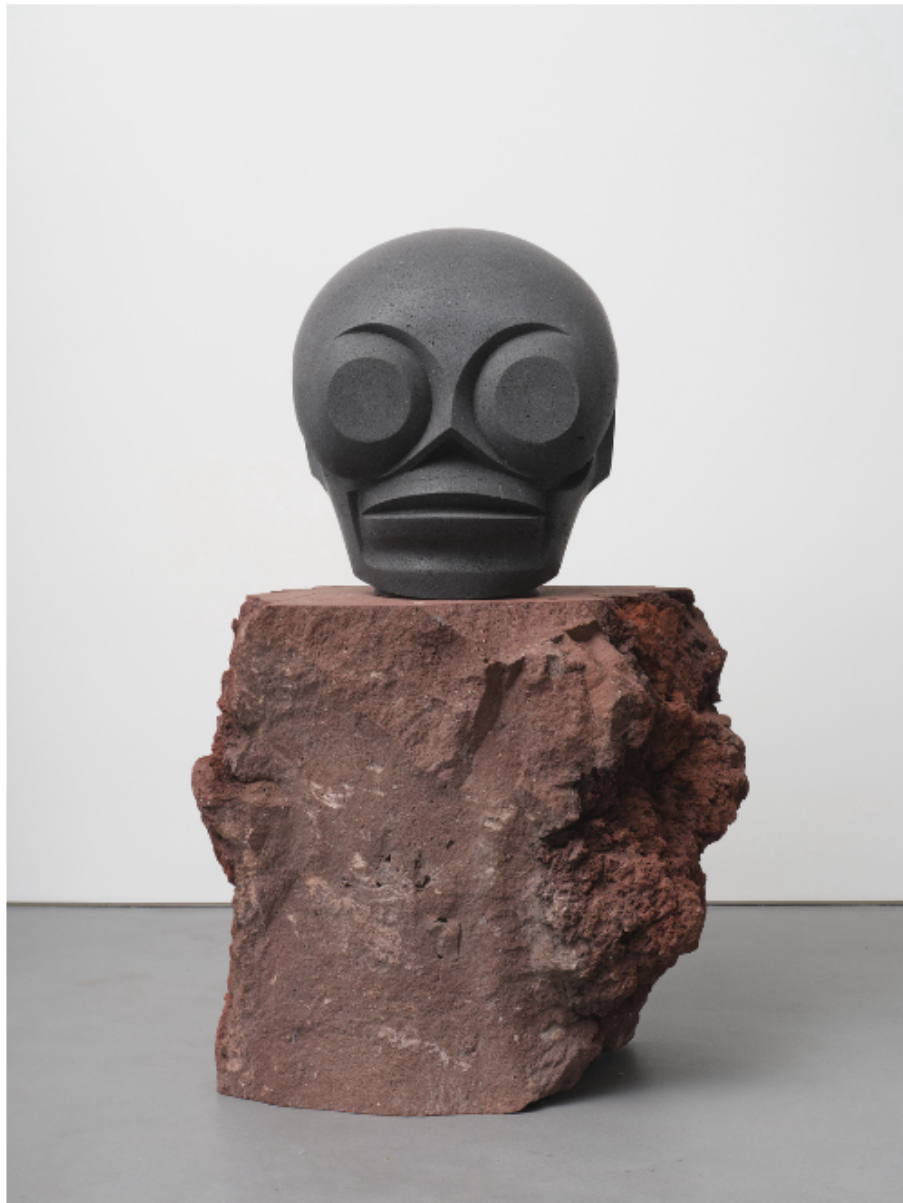
LISSON GALLERY

Cultured
03 August 2023

CULTURED

5 Must-See Shows In Los Angeles Before Summer's End

Between inaugural exhibitions and momentous anniversaries, these shows are not to be missed.



Pedro Reyes, *Tsontekoti*, 2022. Image courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Lisson's new Sycamore District space is its first West Coast outpost and well worth the wait. The gallery brings artistic gravitas to one of LA's growing destination neighborhoods, furthering the city's global art player status. Case in point: the current exhibition of artwork by Pedro Reyes marks the Los Angeles debut for the Mexican artist—coming off a major solo show, "Direct Action," at Site Santa Fe this spring. At Lisson, Reyes harkens to pre-Columbian civilization and Aztec tradition, transforming meteorite and volcanic stone into spiritual forms that feel at once meditative and political.

"Pedro Reyes" is on view through September 1, 2023 at Lisson Gallery, 1037 N. Sycamore Avenue, Los Angeles.

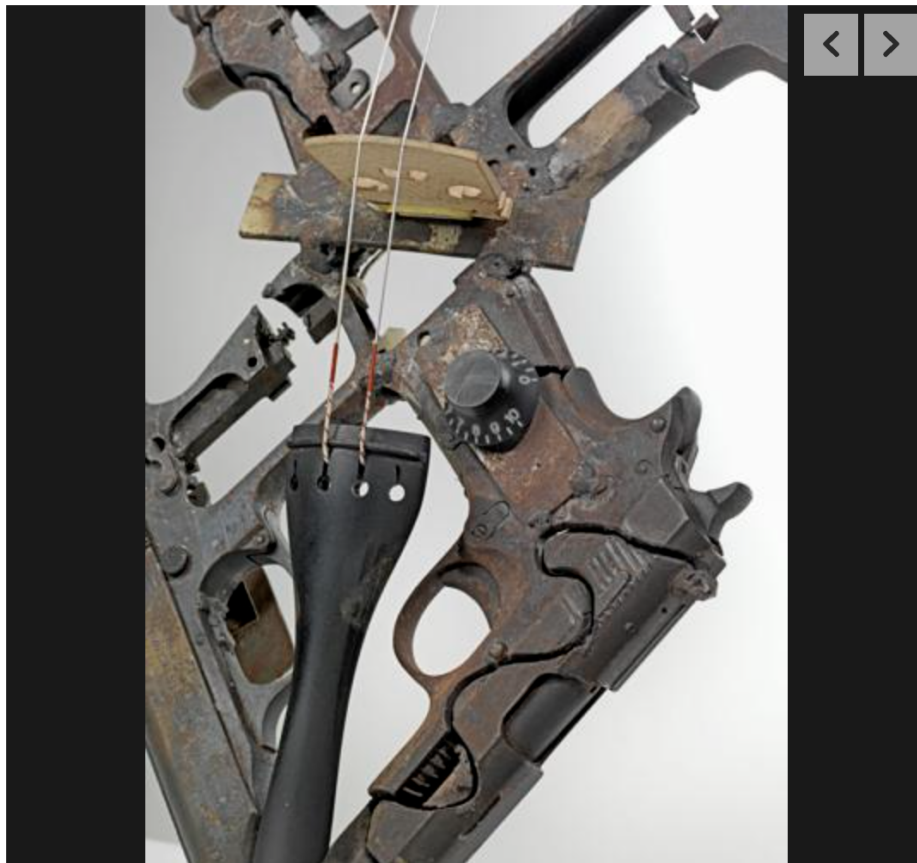
Pasatiempo

17 March 2023

Pasatiempo

Pieces of peace

Brian Sandford Mar 17, 2023 Updated 21 hrs ago



Pedro Reyes, detail from *Disarm (Violin I)* (2012), destroyed weapons, metal parts, strings; courtesy Lisson Gallery

Paranoia about an imminent nuclear attack was at a fever pitch in the United States in the 1980s, four decades after the nation dropped a pair of the weapons on Japan, demonstrating their cataclysmic power to a stunned world.

In the U.S., sculptor Pedro Reyes says, many embraced or at least accepted nuclear weapons as a necessary deterrent to the nation's heavily armed rival, the Soviet Union. Reyes' native Mexico is prevented by a treaty it signed from owning or creating the weapons, and it warily eyes developments in its neighbor to the north.

"We're living in extra time," says Reyes, 50. "There have been so many close calls and near-accidents [at nuclear facilities]. No one can be trusted with nuclear weapons, in the sense that no one should have the power to kill us all. It is difficult for people in the United States to understand this. It's very, very, very clear if you live outside the United States."

Pedro Reyes: Direct Action features firearms repurposed by Reyes into vases and playable instruments — far smaller than nuclear

warheads, but symbolic of the change Reyes wants to see in the world. It continues through May 1 — a change from the original end date of May 8 — at SITE Santa Fe and includes elements from two previous Reyes exhibitions. *Palas por Pistolas [Shovels for Guns]*, from 2008, involved transforming 1,527 guns into shovels that were then used to plant 1,527 trees. *Disarm*, from 2012, is a series of musical instruments made from more than 6,700 combined donated firearms. The exhibition also includes sculptures, video, and other art with the *Disarm* instruments hanging when they're not in use, cutting a distinctive silhouette into the white wall behind them.

Should anyone doubt the instruments are playable, musicians are providing proof via a series of First Friday events. Jesse Tatum is set to play *Disarm Flute*, Sabrina Griffith *Disarm Violin*, and Damon Griffith *Disarm Guitar* at 5:30 p.m. April 7 at the art space, followed by Leticia Gonzales playing *Disarm Violin* at 5:30 p.m. April 28 — a change from the originally scheduled May 5. The performances are followed by tours focused on the musical elements of the exhibition.



Pedro Reyes, *Disarm Guitar* (2018), destroyed weapons, metal parts, strings; photo Fiona Tommasi, image courtesy SITE Santa Fe

"No one can be trusted with nuclear weapons, in the sense that no one should have the power to kill us all. It is difficult for people in the United States to understand this. It's very, very, very clear if you live outside the United States." —
Artist Pedro Reyes

The heavy, painted repurposed instruments are far from traditional in multiple ways. The neck of *Disarm Guitar* is made of a rifle barrel, while the metal outlines of former handguns are clearly visible on the body of one of the *Disarm Violin* pieces. The former instrument has three strings, the latter, two. They appear rusty, bolstering the sensation that the weapons they're constructed from are of another time and place, no longer a potential danger.

Reyes hopes the performances and display bring attention to an issue he fears is overshadowed by concerns such as climate and social changes.

"I think that the subject is, right now, in a blind spot of people's consciousness," he says. "Millennials and Generation Z just don't have it on their map. And perhaps baby boomers and Generation X were so traumatized by the awareness of it that they don't *want* to remember. So it's the most pressing subject of all, because we're very close to seeing nuclear war in our lifetimes. Paradoxically, it ranks very low in people's concerns."

That confounds Reyes, who points out that the Doomsday Clock — which reflects the likelihood of human-caused global catastrophe, according to members of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists — was moved Jan. 24 to 90 seconds to midnight. That's the closest the 76-year-old figurative clock has ever been to midnight. The change was a result of fears over Russia's war on Ukraine damaging a nuclear reactor there.



Direct Action (2023), installation view; photo Shayla Blatchford, image courtesy SITE Santa Fe

Direct Action and its anti-weapons message were unveiled Feb. 3, two weeks after the Legislature convened less than a mile from SITE Santa Fe. As of early March, a bill aimed at slowing plans for a radioactive waste disposal storage site between Hobbs and Carlsbad was being reviewed by the House Judiciary Committee following passage in the Senate. That facility would store highly radioactive uranium from reactor sites nationwide.

No fewer than seven bills were introduced aimed at restricting or changing gun laws, with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham stating in late February that a special session might be required to ensure passage of an initiative to ban automatic weapons before later softening that stance.

Additionally, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in late February that his nation would no longer take part in the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which calls for Russia and the U.S. to submit to inspections of their stockpiles and to cap the number of their warheads. It was the final remaining nuclear weapons treaty between the two nations.

Curator Brandee Caoba acknowledges that the exhibition is well-timed, especially given the proposal to store nuclear waste in New Mexico.

“It’s just terrifying,” she says of that plan. “With the development of these catastrophic nuclear waste facilities and the implications of them, I really hope it helps people kind of get on board with, ‘What is happening here?’”

Caoba adds that she hadn’t previously seen work similar to Reyes’, describing it as renewing.

“You’re cutting and reshaping metal to make something new, with a new purpose, that gives off sound and vibration,” she says. “The music made from the instruments that Pedro has built, those guns are decommissioned firearms that were likely used in crimes. They function as a requiem for people who lost their lives.”



Pedro Reyes, *Amendment* (2022), volcanic stone; photo Fiona Tommasi, image courtesy SITE Santa Fe

On Feb. 4, Reyes engaged in a public discussion about transforming deadly materials into art with Miranda Viscoli, co-president of New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence and co-founder of Guns to Gardens, a gun buy-back program in New Mexico. He wasn't sure what kind of reception he'd receive, given New Mexico's role in the development of nuclear weapons and the employment of more than 10,000 people at Los Alamos National Lab alone.

"There's people that believe that nuclear weapons helped win the Second World War, which is not really true," he says. "The real reason the Japanese surrendered was because they were being invaded by Russia at the same time. They chose to surrender to the United States instead of Russia."

The public was appropriately fearful of the nuclear threat in the 1980s, Reyes says, partly as a result of films such as *The Day After* that depict the bleak realities of a nuclear attack for survivors. That film was broadcast on ABC in 1983, attracting more than 100 million viewers. Four years later, it aired on Soviet state television.

"You're cutting and reshaping metal to make something new, with a new purpose, that gives off sound and vibration. The music made from the instruments that Pedro has built, those guns are decommissioned firearms that were likely used in crimes. They function as a requiem for people who lost their lives." — *Curator Brandee Caoba*

"But right now, if you see the advertisements or the propaganda that the national labs put out there, or if you go to their museums, there are all these lies that they tell themselves that what they are doing is actually useful," Reyes says.

Nuclear responsibility transcends politics, he says, acknowledging rising concerns about irresponsible use of the weapons when former President Donald Trump was in office.

"But you know, [President Joe] Biden also has made very dangerous declarations, like when he goes out there and says about Putin, 'We have to get rid of this man,'" Reyes says. "Those are not words that a head of state should say."

This isn't SITE Santa Fe's first connection with Reyes. Earlier in 2022, it commissioned his video *Under the Cloud*, featuring New Mexicans talking about nuclear colonialism. *Direct Action* did, however, result in Reyes' first visits to SITE Santa Fe; he came from Mexico City in September and December 2022, and February.

While Viscoli and Reyes met for the first time in December, their connection goes back years. Viscoli was so inspired after reading about Reyes' work in 2008 that she co-founded New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence, Caoba says. That's the year Reyes started his ongoing *Palas por Pistolas* project, which led to *Disarm* four years later.

Outside SITE Santa Fe, visitors will see nine anti-nuclear-weapons posters created by international artists recruited by Reyes.

Caoba says *Direct Action* asks viewers to reexamine the legacy of the human race, as well as how they define respect.

"I'm not being human-specific," she says. "Respect for the land, respect for the water, respect for the air, respect for other creatures living on Earth."

LISSON GALLERY

WideWalls

11 June 2023

WIDEWALLS

GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

Pedro Reyes Has His First Los Angeles Solo at Lisson Gallery

3 weeks ago



The show is a follow-up to his exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Monterrey, Mexico.

New sculptures and works on paper by [Pedro Reyes](#) make their way to Lisson Gallery for the artist's first solo show in LA. For the occasion, Reyes explores the concept of monumentality, whereby small and life-scale works speak of the human ambition to create something greater than ourselves.

He takes inspiration from Pre-Columbian art and indigenous communities, mostly Aztec tradition and the language of Nahuatl. It is their beauty and endurance that he seeks to replicate. For example, *Amoxcalli*, an ancient Mexican word for libraries, is a large-scale piece of a figure clutching a book in the thirst for greater knowledge. Another humanoid work, *Nahuatequi* ("encounter"), depicts a group of silhouettes holding hands in a union. Read together with a series of standing totemic sculptures (*Naualli*, *Abolition*, and *Tlapacalli*), they speak of human interconnectedness through time, space, and cultural conditioning. The show opens in late June.

Featured image: Pedro Reyes, UR, 2020, Volcanic Stone; 125.5 x 70 x 70 cm 49 3/8 x 27 1/2 x 27 1/2 in © Pedro Reyes, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

LISSON GALLERY

Artishock

30 June 2023



ARTISHOCK
—REVISTA DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO—



Vista de la exposición de Pedro Reyes en Lisson Gallery Los Ángeles, EEUU, 2023. © Pedro Reyes. Cortesía Lisson Gallery

PEDRO REYES. NUEVAS OBRAS EN PIEDRA Y PAPEL AMATE

«Cada gesto encierra un conjunto de significados políticos»

Pedro Reyes

Para su primera exposición en **Lisson Gallery Los Ángeles**, **Pedro Reyes** presenta una nueva serie de esculturas y obras sobre papel que se centran en el concepto de monumentalidad, inspirándose en las tradiciones mexicanas de la talla en piedra, la civilización precolombina y las comunidades indígenas.

A través de estas obras, el artista mexicano acredita la imperecedera influencia de las tradiciones aztecas y de la lengua náhuatl, hablada en México desde hace siglos. La exposición se suma a las muestras de Reyes en el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, México (2022) y SITE Santa Fe (2022-2023).



Detente (2023) -una nueva obra incluida en la exposición- hace referencia a la distensión de la hostilidad entre naciones, frecuentemente a través de la diplomacia verbal, y tiene una resonancia particular con las políticas relacionadas con el comercio de ya sea mediante el uso de armamento o de energía nuclear.

Aludiendo a la vinculación de Reyes con organizaciones pacifistas y a sus campañas públicas en favor del desarme, en *Detente* vemos el símbolo de la mano-paloma, que refleja sus anhelos de solidaridad, compasión y colaboración.



El artista reconoce al activista y director teatral brasileño [Augusto Boal](#), uno de sus mentores, como una influencia en la promoción de «la paz, no la pasividad». Este mensaje también resuena con el lema de **Martin Luther King**: «Los que esperan la paz deberían estar tan bien organizados como los que luchan por la guerra». Para Reyes, la mano-paloma simboliza el gran trabajo necesario para hacer frente a la carrera armamentista.

La exposición gira en torno al concepto de monumentalidad, presente en toda la obra de Reyes - desde esculturas y pinturas de tamaño natural hasta la activación de espacios públicos con instalaciones y performances participativos-, pero la esencia de lo monumental va más allá de la escala para adentrarse en la ambición.

Reyes también traslada intencionadamente los fines épicos de la escultura urbana a la pequeña escala, planteando así la creación artística como un medio para despertar compasión.



Otra de las esculturas expuestas, *El Abrazo* (2023), consiste en un grupo de siluetas antropomórficas que parecen tomadas de la mano, como símbolo de unión fraternal. La escultura circular *Tonametl* (2023), en tanto, ilustra la conexión entre la piedra y el sol, la tierra y el cielo.

Amoxcalli, nombre que recibían las bibliotecas en el México antiguo, es el título de una obra a gran escala que representa a una figura de pie sosteniendo un libro. Esta figura personifica la sed de conocimiento del artista y su pasión por el acto comunitario de compartir, como lo demuestran proyectos como *TLACUILO* (2021), en el Museo Carrillo Gil de la Ciudad de México, donde los visitantes podían pedir en préstamo libros, obras de arte, y una colección de discos LP hasta por tres meses, así como la famosa e imponente biblioteca de su propio estudio en la Ciudad de México.

Mientras que *El Abrazo* y *Amoxcalli*, junto con *Hypatia* (2022) y *Cihuacóatl* (2022) -también presentes en la exposición-, son expresiones más figurativas de la forma humana, en *Chac Mool* (2022) Reyes lleva la composición mesoamericana precolombina de la figura reclinada a un nivel más profundo de abstracción. Anteriormente explorada por artistas como Henry Moore, esta representación difiere de la posición erguida y heroica más comúnmente realizada en monumentos, ya que se trata de una figura en reposo.



Vista de la exposición de Pedro Reyes en Lisson Gallery Los Ángeles, EEUU, 2023. © Pedro Reyes. Cortesía Lisson Gallery

A la vez que hace referencia a otras efigies prehispánicas, como los artefactos arqueológicos en forma de U, Reyes reduce el *Chac Mool* a una curva: una forma circular creada a partir de jadeíta, una piedra sedimentaria verde que acumula capas de historia. De este modo, estas obras en piedra, junto a otras estructuras totémicas verticales como *Tlatoani* (2023), *El Tratado* (2023) y *Tlapacalli* (2021), pueden entenderse como una forma de leer el tiempo.

Estos símbolos también aparecen en las nuevas pinturas aquí expuestas -algunas emparejadas y otras en un balance de opuestos- realizadas con óleo sobre papel amate, un material considerado sagrado.

El papel de amate era utilizado históricamente por los «tlacuilos» -un antiguo término mexicano para designar tanto a escritores como a pintores- para registrar sus experiencias. En este caso, las pinturas de amate representan un encuentro entre historias, culturas y tradiciones.

Al igual que en su obra escultórica, Reyes canaliza el poder de lo monumental en este material, convirtiendo estas pinturas en una manera de fomentar y celebrar la camaradería y el entendimiento.



La exposición se podrá ver desde el 24 de junio al 1º de septiembre de 2023 en [Lisson Gallery](#), 1037 N. Sycamore Avenue, Los Ángeles, EEUU

LISSON GALLERY

Artillery

12 July 2023

artillery

GALLERY ROUNDS: Pedro Reyes

Lisson Gallery

by David S. Rubin | Jul 12, 2023



Pedro Reyes, "Signos," 2023. © Pedro Reyes, courtesy of
Lisson Gallery.

An avowed pacifist and activist, Pedro Reyes is known for his sculptures that subvert the potential violence of guns by transforming them into shovels for planting trees or musical instruments played in performance. In his current exhibition of recent sculptures and works on paper, his political intentions are a bit more subtle. Relying upon his knowledge of Pre-Columbian and Mesoamerican codices and the history of modern art, Reyes appears to be searching for a simple, symbolic language for championing peace and humanistic values that is rooted in his Mexican heritage, yet universal in its appeal and comprehensibility. Accordingly, many of the shapes employed in the new works derive from pictographs found in the ancient codices, while 20th-century influences include sculptors Constantin Brancusi, Isamu Noguchi, and Henry Moore, and painter Adolph Gottlieb— artists who believed in abstraction as a stylistic vehicle for reducing something to its essence or for representing higher truths.

One way Reyes' shows respect for cultural history is through his titles, most of which are in Spanish or Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. His sculptural mediums now include volcanic stone, which is available in a variety of colors, as well as marble and jadeite, the principal mineral in jade. Because these materials are from the earth and have been around for eons, Reyes believes they metaphorically embody the history of humankind, and are thus well suited for works that celebrate humanity's endurance and survival. All of the sculptures are hand carved by a collaborative team of workers, thereby providing essential employment for skilled laborers at a time when people are being replaced by robots and artificial intelligence.



Pedro Reyes, *Tlapacalli*, 2021. © Pedro Reyes, courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

Among the most powerful works in the exhibition is a totemic abstract sculpture that resembles an obelisk or column. Built by stacking rectangular and cylindrical blocks of red tezontle stone that resemble bricks, each section of *Tlapacalli* (2021) is configured in a variation of the Pre-Columbian pictograph for a house. While recalling the geometry of Mesoamerican architecture, the sculpture also reminds us that the security of a good home is something that has enriched human lives for centuries and is universally desired. Yet, like any ideal, it is not always attainable. This latter idea is reflected in the visual precariousness of the structure. Although it is stabilized internally by concealed metal rods, the individual building blocks are not perfectly aligned, thus it deceptively seems as if it might topple.

As an alternative strategy, Reyes carved several semi-abstract figurative sculptures in the shapes of widely familiar emblems for peace: two clasped hands, a dove with an outstretched hand for a tail, and a circle of embracing friends. In terms of communicating with viewers, this approach is simpler, more direct, and more immediately accessible.

For the paper works, where pictographic imagery also abounds, Reyes prefers amate paper, which is essentially tree bark smashed with stones and was used in creating the ancient codices. In the diptych *Signos* (2023), a delightful musing on the duality of the yin-yang principle, Reyes exposes both his serious and playful sides. In the left panel, black Spanish (upside down) exclamation points are arranged in registers on a white field; in the companion panel, they are shown the same way in English (right-side up), and painted in white on a black field. The height and width of the exclamation points are varied across each row such that an energetic movement emerges, a life force of sorts that reinforces the notion that they really caricature people of different body types existing in a world of harmonious coexistence. As in his sculptures, the message here is that if we are to attain lasting peace, we must first achieve communal balance and equality.

LISSON GALLERY

The Brooklyn Rail
04 August 2023

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Pedro Reyes

Featuring Reyes and José Falconi, with Pierre Joris

📅 Friday, August 4, 2023 1 p.m. Eastern / 10 a.m. Pacific

Artist Pedro Reyes joins Rail contributor José Falconi for a conversation. We conclude with a poetry reading by Pierre Joris.

In this talk

[Visit *Pedro Reyes*, on view at Lisson Gallery, Los Angeles through September 1, 2023 →](#)

Pedro Reyes

Pedro Reyes studied architecture but considers himself a sculptor. His works integrate elements of theater, psychology, and activism, and takes a variety of forms, from penetrable sculptures to puppet productions. In Fall 2016, he held a visiting faculty position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a residency at MIT CAST as the inaugural Dasha Zhukova Distinguished Visiting Artist. Recently, Reyes was commissioned by The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists together with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, to raise awareness on the growing risk of nuclear conflict, for which he developed *Atomic Amnesia*, presented in Times Square, May 2022. For his work on disarmament, Reyes received the Luxembourg Peace Prize in 2021.



More on Pedro Reyes

- pedroreyes.net
- [@_pedro_reyes_](#)

LISSON GALLERY

Air Mail

28 August 2023



The Arts Intel Report

ART

Pedro Reyes

WHEN

June 24 – Sept 1, 2023

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Lisson Gallery

United States

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In a project titled “Palas por pistolas,” the Mexican artist Pedro Reyes partnered with the government of Mexico to make gardening tools out melted-down guns: 1,527 trees were then planted. In the project “Disarm,” guns were transformed into musical instruments: a concert in Mexico City followed. The sculptures and amate paintings featured in Reyes’s new exhibition demonstrate a similar appeal for social change. His sculpture *Detente* (2023), which depicts a hand curved in the shape of a dove, is named for the concept of relaxed hostilities between two entities, specifically in the vein of disarmament. In his sculpture of a lone figure clutching a book, Reyes—who founded Mexico’s first art-lending library at the Museo Carrillo Gil, in Mexico City—pays tribute to Aztec and Indigenous Mexican cultures. The work is titled *Amoxcalli*, which is the Nahuatl word for “library.” Fusing ancient and modern, Reyes imparts his message of education and pacifism. —*Paulina Prosnitz*

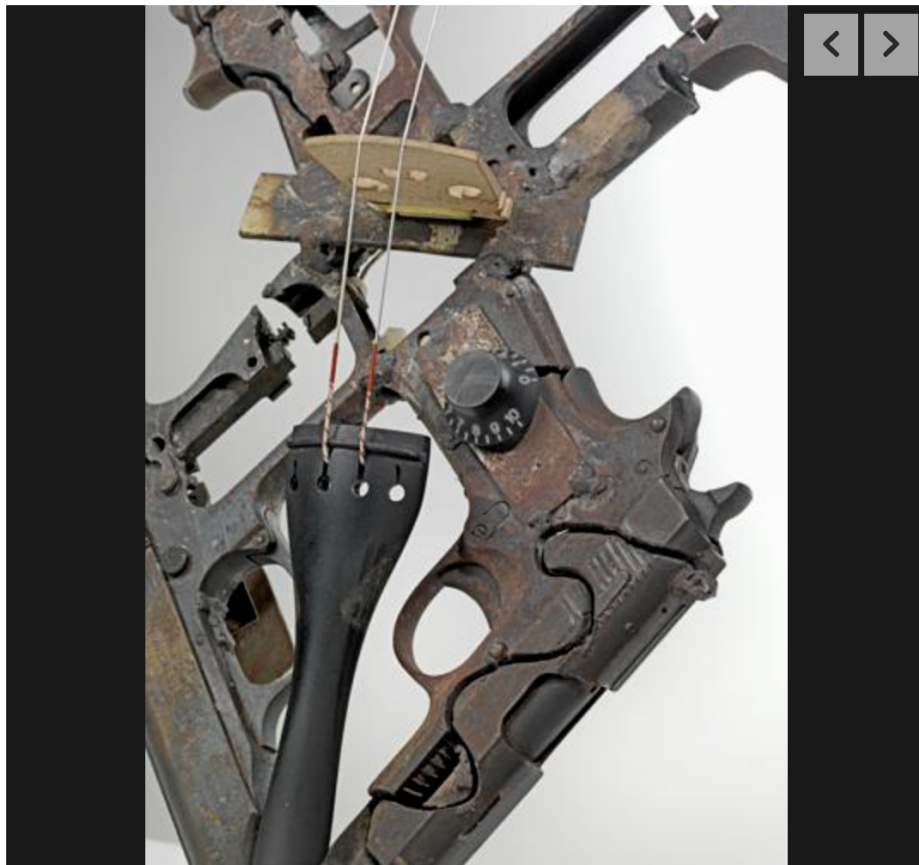
Pasatiempo

17th March 2023

Pasatiempo

Pieces of peace

Brian Sandford Mar 17, 2023 Updated 21 hrs ago



Pedro Reyes, detail from *Disarm (Violin I)* (2012), destroyed weapons, metal parts, strings; courtesy Lisson Gallery

Paranoia about an imminent nuclear attack was at a fever pitch in the United States in the 1980s, four decades after the nation dropped a pair of the weapons on Japan, demonstrating their cataclysmic power to a stunned world.

In the U.S., sculptor Pedro Reyes says, many embraced or at least accepted nuclear weapons as a necessary deterrent to the nation's heavily armed rival, the Soviet Union. Reyes' native Mexico is prevented by a treaty it signed from owning or creating the weapons, and it warily eyes developments in its neighbor to the north.

"We're living in extra time," says Reyes, 50. "There have been so many close calls and near-accidents [at nuclear facilities]. No one can be trusted with nuclear weapons, in the sense that no one should have the power to kill us all. It is difficult for people in the United States to understand this. It's very, very, very clear if you live outside the United States."

Pedro Reyes: Direct Action features firearms repurposed by Reyes into vases and playable instruments — far smaller than nuclear

warheads, but symbolic of the change Reyes wants to see in the world. It continues through May 1 — a change from the original end date of May 8 — at SITE Santa Fe and includes elements from two previous Reyes exhibitions. *Palas por Pistolas [Shovels for Guns]*, from 2008, involved transforming 1,527 guns into shovels that were then used to plant 1,527 trees. *Disarm*, from 2012, is a series of musical instruments made from more than 6,700 combined donated firearms. The exhibition also includes sculptures, video, and other art with the *Disarm* instruments hanging when they're not in use, cutting a distinctive silhouette into the white wall behind them.

Should anyone doubt the instruments are playable, musicians are providing proof via a series of First Friday events. Jesse Tatum is set to play *Disarm Flute*, Sabrina Griffith *Disarm Violin*, and Damon Griffith *Disarm Guitar* at 5:30 p.m. April 7 at the art space, followed by Leticia Gonzales playing *Disarm Violin* at 5:30 p.m. April 28 — a change from the originally scheduled May 5. The performances are followed by tours focused on the musical elements of the exhibition.



Pedro Reyes, *Disarm Guitar* (2018), destroyed weapons, metal parts, strings; photo Fiona Tommasi, image courtesy SITE Santa Fe

"No one can be trusted with nuclear weapons, in the sense that no one should have the power to kill us all. It is difficult for people in the United States to understand this. It's very, very, very clear if you live outside the United States." —
Artist Pedro Reyes

The heavy, painted repurposed instruments are far from traditional in multiple ways. The neck of *Disarm Guitar* is made of a rifle barrel, while the metal outlines of former handguns are clearly visible on the body of one of the *Disarm Violin* pieces. The former instrument has three strings, the latter, two. They appear rusty, bolstering the sensation that the weapons they're constructed from are of another time and place, no longer a potential danger.

Reyes hopes the performances and display bring attention to an issue he fears is overshadowed by concerns such as climate and social changes.

"I think that the subject is, right now, in a blind spot of people's consciousness," he says. "Millennials and Generation Z just don't have it on their map. And perhaps baby boomers and Generation X were so traumatized by the awareness of it that they don't *want* to remember. So it's the most pressing subject of all, because we're very close to seeing nuclear war in our lifetimes. Paradoxically, it ranks very low in people's concerns."

That confounds Reyes, who points out that the Doomsday Clock — which reflects the likelihood of human-caused global catastrophe, according to members of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists — was moved Jan. 24 to 90 seconds to midnight. That's the closest the 76-year-old figurative clock has ever been to midnight. The change was a result of fears over Russia's war on Ukraine damaging a nuclear reactor there.



Direct Action (2023), installation view; photo Shayla Blatchford, image courtesy SITE Santa Fe

Direct Action and its anti-weapons message were unveiled Feb. 3, two weeks after the Legislature convened less than a mile from SITE Santa Fe. As of early March, a bill aimed at slowing plans for a radioactive waste disposal storage site between Hobbs and Carlsbad was being reviewed by the House Judiciary Committee following passage in the Senate. That facility would store highly radioactive uranium from reactor sites nationwide.

No fewer than seven bills were introduced aimed at restricting or changing gun laws, with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham stating in late February that a special session might be required to ensure passage of an initiative to ban automatic weapons before later softening that stance.

Additionally, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in late February that his nation would no longer take part in the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which calls for Russia and the U.S. to submit to inspections of their stockpiles and to cap the number of their warheads. It was the final remaining nuclear weapons treaty between the two nations.

Curator Brandee Caoba acknowledges that the exhibition is well-timed, especially given the proposal to store nuclear waste in New Mexico.

“It’s just terrifying,” she says of that plan. “With the development of these catastrophic nuclear waste facilities and the implications of them, I really hope it helps people kind of get on board with, ‘What is happening here?’”

Caoba adds that she hadn’t previously seen work similar to Reyes’, describing it as renewing.

“You’re cutting and reshaping metal to make something new, with a new purpose, that gives off sound and vibration,” she says. “The music made from the instruments that Pedro has built, those guns are decommissioned firearms that were likely used in crimes. They function as a requiem for people who lost their lives.”



Pedro Reyes, *Amendment* (2022), volcanic stone; photo Fiona Tommasi, image courtesy SITE Santa Fe

On Feb. 4, Reyes engaged in a public discussion about transforming deadly materials into art with Miranda Viscoli, co-president of New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence and co-founder of Guns to Gardens, a gun buy-back program in New Mexico. He wasn't sure what kind of reception he'd receive, given New Mexico's role in the development of nuclear weapons and the employment of more than 10,000 people at Los Alamos National Lab alone.

"There's people that believe that nuclear weapons helped win the Second World War, which is not really true," he says. "The real reason the Japanese surrendered was because they were being invaded by Russia at the same time. They chose to surrender to the United States instead of Russia."

The public was appropriately fearful of the nuclear threat in the 1980s, Reyes says, partly as a result of films such as *The Day After* that depict the bleak realities of a nuclear attack for survivors. That film was broadcast on ABC in 1983, attracting more than 100 million viewers. Four years later, it aired on Soviet state television.

"You're cutting and reshaping metal to make something new, with a new purpose, that gives off sound and vibration. The music made from the instruments that Pedro has built, those guns are decommissioned firearms that were likely used in crimes. They function as a requiem for people who lost their lives." — *Curator Brandee Caoba*

"But right now, if you see the advertisements or the propaganda that the national labs put out there, or if you go to their museums, there are all these lies that they tell themselves that what they are doing is actually useful," Reyes says.

Nuclear responsibility transcends politics, he says, acknowledging rising concerns about irresponsible use of the weapons when former President Donald Trump was in office.

"But you know, [President Joe] Biden also has made very dangerous declarations, like when he goes out there and says about Putin, 'We have to get rid of this man,'" Reyes says. "Those are not words that a head of state should say."

This isn't SITE Santa Fe's first connection with Reyes. Earlier in 2022, it commissioned his video *Under the Cloud*, featuring New Mexicans talking about nuclear colonialism. *Direct Action* did, however, result in Reyes' first visits to SITE Santa Fe; he came from Mexico City in September and December 2022, and February.

While Viscoli and Reyes met for the first time in December, their connection goes back years. Viscoli was so inspired after reading about Reyes' work in 2008 that she co-founded New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence, Caoba says. That's the year Reyes started his ongoing *Palas por Pistolas* project, which led to *Disarm* four years later.

Outside SITE Santa Fe, visitors will see nine anti-nuclear-weapons posters created by international artists recruited by Reyes.

Caoba says *Direct Action* asks viewers to reexamine the legacy of the human race, as well as how they define respect.

"I'm not being human-specific," she says. "Respect for the land, respect for the water, respect for the air, respect for other creatures living on Earth."

LISSON GALLERY

San Antonio Current

8th March 2022

SAN ANTONIO CURRENT

By [Ashley Allen](#) on Tue, Mar 8, 2022 at 9:21 am



Courtesy of City of San Antonio Department of Arts & Culture

Close-up view of Pedro Reyess' *Stargazer (Citlali)*.

A new, large-scale public artwork has made its debut at San Antonio's [River Walk Public Art Garden](#).

On Monday, the City of San Antonio's Department of Arts & Culture announced the addition of Mexican artist Pedro Reyes' monumental 16-foot sculpture *Stargazer (Citlali)* to the downtown cultural destination.

The large-scale sculpture, created from Mexican volcanic stone and marble, features a stylized seated female figure gazing at a star-shaped object that she holds between her fingers. Reyes was originally inspired to create the sculpture by San Antonio's tricentennial celebrations.



Reyes stands next to his sculpture.

Courtesy of City of San Antonio Department of Arts & Culture

In a press release, the artist noted that *Stargazer (Citlali)* honors a collective history of looking to the stars for inspiration, guidance and hope. Additionally, "Citlali" means "star" in Nahuatl, the indigenous language of Reyes' hometown of Mexico City.

"I wanted to offer a work that transcends the relatively recent borders and boundaries we know today to offer an ageless perspective in celebration of San Antonio's more than three hundred years of distinctive history and culture," Reyes said in a statement. "The star could be a star like the ones that shine over San Antonio each night — the same ones that have been contemplated by all peoples throughout the region's human history, the same ones that inspire awe and wonder as they help us glimpse our place in relation to the universe and time."



Courtesy of City of San Antonio Department of Arts & Culture

The sculpture as seen from the river.

Stargazer (Citlali) joins a growing slate of public artworks that are on display in the River Walk Public Art Garden. Located between the Shops at Rivercenter and the Henry B. González Convention Center, the garden boasts installations by San Antonio artists Ashley Mireles, Cade Bradshaw, Leticia Huerta, Kaldric Dow and others.

"The River Walk Public Art Garden has been an extensive, multi-year project that celebrates the spirit of connection with artworks by several San Antonio artists intermingled with pieces by international artists," Department of Arts & Culture Interim Executive Director Krystal Jones said in a statement.

The River Walk Public Art Garden is planned to be completed by the end of 2022 with the addition of a new plaza area that honors the history of social justice, civil rights and the labor movement in San Antonio.

The Art Newspaper
18 May 2022



THE ART NEWSPAPER

A mushroom cloud rises over Times Square in latest iteration of anti-nukes art project

Artist Pedro Reyes is turning heads with an installation that evokes a nuclear explosion at the centre of Manhattan, and serving as a backdrop for talks and performances



Pedro Reyes's inflatable sculpture *ZERO NUKES* (2022) in Times Square
Photograph by Allison Dinner

The sight of a 30ft-tall mushroom cloud rising over Times Square might be especially ominous right now, with the threat of nuclear war having become disquietingly more real since Russian president Vladimir Putin ordered his army to invade Ukraine. For artist Pedro Reyes, commissioned to create the inflatable sculpture *ZERO NUKES* (2020) by the non-profit [Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#), making distant and abstract nuclear risks more tangible was the entire point.

“Nobody wins a nuclear war,” Reyes says. “We all care about the environment, we all care about social justice, but we should all care about this issue, too, because if nuclear war comes there’s no environment to save, there will be no society to save—it’s a universal issue.”

The sculpture forms the centrepiece and backdrop for a series of events and performances [↗](#) about nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, disruptive technology and climate change that continues through 24 May, in partnership with Times Square Arts. Two stands at Frieze New York (18-22 May) are also devoted to the project: one holds part of a new participatory piece by Reyes in which nearly 13,000 missile-shaped balloons (one for each nuclear warhead in existence) are handed out to visitors, the other features artworks and ephemera from past nuclear protest movements.

Frieze

10th May 2022

FRIEZE

Pedro Reyes's 'ZERO NUKES' at Frieze New York 2022

The installations at The Shed aim to inform on nuclear risk, calling for global nuclear disarmament

IN FRIEZE NEW YORK, NEWS | 10 MAY 22

Pedro Reyes will install *ZERO NUKES* at Frieze New York on Levels 2 and 4 inside The Shed. These projects will be displayed in conjunction with Reyes' presentation of *Amnesia Atómica* happening in Times Square from May 17-24, 2022, which aims to educate the public on nuclear risk, climate change, and disruptive technologies.



Pedro Reyes, *Amnesia Atómica*, 2020. ©Pedro Reyes

ZERO NUKES is a campaign calling for a full world-wide nuclear disarmament. Commissioned by the **Bulletin of Atomic Scientists**, the campaign is envisioned to support organizations dedicated to the prohibition of nuclear weapons.

The communications strategy *ZERO NUKES* focuses on the 'zero' as a graphic, visual and conceptual element common to all languages. The structure of the campaign aims to convey a symbol of global unity for a single non-controversial cause: to avoid the destruction of all life on earth.

Frieze New York 2023


For updates on Frieze New York, follow @friezeofficial on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook and sign up to the Frieze newsletter to be the first to know when early bird tickets go on sale.

LISSON GALLERY

Art in America
3 May 2021

Art in America

SIX MUST-SEE EXHIBITIONS IN CHELSEA THIS SUMMER

By Francesca Aton  May 3, 2021 12:19pm

Art in America

GUIDE

CHELSEA NEW YORK

Here are our picks of the six must-see shows in New York's Chelsea neighborhood this season, from the [Art in America Guide to Chelsea](#).

Robert Polidori at Kasmin



Photo : Robert Polidori: Villa dei Misteri #2, Pompeii, Italia, 2017, archival pigment print on Dibond. Courtesy the artist.

Through May 15

Robert Polidori's large-scale color photographs capture some of the most striking frescoes among the ruins of Pompeii. The documentary images evoke spiritual and psychological themes tied to shelter and a sense of place that Polidori has investigated throughout his forty-year career.

[Visit the A.i.A. Guide listing.](#)

Lamar Peterson at Fredericks & Freiser

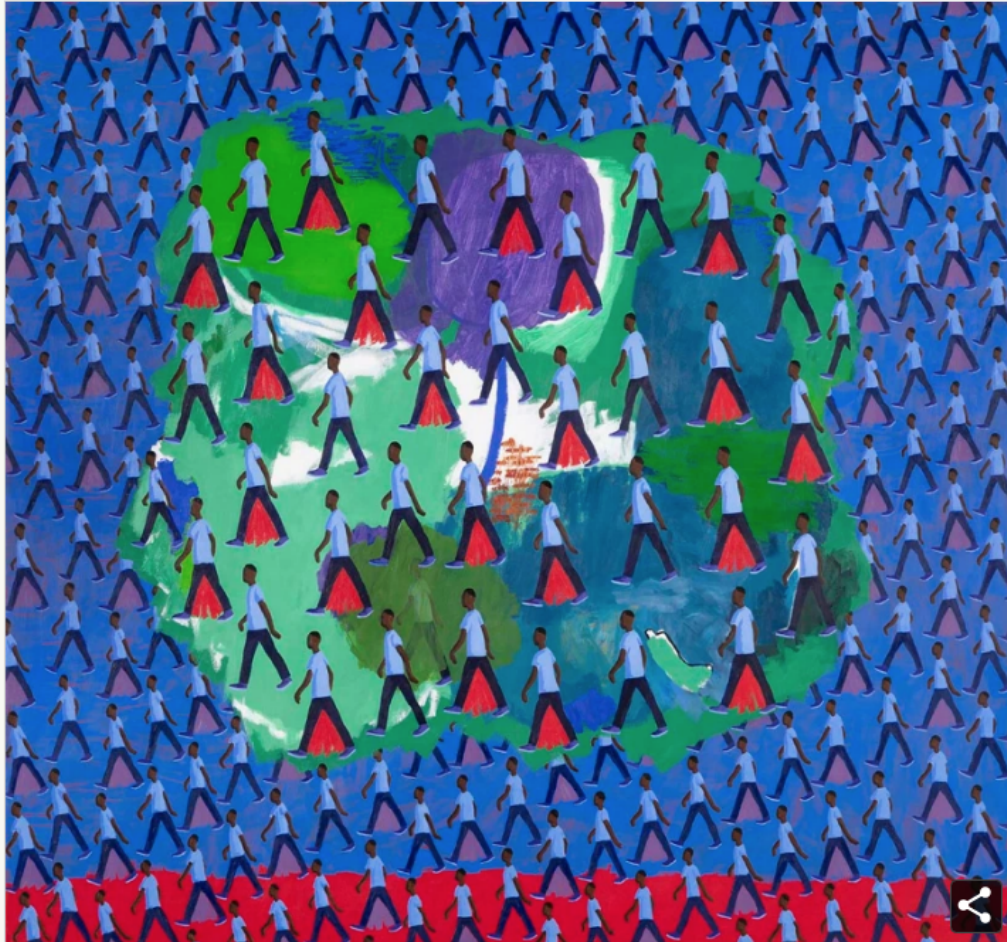


Photo : Lamar Peterson: Path Through the Woods, 2021, oil on canvas, 70 by 75 inches. Courtesy the artist and Fredericks & Freiser, New York.

Through June 4

“Left Foot, Right Foot”

Minneapolis-based artist Lamar Peterson's vibrant candy-colored paintings and works on paper depict versions of himself walking—an activity he began to process the pandemic and the death of George Floyd. While some works display passionate bursts of self-expression, others appear removed and integrate repetitions of his figure in various landscapes. In grappling with grief, this present-day flâneur captures a striking tension between stark reality and emotive possibility.

[Visit the A.i.A. Guide listing.](#)

Pedro Reyes at Lisson Gallery



Photo : Pedro Reyes: Totem (Huehuetotl), 2021, tezontle stone, 90 1/2 by 29 1/2 by 19 5/8 inches. © Pedro Reyes. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Through June 19

"Tlali"

In Pedro Reyes's show "Tlali," its title adapted from the Aztec word for "earth," the Mexico City-based artist and activist uses the visual language and symbols of pre-Columbian civilizations in a new series of 14 carved-stone sculptures and 11 drawings to offer an alternative perspective on the cultural foundations of the American continent.

[Visit the A.i.A. Guide listing.](#)

Leslie Wayne at Jack Shainman Gallery



Photo : Leslie Wayne: Self-Reflection, 2020, oil on wood, 28 1/4 by 24 inches. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

Through June 19

"The Universe Is on the Inside"

Scraping, folding, cutting, and layering are among the techniques Leslie Wayne employs to create the surfaces of her oil paintings. Her depictions of mundane objects—a wardrobe, a window, her own likeness in a mirror selfie—suggest instability and unlikely movement, thereby highlighting the power of perception and memory.

[Visit the A.i.A. Guide listing.](#)

Terry Winters at Matthew Marks Gallery

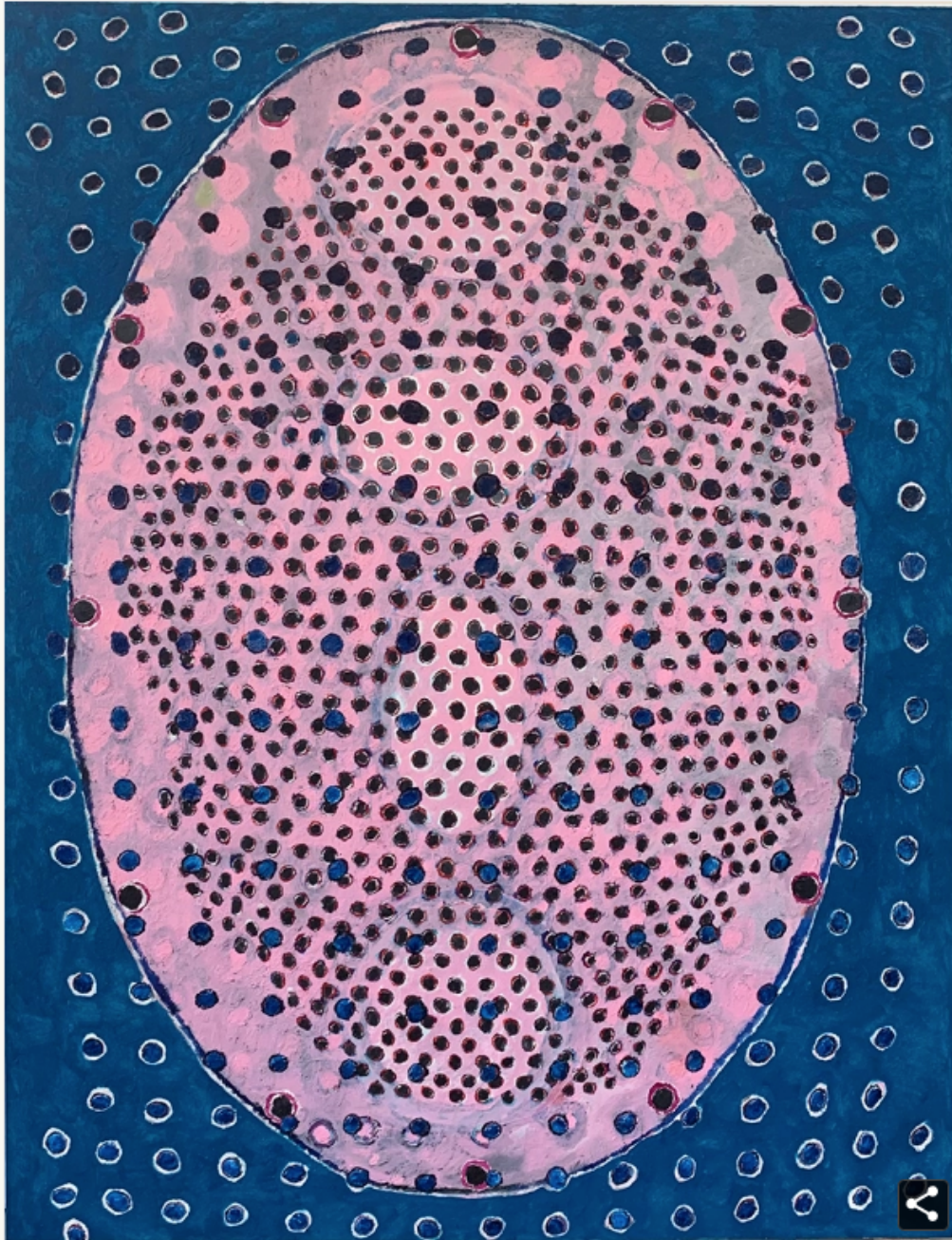


Photo : Terry Winters: Thyreos, 2020, oil, wax, and resin on linen, 88 by 68 inches. © Terry Winters, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Through June 25

Recalling computation, architecture, and genetic helices, Terry Winters's complex compositions combine elements from abstract art and mathematical systems. This exhibition features nine new paintings as well as a selection of works on paper that feature colorful, overlapping biomorphic forms.

[Visit the A.i.A. Guide listing.](#)

Franklin Evans at Miles McEnergy Gallery

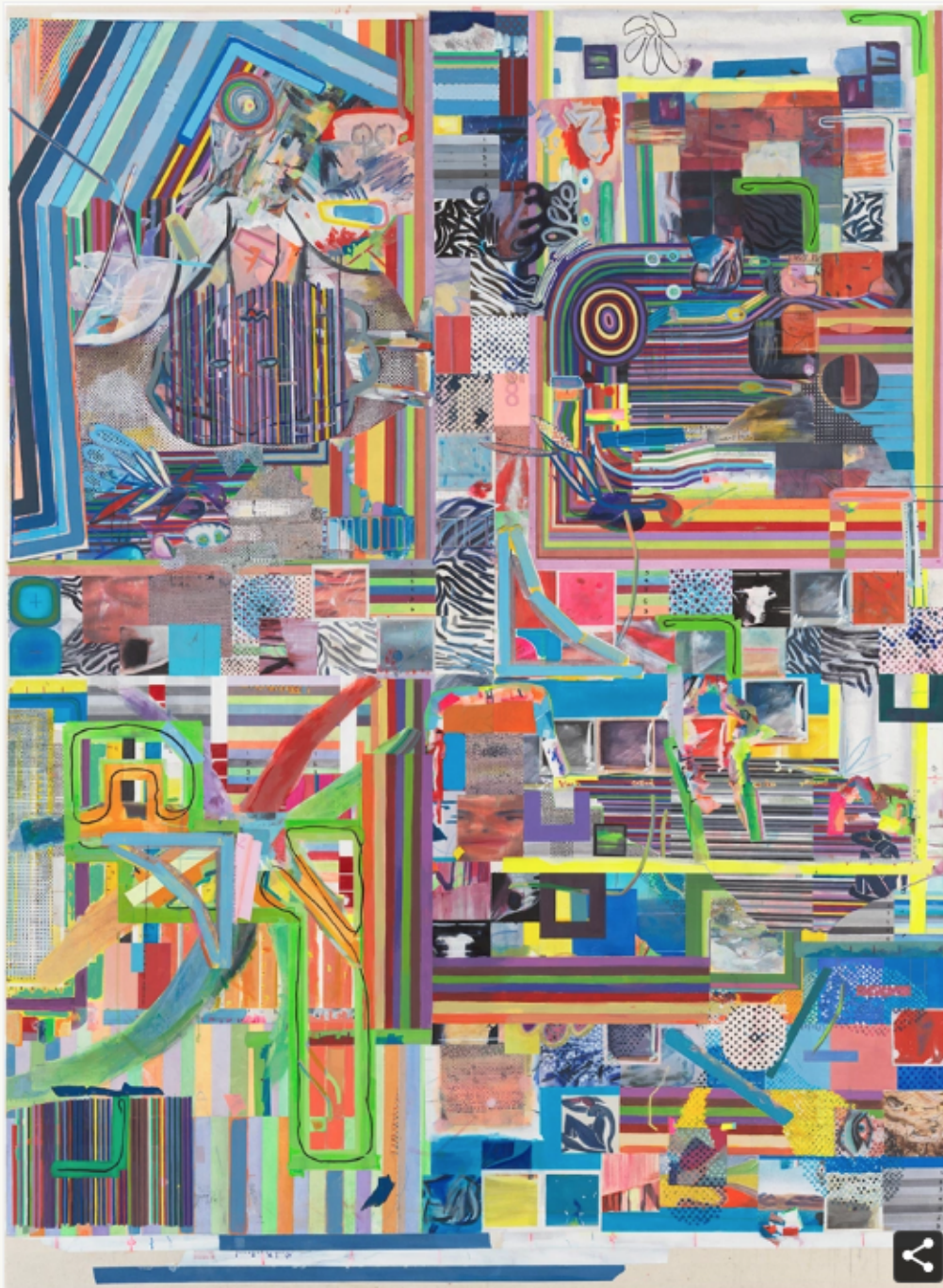


Photo : Franklin Evans: franklinfootpaths15to20, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 78 by 57 1/8 inches; at Miles McEnergy Gallery.

Through July 30

“fugitivemisreadings”

Franklin Evans’s paintings and installations have long explored the artist’s studio, with references ranging from Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard to Laura Owens and Kerry James Marshall. Akin to an art historical lexicon, his latest paintings address the theme of originality through an array of jumbled maximalist configurations. An illustrated catalogue with an essay by *A.i.A.* contributor Raphael Rubinstein accompanies the show.

[Visit the A.i.A. Guide listing.](#)

LISSON GALLERY

Frieze

6 May 2021

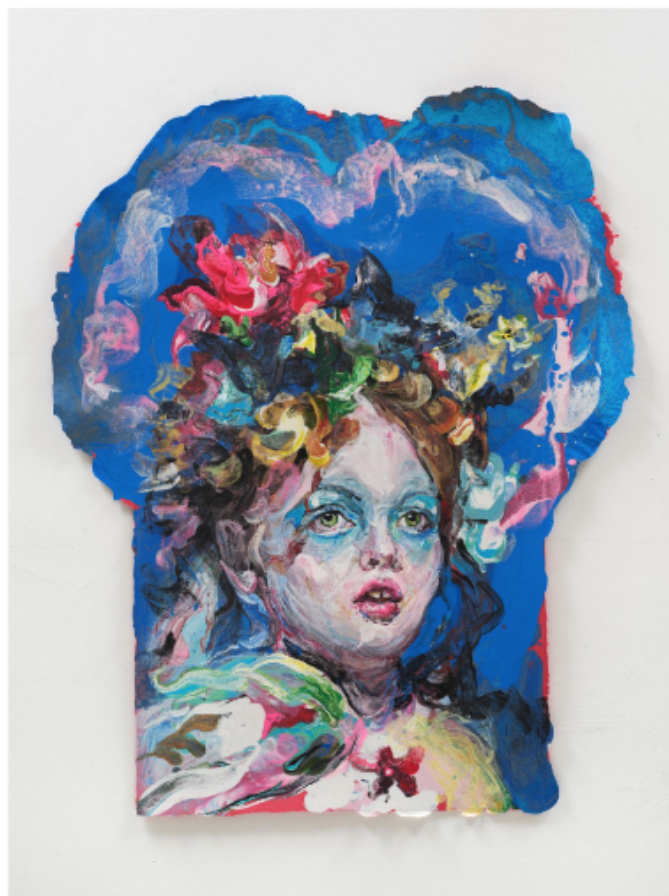
FRIEZE

Which Gallery Shows to See in New York This Frieze Week

From Cameron Rowland's deep dive into the history of US policing at Essex Street to Pedro Reyes's pre-Columbian inspired sculptures at Lisson Gallery, these are the must-see exhibitions in New York during Frieze Week

T

BY TERENCE TROUILLOT IN CRITIC'S GUIDES | 06 MAY 21



Natalie Frank, *Woman, Blue*, 2021, linen paper pulp on cotton base sheet, 73.7 x 53.3 cm. Courtesy: the artist, Lyles & King, New York and Salon 94 New York

Natalie Frank

Lyles & King and Salon 94

29 April – 29 May

Spread across two galleries, Natalie Frank's latest solo outing, 'Cross-dressing for the Battlefield', showcases a new series of portraits made from colourful and textured slivers of paper pulp pressed onto cotton sheets, alongside a collection of painted clay vessels detailed with feminine figures. With their embellish hairstyles and delicate visages, Frank's rococo-inspired characters – excepting the Joan of Arc figure in *Woman with Armor III* (2021) – are so beautifully rendered, the paper works almost appear wet with paint, as if fashioned in richly layered impasto on raw canvas. At Lyles & King, Frank has extended the portraits beyond their frames onto vinyls that cover both gallery walls, revealing the costumed bodies of our heroines.



Chase Hall, *The Great White Hanging*, 2020, acrylic, thread, and coffee on found support (cotton canvas and wood), 319 x 170 cm.
Courtesy: the artist and C L E A R I N G, New York

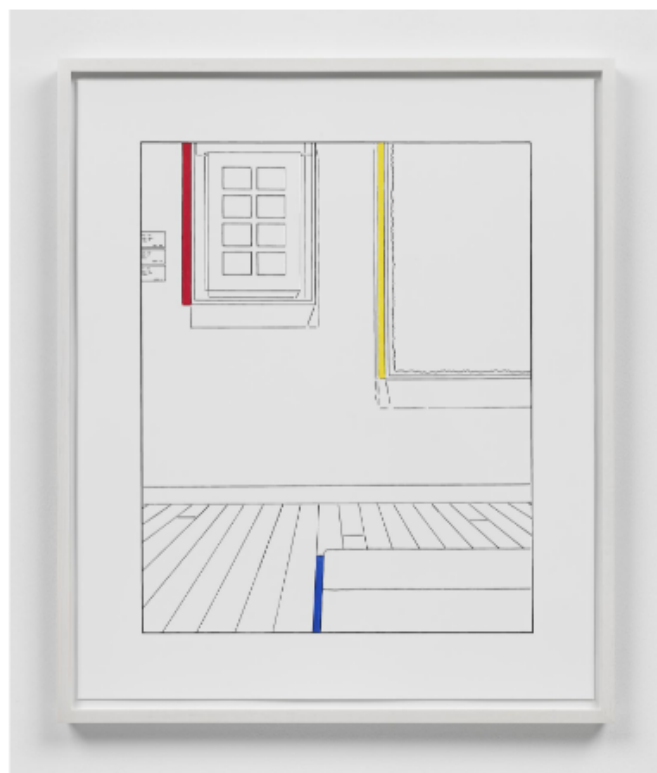
Chase Hall

CLEARING

29 April – 20 June

C L E A R I N G gallery presents 'Aleczander', a solo exhibition of Chase Hall's latest series of large-scale paintings. The show – which features a text by Horace D. Ballard, curator of American Art at the

Williams College Museum of Art – foregrounds Hall's experimentations in Black figuration, composition and material, in paintings made using acrylic, coffee and raw cotton canvas. Works such as *The Great White Hanging* (2020) – an image of a Black fisherman posing with his catch of the day: a great white shark – are imposing yet delicately rendered; the lacunae of the bare, white canvas in his tableaux are wonderfully balanced with the short strokes of brown paint that colour the skin of his cast of figures.



Louise Lawler, *Life Expectancy* (traced and painted), First, 2010/2018/2020, archival pigment print with gouache, 47 x 37.5 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

Louise Lawler

Metro Pictures

4 May – 5 June

Louise Lawler's 'One Show on Top of the Other', at Metro Pictures, presents two exhibitions simultaneously. 'Distorted for the Times' is a selection of digitally adjusted and distorted images, in the form of three vinyl works spread across the walls of the gallery, accompanied by a series of mounted photographs. 'A Given (Red, Yellow, Blue)' is the first showing in its entirety of 'Traced and Painted' (2000–ongoing), a series of trace drawings Lawler made from her own photographs, daubed with sparse marks of primary colour. While Lawler's constant revisiting and repurposing of her *oeuvre* could potentially create a disjointed visual encounter, the overall experience is one of outstanding aesthetic and conceptual coherence.



Cameron Rowland, *Description*, 2021, *New York Herald*, January 16, 1803

Matching a description in the vicinity of a reported crime is often considered sufficient to meet the standard for reasonable suspicion.

Courtesy: the artist and Essex Street, New York

Cameron Rowland

Essex Street

1 May – 19 June

Cameron Rowland's 'Deputies' at Essex Street is the artist's first solo show in New York since his acclaimed '91020000' at Artists Space in 2016. While his previous show focused on prison labour as a modality of neo-slavery in the US, 'Deputies' takes on the history of the police and, more precisely, the development of the New York Municipal Police Department (now the NYPD). Accompanying the show is a leaflet featuring an essay by the artist that traces the roots of the police to the slave patrol in the South: a militia of white men that enforced punitive slave codes to prevent the 'fugitivity, truancy and rebellion of the enslaved'. Installed in the show are objects that reflect on Rowland's research: an emergency call tower (*Lynch Law in America*, all works 2021); a copy of the New York Herald from 1803 (*Description*); two 19th-century cotton scales (*Price per Pound*); and five UHF radio scanners broadcasting 24/7 the NYPD's radio communications (which are recorded for posterity) across all five boroughs in New York (*Life and Property*). Finally, outside the gallery, in Chinatown's Seward Park (named after William H. Seward, US Secretary of State [1861–1869]), Rowland installed five New York City benches to memorialize five unmarked Black burial grounds in the city. As Rowland notes in the work's description: 'The displaced acknowledgements of these burial grounds intervene on Seward's memorial. They are meant for resting or remembering or plotting.'



Pedro Reyes, *Tonatiuh*, 2021, volcanic stone, 222 x 120 x 110 cm.
Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery, New York

Pedro Reyes

Lisson Gallery

6 May – 18 June

At Lisson Gallery, the Mexican artist Pedro Reyes presents 'Tlali', an exhibition of new sculptures and works on paper inspired by pre-Columbian language and iconography. Working closely with the Aztec language Nahuatl, Reyes offers the word 'Tlali' (Earth) as new name for North America, envisioning a new future for the continent while looking back at the contributions of Mesoamerican civilizations. Collaborating with stone carvers in Mexico City, Reyes created a group of fantastical sculptures from volcanic rock, red tezontle, jadeite and marble. These massive, stunning works each command their space within the gallery. *Tonatiuh* (2021), for example, named after the Aztec sun god, is a spherical polygon made entirely from volcanic rock. Sitting solidly on its large stone plinth, the object presents as a sacred totem of worship to the sun's immense power.

LISSON GALLERY

designboom
7 June 2021

designboom®

pedro reyes sets carved stone sculptures in dialogue with amate paper drawings at lisson gallery

from now through june 18 at new york's lisson gallery, artist **pedro reyes** presents a series of new sculptures and works on paper drawn from the language and symbols of pre-columbian civilizations. the exhibition, *tlali* — translated as 'earth' from the aztec language *nahuatl* — addresses the origins and history of the naming of the american continent, serving as a reminder of its foundations.

'it is imperative for a mexican artist to learn nahuatl,' reyes shares. 'proportionate to the use of latin in the united states, many places in mexico have a name in nahuatl, so learning the language is vital to understanding the region's geography and anthropology.' the exhibition features fourteen carved stone sculptures in dialogue with eleven drawings on amate across a presentation that engages with mayan, olmec, toltec and mexican heritage.



pedro reyes: *tlali*, exhibition view | 504 west 24th street, new york | may 6 – june 17, 2021
all images © pedro reyes, courtesy lisson gallery

each work in *tlali* at lisson gallery is allotted a nahuatl title connected to pre-columbian symbolism. carved directly in stone, the sculptures put an ancient artistic practice in the spotlight and pay homage to a discipline that spans over thirty-five centuries. reyes' sculptures feature the distinct geometric vocabulary used to depict human figures or architectural models by the mesoamerican civilizations. made from red tezontle, volcanic stone, jadeite, and white marble, the monumental works continue reyes' deeply political practice through the creation of new totemic and abstract forms.



highlights of the exhibition include *coatí (snake)*, a volcanic stone sculpture spanning more than 13 feet high that echos the rhythmic movement of a rattle snake. another totemic structure, *huehuetéotl (the old god of fire)*, recalls the monumentality of the classic pre-columbian sculpture *los atlantes de tula* — toltec warriors that supported temple structures. meanwhile, on the gallery floor, *ueueyeyeko (ancient knowledge)* comprises a series of marble carvings that allude to the plethora of symbolic objects found at a burial site. these works seek to comment on how this act of detachment likely differs from our experience of offerings today, given the importance placed on personal ownership.

'mexican people have two obsessions. a sympathy for death and love for flowers,' mexican poet carlos pellicer once remarked. reyes makes a further reference to this notion in the white marble *xochitl (flower)*, pre-columbian ruler and poet nezahualcóyotl touches on the acute importance of the flower in mesoamerican philosophy, offering it as a metaphor for the fleeting nature of life.



pedro reyes: tlali, exhibition view

the gathering of sculptural objects is flanked on both sides by eleven vertical drawings that continue the artist's dialogue with mesoamerican typology. bearing resemblance to political banners, these monumental works on handmade mexicanamate paper serve as an index of language, an arrangement of symbols and patterns that mirror pre-columbian ethnology.

exhibition information:

artist: pedro reyes

title: tlali

dates: may 6 – june 18, 2021

gallery: lisson gallery

location: 504 west 24th street, new york

nina azzarello | designboom

jun 07, 2021

LISSON GALLERY

*Wallpaper**
2 June 2021

Wallpaper*

Pedro Reyes: 'sculpture is a very jealous goddess'

In 'Tlali', an exhibition at Lisson Gallery, New York, Mexican artist Pedro Reyes carves into the spirituality of stone, the complex history of the American continent and the vocabulary of pre-Columbian and Mesoamerican civilisations

| BY [HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH](#)



Pedro Reyes, *Chac Mool*, 2021, volcanic stone. © Pedro Reyes. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Pedro Reyes' latest body of work is all ancient history. It's also searingly contemporary: old materials and methods as platforms for new socio-political critique.

His exhibition, 'Tlali', now on show at Lisson Gallery, New York, mines the language and symbols of pre-Columbian and Mesoamerican civilisations. It also confronts the complexities within the United States of America and the larger continent it occupies; the land's name originates from conquistador Amerigo Vespucci, responsible for the enslavement and death of countless indigenous communities.

Deriving from the Aztec language Nahuatl, the exhibition's title, meaning 'Earth', refers to the deeply rooted and contested predicament of the continent's given name. Reyes posits 'Tlali' as an alternative, unblemished term for the continent, yet imbues the featured works with the political charge for which he is renowned.



Top: Pedro Reyes, *Xochitl*, 2021, white marble. Above: *Coatl*, 2021, volcanic stone. Photographer Daniel Kukla. © Pedro Reyes. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Reyes' show includes 14 carved, totemic stone sculptures alongside 11 drawings on handmade Mexican paper. This vast presentation engages with Mayan, Olmec, Toltec and Mexican heritage and serves as a reminder of the foundations of the American continent. These sculptures – rendered in volcanic stone, jadeite, and white marble – draw on the geometric vocabulary used to depict human figures and architectural models by Mesoamerican societies.

Coatl (snake), an imposing volcanic stone piece, resembles the weight and motion of a snake's rattle. Reyes references the philosophy of balance and yin and yang. 'The pieces are stacked in a rhythmic manner, rising to the top, and could continue endlessly.'



‘We do not know much about the poetry, dance, or music of the cultures that existed 4,000 years ago in Mexico. However, their sculptures are still here,’ says Reyes. ‘I am fascinated by the resilience of direct carving in stone. Once a stone has been carved, it earns its permanent place in the world. This power doesn’t necessarily have to do with scale. There are tiny artefacts that can feel monumental because of the intensity and concentrated care that they carry.’



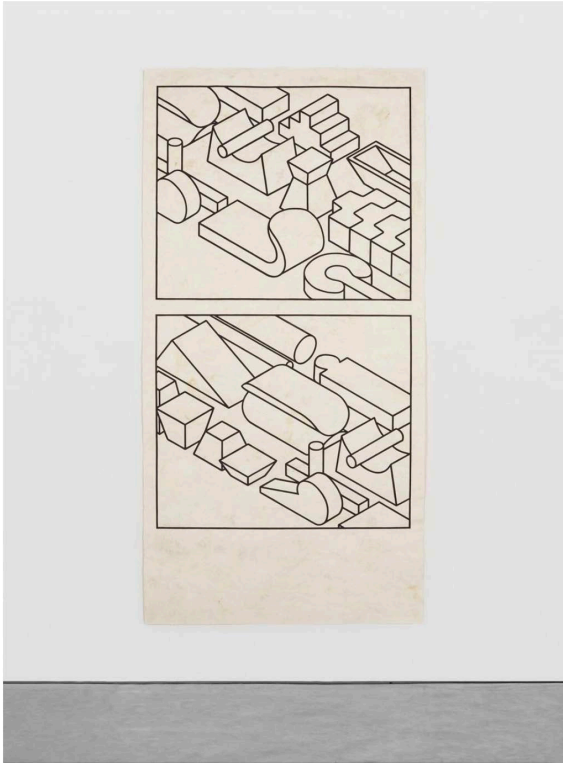


Top: Pedro Reyes, *Tonatiuh*, 2021, volcanic stone. Above: *Incuicatl*, 2021, white marble. © Pedro Reyes. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

For Reyes, the process of carving directly into stone is raw, spiritual, and respectful of the nuances in his material. Each stone that he collects from the local quarry is, as he puts it, already ‘halfway to a sculpture’, but the other half of the process is crucial: ‘I don’t believe in ready-mades. A lot of bad art has been made out of the idea of ready-mades, but there is something about rocks. Stones have an intrinsic sculptural value that asks for minimum intervention.’

‘A work of art gets better if you spend as much time as necessary with it. Sculpture is a very jealous goddess; she wants you to be there all the time.’

Reyes lives in a self-built house with his wife, fashion designer Carla Fernández, in Coyoacán, in the south of Mexico City. Despite the global tumult of the last year, the pandemic has thrown up unexpected opportunities: ‘Not being able to travel was, in fact, beneficial because I got to spend more time in the studio,’ says Reyes. ‘A work of art gets better if you spend as much time as necessary with it. Sculpture is a very jealous goddess; she wants you to be there all the time. I have become a slave to sculpture.’ His exhibition was delayed for more than a year, but this afforded him a privilege of increasing scarcity in contemporary culture: slowness.



Reyes also took the time to engage with social practice – one of the key facets of his work – in a time of social distance. ‘I am very interested in finding ways to activate the aesthetic experience in the pandemic,’ he says. For a recent project, *Tlacuilo* (meaning ‘scribe’ in Nahuatl), he turned his personal library into a public library. ‘I have personally benefited tremendously from having access to libraries and want to promote and encourage people to continue to use them.’

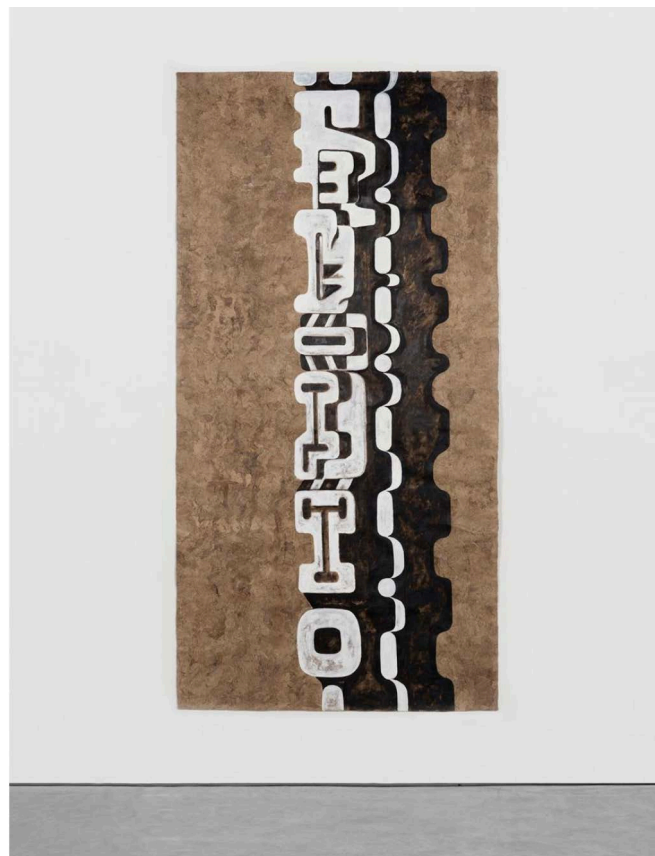
Reyes’ work explores how individual and collective organisation can cultivate positive change. In one of his most notable participatory works, *Palas por Pistolas* (2008), the artist took aim at contemporary gun culture, working with local authorities in Culiacán, Mexico, to melt down guns into shovels, intended to plant trees in cities elsewhere in the world.



Pedro Reyes, *Titani*, 2021, jadeite. © Pedro Reyes. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Reyes is an artist who believes in a deep engagement with his material. For him, creation is a physical battle and a spiritual encounter that requires 'hundreds of decisions every minute'. It's also a process that goes against one of the founding principles of conceptual art: severance of the artwork from its author.

'I believe that, in the development of conceptual art, when one has an outsourced idea that is produced by other people, this has led to a lot of bad art,' he says. 'Art is a transmission of spiritual energy from the mind into matter and if this transition really happens you can feel it in the piece.' ✱





Pedro Reyes: 'Tlali', exhibition view. 504 West 24th Street, New York. Until 17 June 2021. © Pedro Reyes. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

INFORMATION

Pedro Reyes, 'Tlali', until 17 June 2021, Lisson Gallery, New York. lissongallery.com

Pedro Reyes: 'Sanatorium', until 20 August, MAAT - Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon. maat.pt

LISSON GALLERY

Art Observed
13 May 2021

ART OBSERVED

NEW YORK – PEDRO REYES: “TLALI” AT LISSON GALLERY
THROUGH JUNE 18TH, 2021

May 13th, 2021



Pedro Reyes, *Tlali* (Installation View), via Lisson

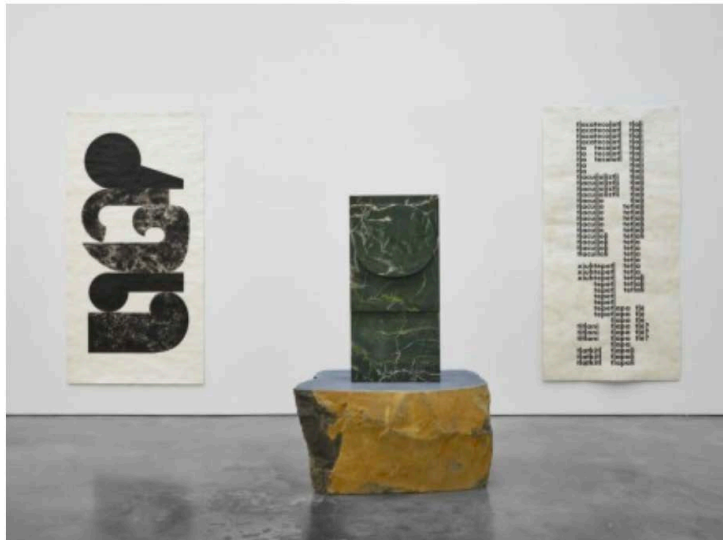
[Pedro Reyes](#) returns to [Lisson Gallery](#) in New York this month with *Tlali*, an impressively dense and exploratory exhibition that a new series of sculptures and works on paper drawn from the language and symbols of Pre-Columbian civilizations. Drawing on the history and social economies of the Aztec language Nahuatl, the show turns a local historical and linguistic thread into a broader reflection on the state of the world and the broader political and social landscape of modernity.



Pedro Reyes, *Tlali* (Installation View), via Lisson

Drawing the notion of the world and specifically that of the North American continent as an inherently problematized power relation, Reyes's show title points directly to the interference between European and Pre-Colombian iconographies of the world. Even the name America, he hints, was adapted from the conquistador Amerigo Vespucci, responsible for the enslavement and death of countless indigenous communities. Here, *Tlali* becomes an alternative, allegorical name for the continent. Featuring fourteen carved stone sculptures along with eleven drawings on amate, the presentation engages with Mayan, Olmec, Toltec and Mexica heritage and serves as a reminder of the very foundations of the American continent.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100



Pedro Reyes, *Tlali* (Installation View), via Lisson

For Reyes, the experience of language and place are inextricably linked, and provide an underlying context through which Mexican citizens can better understand their world and landscape. "It is imperative for a Mexican artist to learn Nahuatl," he says. "Proportionate to the use of Latin in the United States, many places in Mexico have a name in Nahuatl, so learning the language is vital to understanding the region's geography and anthropology." The result here is an exploration of language and its relations to architecture and form, sculptures and wall-mounted works that emphasize place and history in relation to a specific, internal linguistic experience. These are works imbued with meaning from the language that spawns their history and modes of generation, a symbolism linked to, and always reflecting, the language that produced it. The sculptures displayed throughout the exhibition feature the distinct geometric vocabulary used to depict human figures or architectural models by the Mesoamerican civilizations. Using red tezontle, volcanic stone, jadeite, and white marble Reyes continues his deeply political practice through the creation of new totemic and abstract forms.



Pedro Reyes, *Tlali* (Installation View), via Lisson

Coatl (snake), a volcanic stone work at 157 inches high, resembles the snake's rattle movement. Where Eastern civilizations elected to meditate sitting, Pre-Columbian cultures opted for a peripatetic practice. Another totemic structure, *Huehuetotl* (the old god of fire), reminds of us of the monumentality of the classic Pre-Columbian sculpture Los atlantes de Tula, Toltec warriors that supported temple structures. *Ueueyeyeko* (ancient knowledge) is a series of marble carvings that symbolize the plethora of symbolic objects found at a burial site, serving as a commentary on how this act of detachment likely differs from our experience of offerings today given the importance placed on personal ownership.



Pedro Reyes, *Tlali* (Installation View), via Lisson

Exploring the work as a mode through which one produces shared history and awareness through language, Reyes's work is a powerful exploration of place as both ground and subject.

The show closes June 18th.

– D. Creahan

Read more:

Pedro Reyes: *Tlali* [\[Exhibition Site\]](#)

LISSON GALLERY

Openhouse
April 2020

Openhouse

CASTELLANO 42 TO 47
A space

Pedro Reyes

to be

Carla Fernández

Read

Written by Roben van den Haag/berg ysuitab.no Photographed by Marina Demova marina-demova.com
Pedro Reyes: andresreyes.net Carla Fernández: carlafernandez.com





Seen from the street, the house of fashion designer Carla Fernández and artist-architect Pedro Reyes appears to have descended from the skies. A front door that could belong to a submarine opens onto a space filled with billowing clouds of grit-dust. In one of the adjoining studios two men are at work on a large stone sculpture of a face. I have entered a black-and-white world, further outlines and colors only slowly becoming discernible as the dust begins to settle.

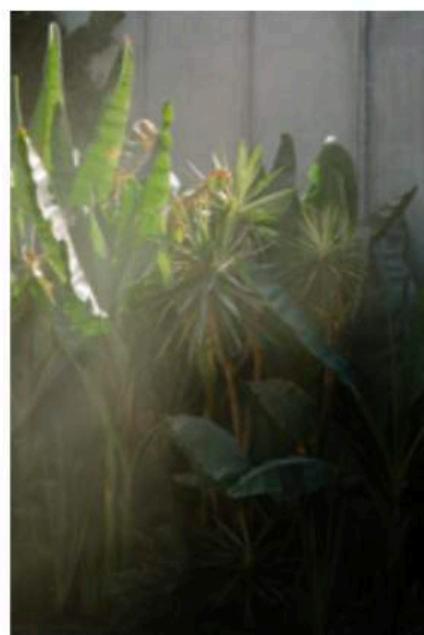
Carla greets me hurriedly, excusing herself – she has been summoned to meet the Minister of Cultural Affairs and has to leave straight away. Pedro emerges from his studio on the mezzanine, where a sea of book covers almost seems to engulf him as he comes down the stairs. In the living-room no wall space is left uncovered: thousands of books are shelved here, collected from rare-bookstores the world over. Pedro is a dedicated reader, but the stories amassed here would take more than one lifespan to read. These books aren't merely meant for himself. 'A book that sits safely in its shelf equals a destroyed book to me. Books are made to be read.'

When Carla and Pedro first saw the building five years ago, the spacious living-room in which we now stand was a swimming-pool. Architect Pedro had no prior intention to build on such a large scale, but given the pre-existing structure the duo soon agreed that this would become the brain of the house. An open space, free for all, free of commercial motives – a place for reflection and the sharing of knowledge. While ever more public libraries are being closed down worldwide, Pedro made a countermove by starting an Instagram library, *Tlacuilo*. The Instagram grid serves as bookshelf, books can be reserved by sending a message, and when available picked up in Carla and Pedro's living-room.

Books, texts and stories are central to the work of both. Carla creates sustainable clothing, in close collaboration with traditional artisans from various Mexican communities. Her designs are architectural in appearance; she never works with cut-outs from patterns. Each piece is constructed from the two basic geometric shapes of traditional Mexican weaving, the triangle and the square. The words *textile*, *technique* and *text* are literally entwined in their Latin origin. A hand-woven piece of fabric is resembles a page, with stories embroidered by needle and thread. Carla doesn't cut her fabrics at all – thereby leaving their texts intact.

In Pedro's work also, texts take on spatial form – he makes sculptures that read as words when seen from a certain angle, he designed an architecture of speech, and for his current project on nuclear disarmament he's building an archive of texts written on this explosive subject in the 1970s and 80s. 'There's a *Doomsday Clock* that measures the risk of a nuclear crisis. It is now at 100 seconds before 12 – midnight is KABOOM. This is a much more urgent problem than climate change and it's a lot easier to solve, but we need to wake up.' The walls of his studio are covered with bits and pieces of text. At the moment his main field of interest is female poets, and his favorite poem is by Jayne Cortez. He reads some lines out loud: *That's why I say I'm into life, preservation of life now, revolutionary change now, before the choking, before the panic, before the penetration of apathy, rises up, and spits fire, into the toxic tears, of this stockpile.*

I ask him about the difficulties of conveying an ambiguous message in a project about nuclear disarmament. 'Ambiguity is overrated,' is his amused reply. 'In the arts there's this idea that everything must remain open-ended, that nothing can be prescribed. Artists are afraid to be dogmatic or pedagogical. Ambiguity has become a *comfort zone* where no clear statements need to be made, resulting in a lot of bullshit. These days everything has to be non-linear and deconstructivist. Why? A story is made up of separate parts that work together to create meaning. It's fine to deconstruct hegemonic narratives, as long as they are replaced by something new. That's the only way to change a system.'





Pedro and Carla are well aware that they can't change the system by themselves. In their house a variety of artisans and specialists collaborate in the creation of new couture collections or artworks – thereby reviving traditional crafts and skills, such as stone carving. 'When carving a stone by hand, there is no separation between thinking and doing. Each new step determines what the next step will be, that's how the design unfolds. A machine skips all those steps.'

In one of Pedro's works, he refers to Matsuo Bashō, a Japanese poet from the Edo period. One day, one of Bashō's students took a walk through a field, noticing dragonflies about which he then wrote a haiku:

*Red dragonflies
Remove their wings
And they are pepper pods*

Bashō pointed out to his student that this wasn't a true haiku, and corrected the text:

*Red pepper pods
Add wings
And they are dragonflies*

For Bashō, the haiku was much more than a technique: haikus conveyed moments of revelation. To join one thing to another object or image, thus increasing its meaning. Carla's and Pedro's house became a haiku by breaking away parts of the original construction and adding new elements and a public, communal purpose. Its façade of curved concrete gives it the appearance of a power plant or factory. The patio is an open sunlit space that all the studios open onto. The mezzanine, supporting the weight of all the stories. 'The building's various elements came together like a well-constructed sentence,' Pedro says, 'with emotion and rhythm, an architectural syntax.' ○



Un espacio para ser leído

Pedro Reyes y Carla Fernández

Por fuera, la casa de la diseñadora de moda Carla Fernández, y el arquitecto y artista Pedro Reyes parece un artefacto caído del cielo. La puerta de entrada, que podría ser la de un submarino, me traslada a un espacio donde unas densas nubes de partículas grises turban la mirada. En uno de los estudios, dos hombres tallan una enorme piedra en un mundo en blanco y negro cuyos contornos y colores no comienzan a dibujarse hasta que las partículas de polvo se han asentado.

Carla llega apresuradamente, dispone de muy poco tiempo. Acaba de ser convocada para hablar con el Ministro de Cultura. Pedro aparece en el altílo del salón, casi invisible entre el mar de libros que descienden por la escalera. No hay pared en la amplia estancia que no esté cubierta por miles de libros rescatados de recónditas librerías de todo el mundo. A Pedro le gusta leer, pero aquí hay más historias de las que una persona pueda leer en toda su vida. ¡No son solo para él! «Un libro que yace en la estantería sin leer, para mí, equivale a un libro destruido. Los libros existen para ser leídos».

Cuando Carla y Pedro vieron la casa por primera vez hace cinco años, la gran sala de doble altura donde nos encontramos ahora era una piscina. Como arquitecto, Pedro nunca habría construido un espacio de semejante tamaño pero como ya estaba aquí, el dúo pronto tuvo la idea de convertirlo en el alma de la casa. Un espacio abierto a todos, donde no se tiene la tentación de consumir, sino de profundizar y compartir. Mientras en el resto del mundo se cierran bibliotecas, como contra-movimiento Reyes decidió abrir una en Instagram, Tlacuilo. La galería de Instagram sirve de estantería. A través de un mensaje privado reservas un libro y en el salón de Carla y Pedro puedes recogerlo.

Los libros, textos e historias son el hilo conductor de la obra de ambos. Carla crea colecciones de moda sostenibles en colaboración con mujeres artesanas de comunidades indígenas. Sus prendas son arquitectónicas y no trabaja con patrones preestablecidos. Cada pieza está compuesta por las dos

formas geométricas que los tejedores mexicanos han utilizado tradicionalmente en la confección de una prenda: un triángulo y un cuadrado. Del latín, el significado de las palabras «textil», «técnica» y «texto» está literalmente entrelazado. Un trozo de tela tejido a mano es como una página en la que se escriben historias con aguja e hilo.

El trabajo de Pedro también llena el espacio con texto, creando esculturas que gritan palabras desde determinados ángulos. Una arquitectura de discurso a partir de la cual, para su último proyecto sobre el desarme nuclear, está construyendo un archivo de textos ya escritos en los años 70 y 80 sobre este explosivo tema. Hay un reloj del Día del Juicio Final que mide el riesgo de una crisis nuclear. Las agujas están ahora a 100 segundos de las 12. La medianoche es ¡bum! «Este problema es más urgente que el cambio climático y más fácil de resolver, pero tenemos que despertar». Las paredes de su estudio están llenas de fragmentos de textos. Actualmente está inmerso en el mundo de las mujeres poetas y su poema favorito es el de Jayne Cortez. Lee en voz alta un fragmento: *That's why I say I'm into life, preservation of life now, revolutionary change now, before the choking, before the panic, before the penetration of apathy, rises up, and spits fire, into the toxic tears, of this stockpile.*

«¿Es difícil transmitir un mensaje ambiguo en un proyecto de desarme nuclear?», le pregunto. «La ambigüedad está sobrevalorada», dice Reyes riéndose. «Dentro de las artes existe la idea de que todo debe ser abierto, que nada debe ser prescrito. Los artistas tienen miedo de ser dogmáticos o pedagógicos. Entonces la ambigüedad se convierte en una zona de confort en la que ya no tienes que hacer una declaración y surgen muchas tontorías. Hoy en día todo tiene que ser no lineal o deconstructivista. ¿Por qué debería ser así? Una historia consiste en diferentes partes que, unidas, crean un significado. Es genial deconstruir las cosas, siempre y cuando las sustituyas por algo nuevo. Solo entonces se puede cambiar un sistema».





La casa es un lugar de encuentro donde artistas y artesanos se reúnen para trabajar en una nueva colección o una nueva obra de arte. Pedro y Carla no están solos en esto de cambiar el sistema. Mantienen vivas artes que están desapareciendo en todo el mundo, como el tallado en piedra. «Si tallas una piedra a mano, no hay diferencia entre pensar y hacer. Cada paso contiene el siguiente, así es como se construye el diseño. Una máquina se salta todos esos pasos». El cerebro de la casa no es nada sin los estudios circundantes donde surgen las ideas.

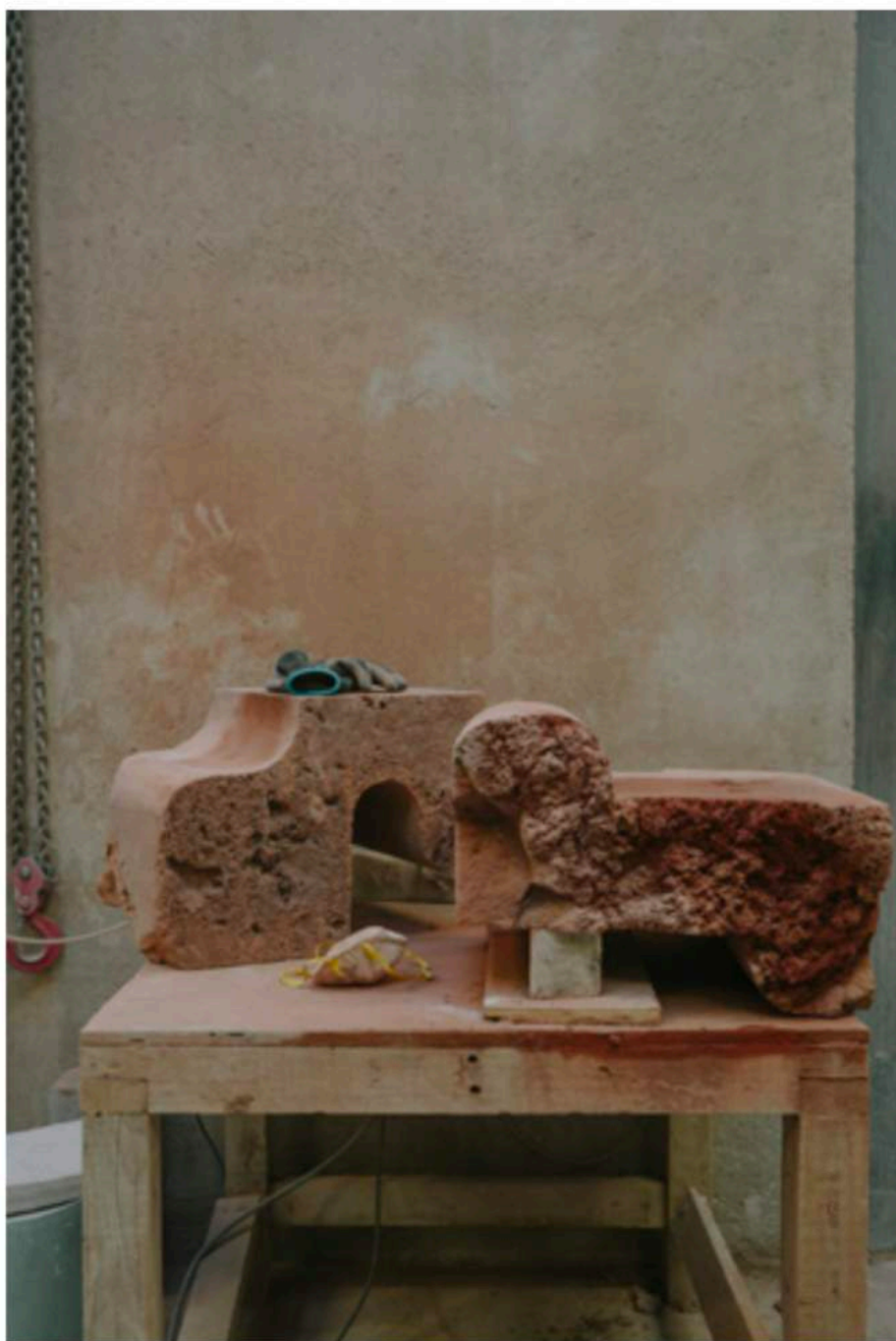
Una de las obras de Reyes hace referencia a Matsuo Bashô, un poeta japonés del período Edo. Un día, uno de los estudiantes de Bashô paseaba por un campo en el que las libélulas volaban alegremente y escribió el siguiente haiku:

*Libélulas rojas
quítale las alas
y serán pimientos.*

Bashô señaló a su estudiante que no era un auténtico haiku, y corrigió el texto:

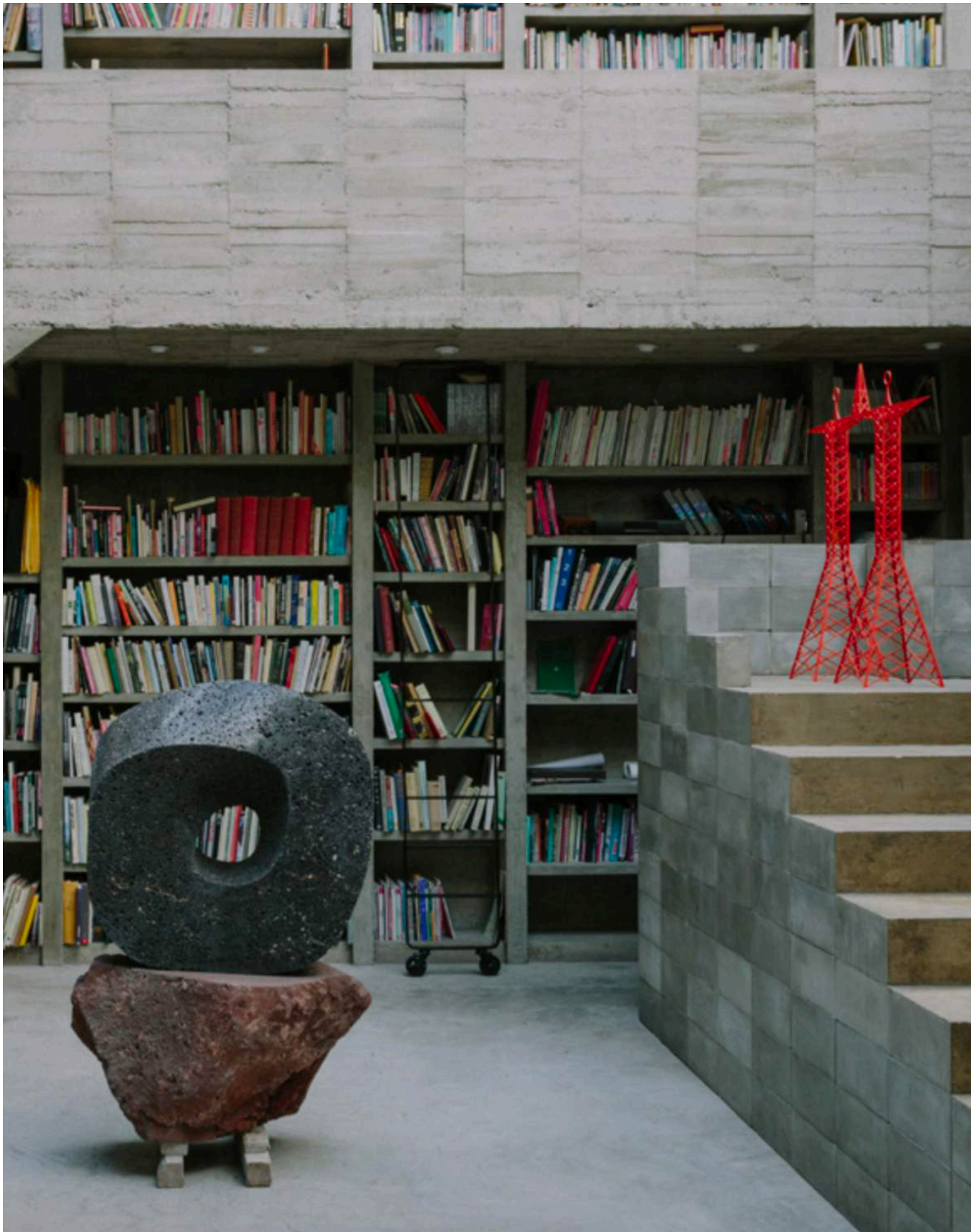
*Pimientos
añádeles las alas
y serán libélulas rojas.*

Para Bashô, un haiku, más que una técnica, era un momento de ingenio: cuando se añade algo a un objeto o imagen, se potencia su significado. Para Carla y Pedro, por ejemplo, la casa se convirtió en un haiku cuando demolieron parcialmente la vieja construcción, pero también porque añadieron nuevos elementos y una función común. La fachada de hormigón abovedado proporciona a la casa el aspecto de una central eléctrica, de fábrica. El patio es un espacio abierto, con mucha luz solar, al que da a parar cada estudio. Y el altillo soporta el peso de todo ello. Así es como los diferentes elementos de la casa se conectaron como en un discurso», dice Reyes, «con emoción y ritmo, como una sintaxis de la arquitectura». ○









LISSON GALLERY

dezeen

21 January 2020

dezeen



Pedro Reyes designs his own brutalist studio in Mexico City



Tom Ravenscroft | 21 January 2020 | 7 comments

Mexican sculptor Pedro Reyes has built a bunker-like studio from prefabricated concrete and stone alongside [his home](#) in Coyoacán, [Mexico City](#).

[Reyes](#), who trained as an architect before becoming an artist, designed the extension to his home to be the main workplace for his studio.

"We prepared spaces for a wood shop, a metal shop, a loading dock, as well as a drawing studio with circular skylights, which provide even light, since we like to draw and work by hand in an old fashioned way, and minimise the use of computers," Reyes told Dezeen.



The studio was designed following the 2017 earthquake and needed to be built quickly, so Reyes chose to use prefabricated concrete panels, which gives the building its brutalist appearance.

"We had a window of opportunity to build the studio in a very short time because of permits, which was one of the reasons why we chose to use prefab elements," said Reyes.

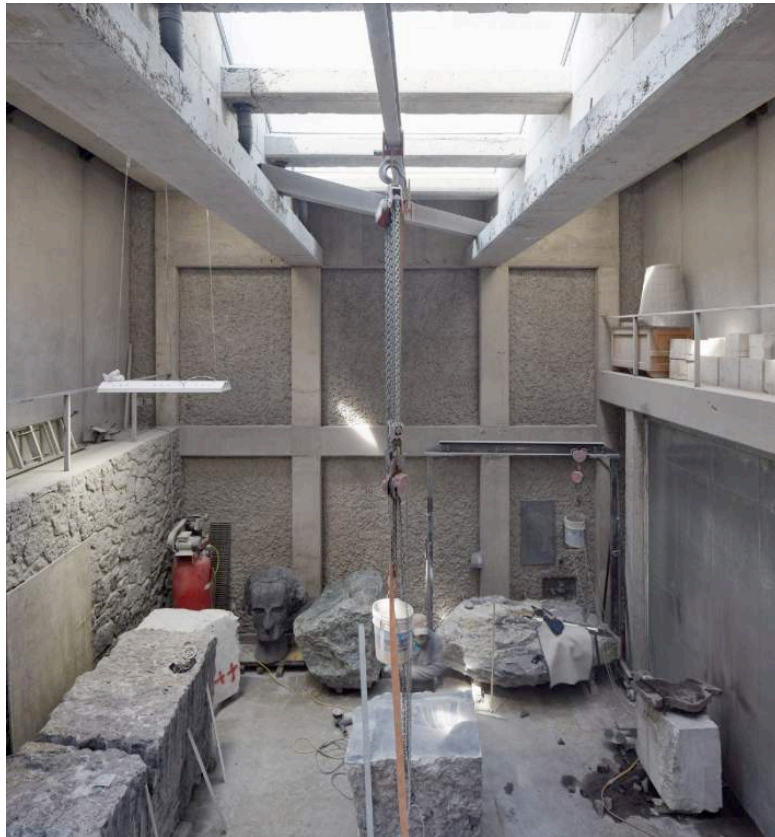
"Definitely, it resembles a work more of infrastructure or engineering than of architecture, which is one of the characteristics of brutalism."



The distinctive, curved prefabricated-concrete panels were designed to give the building a sculptural quality, as Reyes wanted the studio to appear as if it had been placed on the ground.

"I designed concrete slabs of different lengths which have a curvature both at the top and the bottom," explained Reyes.

"By doing a curvature at the bottom, I wanted to convey the feel of a more object-like quality for the building, meaning not one that is emerging from its foundation, but more like sitting on the ground to give it a more sculptural quality."



Inside the studio, there is a double-height stone workshop, which is top lit and accessed through a large door.

"The stone shop was made with cenital lighting in the style of a factory, with very high doors so a truck platform can come in, and beams with a travelling crane that can lift stone blocks up to 10 tons in weight."



In the other spaces, including the drawing studio, Reyes has combined the concrete elements with volcanic stone.

"Certainly, towards the facade, the prefab elements give the look of a bunker or a power station, but we did not want to do that on the inside, because it would have looked like a jail," said Reyes.

"Towards the interior garden, we have a volcanic lava wall that connects more with the local heritage and gives the studio a warmer feel."



Throughout the project Reyes has chosen to use materials that maintain the aesthetic of the adjacent house, but treat them in new ways.

"Being an expansion of the house, we wanted to have this kind of same palette of materials which is stone and concrete, yet within that palette we have a lot of different treatments that allow different textures and surfaces," he explained.



Another concrete home in Mexico City is the apartment complex that Studio Rick Joy built in the city's Polanco neighbourhood.

Photography is by Edmund Sumner.

Read more: [Architecture](#) | [Mexico City](#) | [Mexico](#) | [Industrial](#) | [Brutalism](#)

LISSON GALLERY

The Sunday Times
3 February 2019

THE  TIMES

INTERIORS

INTERIORS: INSIDE THE CREATIVE CONCRETE HOME OF CARLA FERNANDEZ AND PEDRO REYES

Their brutalist home is a surprisingly welcoming work/play haven. By
Fleur Britten



What to do if you're too busy to source furniture for your new house? For the Mexican fashion designer Carla Fernandez and her husband, the artist and architect Pedro Reyes, the solution is simple — you design it yourselves, exactly as you want it. And given that the couple were joint recipients of Design Miami's Design Visionary Award 2018, you can expect a pretty high standard. Their three-bedroom brutalist home, which they share with their children, Cristobal, 11, and Laima, 13, is located in south Mexico City, close to Frida Kahlo's house. Its concrete lines are softened with many of the couple's own, often handmade designs: from the rockpool-style bath and lava-stone basin to chairs, lamps, tables and artwork. Filling in the gaps are iconic pieces by the likes of Charles Eames and the Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen.



The Mexican fashion designer Carla Fernandez in the interior garden, sitting on a volcanic-stone chair designed by her husband, Pedro Reyes. She is wearing one of her designs, which references Mexico's traditional clothing

NIN SOLIS

Fernandez, 46, who held a catwalk show at the V&A Museum last October to coincide with the Frida Kahlo exhibition, also has her atelier here, so this concrete oasis is always full of colleagues and artisans. "The atmosphere is both cosy and lively," says Fernandez, who in 2008 won the British Council's Young Creative Entrepreneur award for fashion. "Our doors are always open to collaborators and friends and family."

What she likes the most, she says, "is that all the spaces are being used, each and every single day — by me, Pedro, the kids, our visitors. It is a place much lived in, not at all a showroom kind of house." Which is the perfect finishing touch to a vast expanse of grey concrete.



The garden features indigenous succulents, cacti and stonecrop plants

NIN SOLIS



In the main bathroom, the lava-stone basin is moulded to resemble turned pottery
NIN SOLIS



The double-height living area features a huge concrete library across 20 metres of wall, designed by Reyes. The flooring is slate, and the sculptures are also by Reyes
NIN SOLIS



The concrete kitchen is softened by curved lines and bevelled edges
NIN SOLIS



The work space overlooks the garden. In the living area, Reyes's sculpture of musical instruments is made from old weapons
NIN SOLIS



The bedroom features a vintage table and chairs by the Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen
NIN SOLIS



In the living area, Reyes's
sculpture of musical
instruments is made from old
weapons
NIN SOLIS

The Art Newspaper
6 December 2018

THE ART NEWSPAPER

[INTERVIEW](#) → [ARTIST INTERVIEW](#)

Pedro Reyes and Carla Fernández: 'death to planned obsolescence'

The Design Miami Visionary award-winners tell us about their projects at the fair

GABRIELLA ANGELETI

6th December 2018 19:48 GMT



[MORE](#)



Installation outside of Design Miami/ by Pedro Reyes and Carla Fernández Photo: © Vanessa Ruiz

The artist Pedro Reyes and the fashion designer Carla Fernández are the winners of the 14th edition of the Design Miami Visionary Award, an annual prize established in collaboration with the Savannah College of Art and Design (Scad) to honour creatives making significant contributions to the design world. The artists—and husband and wife team—were recognised for their “always brilliantly synthesised spectrum of influences, from Brutalism to Mexican indigenous culture to progressive values”, says Craig Robins, the founder of Design Miami.

Two large-scale installations designed by Reyes and Fernández are being shown at Design Miami (until 9 December) along with works from the past decade. These works contrast hands-on design traditions with concerns around automation and our tech-obsessed zeitgeist, and also address current socio-political issues. On 5 December, Rodman Primack, the fair’s chief creative officer, moderated a talk with the artists on the importance of “coming together to make art, architecture, design and fashion that is rooted in social consciousness and justice, and that keeps craft alive and vibrant”, Reyes says. Scad is slated to open an exhibition of the artists’ works next February.

The Art Newspaper: Your work deals with cultural heritage, artisanal traditions and social justice. What can visitors expect to see in the Design Miami exhibition?

Carla Fernández: It’s a full retrospective of our works. In the booth, there are some of my contemporary designs that were made in collaboration with indigenous female artisans across Mexico who specialise in handmade textiles and utilise centuries-old techniques. The textiles are woven to be treasured and we create few of them, doing so slowly. We say: death to planned obsolescence. We understand that artisans need time to think, learn, transform and transcend. It is not only a romantic idea, but also a way to ensure that people who choose these professions will be safe from the destructive waves that automation is bringing to society.



Carla Fernández and Pedro Reyes Photo: Ana Hop and courtesy of Design Miami

Pedro Reyes: The exhibition also has various stone carvings I've done over the past five years. That tradition goes back 3,000 years in Mexico. At a time when a lot of designers are going for 3D printing or computer-controlled machining, I'm more interested in revealing the natural properties of different stones.

Travelling across Mexico, Carla and I became aware that there was no need for us to import sources of inspiration because we have so much to unearth from our past. The furniture I'm designing is based on Pre-Columbian artefacts. My metate chair has three legs, a constant feature in metates [hand-mill stones], molcajetes [mortar and pestles] and most Pre-Columbian pottery because an object with three legs always sits firmly on the ground. This tripod shape was considered a design error, so I'm interested in tackling this principle with a modern language. There's an elegant yet bold simplicity to these types of tools that haven't changed much in thousands of years.



The art world can't be oblivious to the world in which we live — CARLA FERNÁNDEZ

What messages do you hope visitors take away?

Fernández: For us, it's important to show that the political borders we know today are only 200 years old in comparison to a continent that has been inhabited for 11,000 years. Our goal is to bring some perspective to a time where xenophobia and racism are increasing. Looking ahead, we are going to have increasing migration. On the other hand, we also want to show that many of these indigenous cultures continue to exist, and that, in contrast to these original settlers, we are all immigrants.

Art fairs are effective platforms to address social issues because they welcome many spectators with different backgrounds from all over the world. We think that part of the importance of art nowadays is to bring about social change and not only the selling of it.

You've designed a special project for the plaza at the fair. What inspired this work?

Fernández: Our presentation addresses one of the most important issues of our time: migration. There are two different installations, one of them showing two large-scale effigies carrying different tools, representing the many trades done by immigrants in the US. The work becomes a sort of monument to honour and acknowledge the energy that immigrants bring into each profession, and to show their diversity and richness.



Installation shot of Pedro Reyes and Carla Fernández retrospective at Design Miami Photo: © Vanessa Ruiz

The second one, presented within a container, revisits the subject of migration from a political standpoint. We are living through a humanitarian crisis, where immigrants from Latin America are persecuted and families are being separated and abused on grounds of their ethnicity. This persecution has brought us indelible images of detention centres where children as young as four-years-old are being held and separated from their families. We believe that it's our duty to present such images so that these acts of racism don't go unnoticed. We want to open a conversation about the ongoing humanitarian crisis of migrants in the US, as it is our firm belief that the art world can't be oblivious to the world in which we live.

You're also designing the graphic identity of the fair, which is based on protest posters.

Reyes: For several years, we have been collecting protest posters from Mexico, Latin America and Europe. These obviously have a sense of urgency. The inspiration comes from the bold graphics of the handmade protest signs, posters and ephemera from the 1968 uprisings in Mexico, Paris, Prague and Berkeley. Fifty years ago, there was a revolution that signalled a social and cultural turning point worldwide and inspired artists to also get political.

Glocal

4 December 2018



Pedro Reyes & Carla Fernández | Design Miami/ Visionary Award 2018

El premio anual se otorga a talentos creativos de todos los campos que han hecho contribuciones significativas al campo del diseño que ofrecen un impacto tangible y duradero en el mundo que nos rodea.

Por: Redacción

Fotos: Cortesía

Design Miami/ nombró a **Pedro Reyes** y **Carla Fernández** como los galardonados del **Design Miami/ Visionary Award 2018**. El premio se otorga a talentos creativos, incluyendo diseñadores, curadores, arquitectos y luminarias cuyas contribuciones ofrecen un impacto tangible y duradero en el mundo que nos rodea. El premio Design Miami/ Visionary Award es reconocido por tener una continuidad, un impacto tangible y duradero. Los ganadores de los premios Design Miami/ Visionary Award incluyen a **Zaha Hadid, Marc Newson, Tokujin Yoshioka, David Adjaye, Yves Béhar, SHoP Architects** y a la **Escuela Mwabwindo**.



El artista contemporáneo Reyes y la diseñadora de moda Fernández, quienes están casados, presentarán una exposición colaborativa en **Design Miami/ 2018**, además de diseñar la identidad gráfica para la feria. “El trabajo de Pedro y Carla siempre ha sintetizado brillantemente un espectro de influencias, desde el **Brutalismo** a la cultura indígena mexicana en un cuerpo nutrido de trabajo. Estoy contento de que vamos a celebrar sus logros en Design Miami/, y espero con interés ver su exposición en la feria”, dijo **Craig Robins**, fundador de Design Miami/.

La pareja presentará una retrospectiva de obras que abordan algunos de los aspectos fundamentales de la historia de la humanidad, de nuestro tiempo y de los intercambios humanos íntimos que se han vuelto raros en esta era digital. La estructura general del *stand* es diseñado por los ganadores del premio y contará con paredes de acero curvado. Las obras clave a la vista incluirán las **sillas Metate** de Reyes, que están inspiradas en artefactos precolombinos de tres patas. El artista talla las sillas con herramientas sencillas que no han cambiado en casi 3,000 años. También se pueden ver ejemplos del **Desarme** de Reyes, instrumentos musicales fabricados con armas de fuego destruidas, así como las obras textiles de Fernandez y las obras en colaboración como un mapa con los nombres de los más de 300 asentamientos originales del continente americano que existían antes de la conquista.



“Nos sentimos honrados por ser seleccionados como los ganadores del Design Miami/ Design Visionary Award”, dijo Reyes. “Esto nos ofrece la oportunidad de presentar a los asistentes a Design Miami/, piezas en las que el diseño ha adquirido dimensión social, ya sea abordando la justicia social o el establecimiento de la paz, así como la importancia de productos artesanales en un mundo donde la mayoría de los procesos están siendo automatizados y millones de personas están perdiendo sus trabajos.”

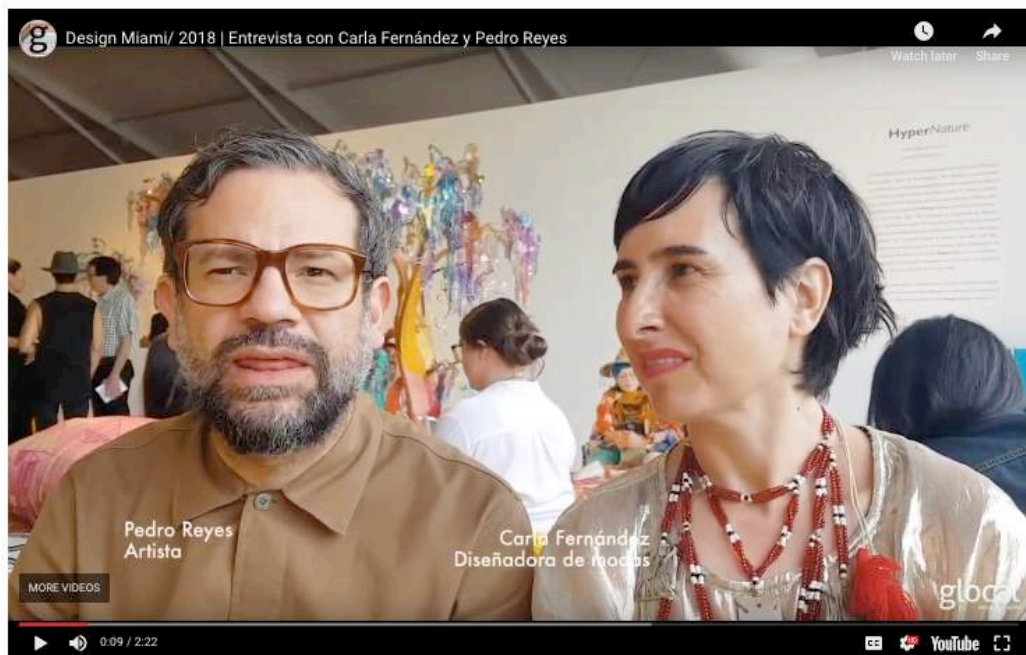
El premio es co-presentado por el socio universitario oficial de Design Miami, **Savannah College of Art and Design** (SCAD). Después de su debut en Design Miami/, la exposición tendrá como objetivo viajar al **SCAD Museum of Art** que abrirá sus puertas en febrero de 2019. Además de la exposición dentro de la feria, Reyes y Fernández diseñarán una presentación especial para la plaza frente a la feria este diciembre y será la sede de una charla de diseño.

Acerca de la Identidad Gráfica

La inspiración de Reyes y Fernández para la identidad gráfica de Design Miami/ 2018 viene de los gráficos *bold*, de carteles, de pancartas de protesta hechas a mano y de la sublevación de mayo de 1968 en París, una revolución que marcó un punto de inflexión social y cultural en todo el mundo e inspiró una revolución artística.

“Cincuenta años después de las manifestaciones de 1968 en México, París y en todo el mundo es más importante que nunca escuchar las voces de nuestra sociedad global”, dijo **Carla Fernández**. “Que es la razón por la que nos inspiramos para incorporar los colores, imágenes y mensajes de este movimiento en nuestro compromiso con la acción y el cambio social”, añadió.

“**Design Miami/** se siente honrado de apoyar a tan poderosos visionarios y tener el honor de que su lenguaje sea parte de nuestra identidad visual con la misión de ser un mercado para el diseño y un líder en el discurso del diseño global.” dijo, **Rodman Primack**, Director Creativo de Design Miami/.



designboom

21 October 2018

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design miami/ celebrates pedro reyes and carla fernández with 2018 design visionary award

contemporary mexican artist **pedro reyes** and fashion designer **carla fernández** have been announced as the recipients of the **design miami/ design visionary award for 2018**. the design visionary award is an annual celebration of luminaries from a wide range of disciplines that have significantly contributed to the field of design, with previous winners including **zaha hadid**, **tokujin yoshioka**, **konstantin grcic**, **sir david adjaye**, and **yves béhar** among others. recognized for their impact on local communities through their individual practices, reyes and fernández are to present a collaborative exhibition at the fair, as well as design the graphic identity of this year's edition.



image © designboom (also header image)

despite their individual focus on separate design disciplines, **pedro reyes** and **carla fernández** express similar concerns through their work, often dealing with mexican indigenous culture, social values in communities, and intimate human interaction in an age of digital exchange. *'a few years ago we begun to realize that we wanted to start looking at designers and people that were doing more with their practice than just creating buildings or objects, using their practice in ways to impact the design community more broadly,'* explains rodman primack, chief creative officer of design miami/. *'with pedro and carla we are obviously so inspired by the work that they create, but also by the way they run their practices and have used them to impact their communities; in carla's case to really keep some crafts and the conversation around native handmade things alive, and use that as a way of communicating with the world and fashion to give energy to that. with pedro, there has always been in his practice a connection with social impact, from early projects such as the ones he did with guns. for design miami/ it is a way of recognizing our community can do more with opportunities, and opportunities that will not only benefit the maker, or the artist, but that can also benefit the people that they collaborate with, the communities that they interact with. it feels like this is probably our best expression of this award so far, '* primack concludes.



mano-sillas by pedro reyes, 2012, courtesy of labor gallery. the chairs appear to be in the middle of a sign-language conversation

a retrospective exhibition of both of their works will open on the occasion of design miami/ on 5 december, while a large version of it will travel to SCAD (savannah college of art and design) in february 2019. the pavilion which will hold reyes' sculptures and artworks, together with fernández's textile archive and fashion pieces, is designed by the two award winners as a curved, steel wall structure. born in mexico city in 1972, pedro reyes uses various media, such as sculpture, performance, and video, to address current sociopolitical issues. *'being an architect and then becoming an artist i could never get away from the idea that you have to solve problems, so i continued making art but always thinking that it should have a function,'* explains reyes while discussing what will be on show at the upcoming exhibition. *'a lot of my pieces are to be used in the sense that there is an instrument, or piece of furniture – they are all works that are only completed once you use them and they become an activity as well.'*



disarm by pedro reyes, 2013, courtesy of lisson gallery, london. the instrument series uses remnants of de-commissioned weapons which the mexican army had collected and destroyed

working with mexico's indigenous communities to produce handcrafted, avant-garde garments, carla fernández has established her brand as a pioneer in ethical fashion. the designer collaborates closely with the artisans on site for every project, integrating centuries-old indigenous techniques in every piece she creates. *'I hope to give a voice, and a name, and a last name, to the people that make these amazing crafts,'* says fernández. *'I am very grateful for the award and the exhibition because it gives us the opportunity to show all these people, either the visitors of design miami or the SCAD students, that another way of doing things is possible, especially now that a lot of people think that technology is the only future the world has – we believe that it is one of them, but we also believe the future is handmade.'* *'fashion sometimes is seen as very empty and pretentious, but for me it's the most amazing thing – it's culture, it's politics, it's architecture, and I don't understand why a lot of people tend to see it as very empty, or banal. we have to be very specific to show that another way of doing fashion is possible, that we can maintain tradition of thousands of years, and be modern and super contemporary at the same time.'*



american visual artist joan jonas wears a piece by carla fernández, photo by ramiro chaves (left)

the two designers have also made some new pieces for the exhibition including a hand-painted map of the americas, where they have put together all the indigenous groups that have existed across the continent over time. *'we were trying to find if there is a map that shows all the original groups of the continent – there are some settlements that go back 11,000 years – but there was none, so we decided to make one, which was incredibly complicated,'* explains reyes. *'we've been checking ethnography maps, topology maps, and so on, and building this map, because in a time where there is a migration crisis, and it is an issue around the world, and there is all this suffering that happens at the crossing of borders, we wanted to bring some perspective to the fact that our current borders are only 200 years old. when the world has been inhabited for thousands of years in many different configurations, what we assume as our current borders may not be the borders in the future and they were essentially not the borders in the past.'*



one of the artisans that works with carla fernández on her handcrafted textiles

design miami/ has also collaborated with reyes and fernández on the visual identity of this year's edition, who came up with a series of graphics that capture the spirit of protests that took place in paris and other places around the world in 1968. *'we suggested a kind of protest-sense of urgency, because now we are turning 50 years since 1968, when there were all these movements in prague, berkley, mexico, paris, and so on, and there were all these protest posters done with only one ink and political messages,'* describes pedro reyes. the visuals will play out across the entire fair, into merchandise and into everything that is 'design miami/' branded.



entomofagia / the grasshopper by pedro reyes, 2013. a food cart made of welded iron and mechanical parts serves grasshopper burgers to introduce the consumption of insects



image © designboom



image © designboom



image © designboom

The Boston Globe

THEATER

New 'Manufacturing Mischief' features Chomsky, Rand, and Tiny Trump



By **Jeremy D. Goodwin** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 24, 2018

It's Noam Chomsky vs. Ayn Rand in a new show from multimedia artist Pedro Reyes — and just to be clear, it's a comedy, and they're puppets.

"Manufacturing Mischief," based in part on the writings of Chomsky, debuts at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Simmons Hall in Cambridge on Thursday and Friday, and all seats are already fully reserved. It's just the latest provocative work from Reyes, a Mexican artist whose past projects include "Palas por Pistolas" (2008), in which 1,527 guns were melted down and made into shovels that were then used to plant an equal number of trees, and "Imagine" (2012) and "Disarm" (2013), both featuring musical instruments fabricated from guns. Reyes also recently had a sculpture show at Lisson Gallery in London.

For "Manufacturing Mischief," Reyes teamed up with director Meghan Finn and writer Paul Hufker. The trio are following up their last project together, a haunted house/art installation called "Doomocracy," staged at the Brooklyn Army Terminal shortly before the 2016 election. The puppets used in "Manufacturing Mischief" are made in Japan by puppet designer Chihiro Takahashi, based on the traditional Bunraku form. Reyes is returning to MIT after serving as the school's inaugural Dasha Zhukova Distinguished Visiting Artist, a program launched with a \$1 million gift to the school by the noted art collector and founder of Moscow's Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. This month Harvard University Press also published "Pedro Reyes: Ad Usum/To Be Used," a handsome career-long survey accompanied by scholarly responses to the work.



PEDRO REYES

Pedro Reyes's Tiny Trump puppet from "Manufacturing Mischief."

A. Chomsky is in this play to sort through ideas that people are reading that present worldviews that are a bit dangerous. Like in the case of Ayn Rand. In academia, no one takes her seriously. It's almost an embarrassment to even mention her name. But a lot of people believe in her philosophy.

I was totally surprised that very influential people like Steve Jobs and Elon Musk [who are also characters in "Manufacturing Mischief"] praise her. I feel that there's a theme of people who are visionaries in the realm of science and technology but that nevertheless lack a philosophical and moral framework to use those advancements of technology for the betterment of all of society, not only a few. Translated to the comedy format, it has a lot of potential. Because Ayn Rand is such a sociopath, it was so funny to put her in contrast with the very benevolent and generous character of Noam Chomsky. I also have a character called Tiny Trump.

Q. Tell me about him.

A. Trump is a nice entertainer, no question about it. And all of the extreme behavior that the people have learned so well, the kind of — how to say it? Obscenity? It almost plays into creating this puppet character. In puppetry, there's usually some characters who are comparatively foolish, but in the case of Trump it's someone who happens to also be dangerous, in real life.

Q. What does the show have to say about technology?

A. We're not against technology, but we're against the idea that whatever the problem is, the solution is technology. Sometimes it seems that everyone is thinking of how to make a robot like a person. For instance, if you go to the cafeteria, it has no clerk. What would happen if all the pubs and restaurants follow that trend? When you're developing that technology, are you thinking about that? No. There's no discussion about what is going to happen with all the people that lose their jobs.

Automation and artificial intelligence are subjects that we deal with in the play, technological developments that happened with only having profit in mind. That is a very dangerous worldview.

MANUFACTURING MISCHIEF

At MIT's Simmons Hall, Thursday and Friday evening. Tickets are free but fully reserved.
arts.mit.edu.

Jeremy D. Goodwin can be reached at jeremy@jeremydgoodwin.com.

 0 Comments

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nytimes.com
16 April 2018

The New York Times

THEATER

Noam Chomsky, Elon Musk and Ayn Rand Walk Into a Puppet Show

By JENNIFER SCHUESSLER APRIL 16, 2018



Puppets representing Elon Musk, Karl Marx, Ayn Rand and Noam Chomsky will be featured in Pedro Reyes's "Manufacturing Mischief." Vincent Tullio for The New York Times

Noam Chomsky, the dead-serious linguist and critic of American capitalism and imperialism, has had his brushes with the goofier realms of pop culture, from an invitation to appear on "Saturday Night Live" ([he declined](#), apparently having barely heard of the show) to the inevitable "Simpsons" [cameo](#).

Now, Mr. Chomsky is the star of a perhaps even more unlikely production: a puppet show.

"Manufacturing Mischief," which will have its premiere run on April 26 and 27 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, puts a mini-Chomsky onstage alongside Elon Musk, Ayn Rand and Karl Marx. Created by the Mexican artist [Pedro Reyes](#), it features a zany plot involving a technology contest, a contraption called the Print-a-Friend and a surprise appearance by Donald Trump. There's also plenty of high-flown debate about technology, freedom and inequality.

The play, which was scripted by Paul Hufker and directed by Meghan Finn, grew out of an artistic residency Mr. Reyes had last fall at M.I.T., Mr. Chomsky's [longtime intellectual home](#), and a place suffused, as Mr. Reyes put it, with "techno-optimism."

"M.I.T. has this very beautiful culture of hands-on creativity," he said in a telephone interview. "But there is also this idea that whatever the problem is, the solution is technology."

We spoke with Mr. Reyes about getting Mr. Chomsky's blessing for the project, and about the other main characters in his mini-drama of big ideas, which will travel to Carnegie Mellon University as part of its [Marx@200](#) series from May 10-13 and to [the Tank](#) in New York from June 5-24.

Noam Chomsky



Vincent Tullio for The New York Times

After arriving at M.I.T., Mr. Reyes met with Mr. Chomsky to float the idea of a puppet play riffing on his criticisms of [artificial intelligence research](#) and the social impact of technology. As a prop/ambassador, Mr. Reyes brought along a puppet of Leon Trotsky, from his 2014 play [“The Permanent Revolution.”](#)

“He said: ‘Oh that’s nice. But where is Rosa Luxemburg?’” Mr. Reyes recalled. “As it turns out, I also have a puppet of Rosa Luxemburg, so I put her in the show too.”

Mr. Chomsky, Mr. Reyes said, approved a synopsis of the play (whose title riffs on [“Manufacturing Consent,”](#) his 1988 book with Edward S. Herman). As for his puppet likeness, which (like the others) was made in Japan by master puppet-makers in the Bunraku tradition, “he was pleased with it,” Mr. Reyes said. (Mr. Chomsky didn’t respond to a request for comment.)

Elon Musk



Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

The show features a cameo by an undead Steve Jobs, who pipes up, like a clueless Alexa, when a character mentions the impact of automation on “jobs.” But the real skewering is reserved for Elon Musk, the Tesla and SpaceX founder who wants to send humans to Mars.

In the play, Mr. Musk (who in real life has [called for government regulation of artificial intelligence](#), even as his start-up Neuralink aims to build a brain-computer interface) has enlisted Mr. Chomsky as a reluctant judge in a contest to select “The Terrifying New Gadget Which Might Kill Us All.” To Mr. Reyes, Mr. Musk is the kind of visionary who ignores the more basic needs of the broad mass of humanity.

“The very idea of going to Mars may capture people’s imagination but it’s something that is only accessible to superrich,” he said. “There’s nothing up there anyway. Mars is kind of a boring rock.”

Ayn Rand



Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

About halfway through the play, Musk puts a copy of “Atlas Shrugged” into the Print-a-Friend, and out pops Ayn Rand, wearing the signature dollar-sign pin she favored in real life.

Mr. Reyes read Rand’s novel “The Fountainhead” as a teenager, but unsurprisingly is not a fan, though he said he appreciates her theatrical qualities.

“She’s a great character for comedy because she’s a sociopath,” he said. “There are so many very crazy things she said.”

Karl Marx



Vincent Tuillo for The New York Times

Mr. Chomsky may be the hero of the play, but it's Karl Marx who bats intellectual cleanup, with a 21st-century rap update of "The Communist Manifesto" that somehow rhymes "Tannenbaum" with "Amazon."

The Marx puppet has appeared (with Adam Smith) in a series of short buddy videos and in "The Permanent Revolution," alongside Lenin, Trotsky, Frida Kahlo, Julian Assange and others.

"Very naïvely, I had this goal of creating a certain literacy though entertainment," Mr. Reyes said. "After I became a parent I found myself wondering, if kids can learn 300 names of Pokémon and 'Star Wars' characters, why not some history?"

Follow Jennifer Schuessler on Twitter: [@jennyschuessler](https://twitter.com/jennyschuessler)

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Vogue Mexico
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February 2018



LA CASA TECTÓNICA

La diseñadora **Carla Fernández**, y el artista y arquitecto **Pedro Reyes**, son los creadores de una **residencia** marcada por el ingenio y la herencia **cultural**

Fotografía Fernanda Roel
Texto José Luis Ávila

Artistas, esposos, socios creativos y activistas de las mejores causas, Carla Fernández y Pedro Reyes conforman una dupla excepcional en la escena contemporánea mexicana e internacional, y desde hace dos años habitan una casa tan singular e ingeniosa como ellos. Tras vivir buena parte de su unión en la colonia Roma de la Ciudad de México, adquirieron en 2014 una casa en Coyoacán que lucía como un diamante en bruto lleno de posibilidades. "Era horrible cuando llegamos. Tenía himbrines de madera, alfombras, un vigre disecado... Pero sí tienes el ojo para ver el potencial de las cosas, te la quedas.



ARRIBA: SILLA DE PEDRO DE YES Y PIRÁMIDE EN LOS INTERIORES DE LA CASA. ABAJO: JARDÍN SEMBRADO CON FLORA PROPIA DE LA ZONA.

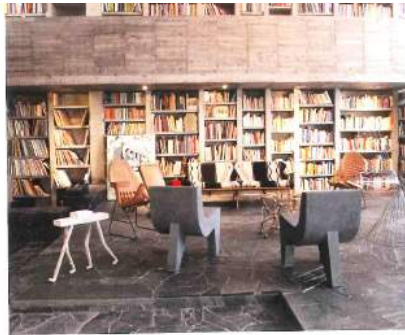
Ha sido muy divertido el proceso de remodelarla a nuestro gusto", comenta Carla sobre el lugar, un espacio vivo que nunca sigue transformándose. El proyecto ha implicado un gran diálogo entre ambos, dos amantes de la pureza de las formas, las texturas, la geometría de Luis Barragán y "lo barroco" de arquitectos como Juan O'Gorman. De hecho, la composición estética de la casa mezcla una visión brutalista con otra más romántica. Las líneas del gran salón se asemejan al *hall* de entrada del Museo Tamayo de Teodoro González de León. Hay en toda la casa un brutalismo muy mexicano. "Este espacio que es la sala biblioteca antes era una piscina interior con una pérgola de concreto. La convertimos en una cisterna, y encima construimos una pirámide, junto al muro de seis metros de altura y 25 de ancho en el que instalamos la biblioteca. Tengo el hábito de comprar un promedio de 100 libros a la semana así que todo el tiempo estoy agregando más y más repisas. El peso de la pared es tal que cumple un rol estructural", expresa Pedro, quien invierte dos horas diarias en clasificar y consultar sus libros, a los que considera su principal fuente de trabajo.

Mundo VOGUE

DÉCO



LA BIBLIOTECA
ES UN ESPACIO
PROTAGONIZADO
DEL LUGAR.
PEDRO SUELO
CAMBIAR UN
PUNTERO DE
BO LIBROS A
LA SEMANA



El piso de la propiedad, un enorme mosaico de piedra pizarra, fue una inspiración del Museo Amahualili de Diego Rivera. "La gente me dice que está lindísimo mi piso de los años 60, y no río porque se hizo en 2013", confiesa Carla. "Este es un lugar muy textónico, muy pétreo", confirma Pedro. La proximidad con El Pedregal influyó en la selección de las flores del patio interno, cuyo paisaje fue hecho en su mayoría con flora local. Asimismo, el gris es el tono dominante de los espacios. "Es un color formidable porque te permite jugar mucho con otros matices. Lo que le pongas enfrente le va a quedar bien", dice Carla que estos últimos meses ha podido hacerse con piezas únicas para la casa. "Tengo unas ollas hechas por una artesana alfarera que representó a Paraguay en Documenta, cerámica

AMORGA DOS SILLAS TIPORE, HECHAS POR PEDRO REYES; DCHA, CARTEL Y ESCULTURA QUE DECORAN EL COMEDOR DE LA RESIDENCIA.



IZQUIERDA: CARLA; FERNANDO Z. ROSA FRENTE A LA COLECCIÓN DE CARTELES LIBRADOS EN LA RECÁMARA DE LA PAREJA.

La sala ostenta un mobiliario como sillas de origen precolumbino diseñadas por Claudia Fernández y otras creadas por el propio Pedro, pero la estructura protagonista del lugar es la pirámide ubicada en los límites de la vivienda. "Es un edificio dentro de un espacio interior que crea una pequeña plaza. Fue el área que Carla me pidió para instalar su oficina y hospedar a los artesanos que trabajan con nosotros, pero a este ritmo no sé cuál será su futuro porque no se donde voy a poner más libros", comenta Pedro. Sus hijos también tienen un espacio dentro del universo de sus dos afano

sos padres, inclusive saben hacer mezcla de cemento y algunos muebles. Entretanto, el arte pulula por todo el lugar. Poesía en libros de artista o viniles, una colección de carteles de protesta, otra con motivos marxistas, se acompañan de ediciones de geometrismo latinoamericano y obras de Julio Le Parc, Christo, Lichtenstein, entre otros. Este mes de febrero ambos están de estreno. Carla presentará su último libro *El manifiesto de la moda en resistencia* en Zona Maco y Pedro inaugura en Labor una muestra con litófonos, instrumentos musicales hechos en piedras. Como ven, sus carreras siguen tan vivas y prolíficas como la casa que los habita.

ABAJO: LA PIRÁMIDE PARA EN LA VIVIENDA DE LA CASA. UN ESPACIO DISEÑADO POR PEDRO ESPECIALMENTE PARA CARLA.



Mundo VOGUE DÉCO



IZDA: LA COCINA.
REARME: CASA
CON MATERIALES
SELETTOS COMO
EL CONCRETO
Y LA PIEDRA.
ABAJO: LA
FINA DEL BAÑO
PRINCIPAL.

de Oaxaca, platos de Perú y una colección de barro negro... Amo los enseres de la cocina y los textiles que hay en la casa", expresa Fernández sobre los objetos más especiales de la propiedad, que incluye una peculiar colección de escobas de distintas partes del mundo. "Solemos hacer una o dos grandes fiestas al año, y recibimos a mucha gente que viene a conocer la obra de Pedro; yo también hago algunas pop up de mi marca, pero la casa es un espacio privado y de trabajo", añade Carla.

ABAJO: CARLA
FERNÁNDEZ
COMO UNA DEL
PATIO INTERINO
ES UNO DE
SUS FAVORITOS
DENTRO DE
LA CASA.





This is a dwelling for the caveman of the future; the ruins of a civilization, now extinct, which was more advanced than the one we're living in now,' explains Mexican artist Pedro Reyes. He's referring to the house he's built with his wife, fashion designer Carla Fernández, in Coyoacán, in the south of Mexico City. Ancient Aztecs meet *The Martian Chronicles* in the form of hammered concrete walls, chunky furniture hewn from volcanic stone and an abundance of rich, overblown greenery. A 'pyramid' at one end is Carla's studio, a yard behind it will be Pedro's. It's currently a ramshackle plot occupied by the team of artisans that is helping finish the house.

The couple is in good company in Coyoacán. Fellow artists Damián Ortega and Gabriel Orozco are nearby, Frida Kahlo was born locally, and it's where her pal, the exiled Leon Trotsky, was murdered in 1940. Those in Mexico's creative circles joke that Carla and Pedro are the modern-day Frida and Diego (Rivera, Kahlo's artist husband). Like their predecessors they are bon vivants – 600 guests came to their housewarming – and like their communist forebears, they are politically engaged.

In 2008, Reyes set up *Palas por Pistolas* (guns for shovels) in the city of Culiacán, a project that resulted in the military collecting 1,527 guns in exchange for coupons for domestic appliances. The weapons were melted down and turned into 1,527 shovels used to plant trees across the city and beyond. In subsequent projects, *Imagine* (2012) and *Disarm* (2013), he turned destroyed weapons into musical instruments. Lisson Gallery founder Nicholas Logsdail, who represents Reyes, says: 'His work is both symbolically and actually transformative, evidenced particularly in monumental and far-reaching projects such as *Disarm* and »



'Concrete is canonical, very clichéd, but it has many possibilities'

ABOVE, THE LIVING ROOM FEATURES A CEILING LIGHT AND GEODESIC DOME INSPIRED BY BUCKMINSTER FULLER
RIGHT, THE COUPLE DESIGNED THE CONCRETE TABLE AND KITCHEN THEMSELVES



Sanatorium. (The latter is a transient 'clinic' first set up at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 2011 to provide therapies and placebos for 21st-century ailments.)

Before becoming an artist, Reyes trained as an architect at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City. His plan in designing the house was to transform his 1,000 sq m home from a '1980s monstrosity with an indoor pool and various eccentricities' into a modern space that 'includes hints of all of Mexico's many modernities'. A stone floor is inspired by the nearby Anahuacalli Museum, the 'temple' designed by Rivera in 1957 as a depository for his collection of 60,000 pre-Hispanic artifacts. Elsewhere, hammered concrete floors and walls were inspired by the Mexican brutalists, in particular 89-year-old Teodoro González de León, who built many landmarks across the capital. 'The use of concrete is very canonical, very clichéd, but it has many possibilities,' says Reyes, pointing out the handmade bricks covered with a wax-like concrete paste, which he developed with his men. 'There's a palette of finishes still waiting to be recovered from brutalism.'

The couple also designed much of the furniture. The lava-stone master bath and basin and the concrete kitchen table are artworks in themselves. A ceiling light, made of copper tubes threaded through electrical wire, is inspired by Buckminster Fuller, as is a 4m-high geodesic dome being completed in the living room. »



In Residence

ABOVE LEFT, ONE OF REYES' 'MANO-SILLAS' CHAIRS, WITH ARTICULATED 'FINGERS' THAT CAN BE MANIPULATED TO MIMIC HAND GESTURES

ABOVE RIGHT, A STAIRCASE FEATURING HANDMADE BRICKS COVERED IN A WAX-LIKE CONCRETE PASTE, WHICH WERE DEVELOPED BY REYES AND HIS TEAM

RIGHT, THE CONCRETE AND LAVA STONE BASIN AND MATCHING MIRROR IN THE MASTER BATHROOM



In Residence



It's for a show this autumn at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan.

Reyes' sign language-inspired 'Mano-Sillas' chairs appear alongside international and Mexican midcentury classics from the likes of Charles and Ray Eames and Clara Porset, and simple rural pieces such as milking stools, leather butaque chairs and seats woven from palm fronds. 'The technique was used by the Aztecs and has been recovered by the design-conscious, but not in any official way,' says Reyes. 'It would be great to make them on a large scale in other raw materials.'

Revisiting ancient indigenous skills and developing a modern Mexican language lies at the heart of Fernández's work, in particular. For 15 years she has built her label on high-fashion interpretations of traditional Mexican garments. Both her boutiques in Mexico City sell her ready-to-wear dresses, shawls, scarves and rebozos, and her mobile fashion laboratory Taller Flora rolls from one indigenous people to another and results in a demi-couture line. In 2013 she published her book, *The Barefoot Designer: a passion for Radical Design and Community*, in which she declares the future is handmade. It's accompanied by an exhibition on the process of making, which has recently travelled to museums in LA and Asia.

Between them, the couple has an impressive collection of textiles and art. Fernández is drawn to fine cottons from the town of Xochistlahuaca in Guerrero that are dyed with mud, cochineal, indigo and snails and loves the thick, rough wools from the highlands of Chiapas, Puebla and Tlaxcala. Her tablecloths are embroidered with fantastical animals by shamans from Hidalgo. Reyes swaps works with

ABOVE, IN THE DINING ROOM, LUSH GREENERY AND A BRIGHT YELLOW SKYLIGHT BRING A SENSE OF THE OUTDOORS IN
BELOW, THE HOUSE'S FACADE, FEATURING WALLS IN BOTH HAMMERED CONCRETE AND BOARD-FORMED CONCRETE

contemporaries such as Spanish artist Santiago Sierra while collecting Mexican works from the likes of Ernesto Mallard and the late Mathias Goeritz.

Between the master bedroom and the two children's bedrooms is space for one of 'the best hammocks in Mexico'. These are woven by women from cooperatives in Izamal in Yucatán and Calkiní in Campeche, take two months to make and can sleep a family of four. So hectic are the couple's schedules that finding the time to curl up in their hammock is a fantasy rather than a reality. Time for that later. Right now, their unique version of *mexicanidad* is in hot demand, and it's their mission to provide it. ✱
pedroreyes.net; carlafernandez.com



L I S S O N G A L L E R Y

The New Yorker
20 March 2017

THE
NEW YORKER

March 20, 2017

ART

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Pedro Reyes

Sculptures, mostly in volcanic stone, and mural-like installations of large drawings by the Mexican demiurge, who was trained in architecture and plainly deems no scale or theme too ambitious, are beyond impressive—they awe you. Reyes's style runs the gamut: from primitivist through neo-classical to futuristic, from tartly realist through surrealist to chastely abstract, from monumental to intimate, with each formulation specific in its erudite references, tinged with political conviction, and consummate in form. Although big, the show suggests a mere warmup for a refashioning of pretty much the whole world, retroactively and from now on. *Through April 15. (Lisson, 504 W. 24th St. 212-505-6431.)*

LISSON GALLERY

GalleriesNow
03 March 2017

GalleriesNow.net

Pedro Reyes

For his first solo exhibition with Lisson New York, Mexican artist Pedro Reyes presents a group of new sculptures made from volcanic stone, marble and concrete.









Surrounding these are over 150 works on paper, installed floor-to-ceiling on the gallery walls. This is the first presentation to feature drawings by Reyes at such scale or diversity.

Ranging from the intimate to the monumental, these new works resonate with both modern and ancient sources. Reyes has been looking closely at the history of statuary. Echos of Modern masters like Germán Cueto and Luis Ortiz Monasterio in Mexico; Frank Dobson, Reg Butler and Lynn Chadwick in the United Kingdom; Gerhard Marcks and Ernst Barlach in Germany; and Pierre Szekely and Marta Pan in France, may be found in some of the sculptures.

The materials Reyes employs in these sculptures further the careful attention to ancestry. Volcanic stone is a recurring material for the artist, and he notes both its integral role in the shaping of Mexico's landscape and its deep connection to the diet of its inhabitants, used for millennia to grind corn in *metates* and *molcajetes*, the traditional Mexican version of the mortar and pestle. Other works in the show range from the luminous marble of Carrara—long beloved by artists and architects as well as abstract sculptors such as Sergio Camargo—to concrete, which offers the artist new and entirely different plastic possibilities thanks to the interplay of cement and steel armatures.

The son of a professor who taught advanced engineering drawing, Reyes received informal training from a young age in the technical process of rendering three-dimensional objects. This early understanding has been an essential part of his practice ever since. For Reyes, it is a fluid movement between the creation of drawings and sculpture, and vice-versa, and the dizzying multitude of works on paper in this exhibition exemplify the complexity of the relationship. The 156 drawings papering the entirety of the gallery's east and west walls, extend Reyes's concerns with sculpture and art-making to encompass many of the radical thinkers that have informed Reyes's practice. They feature a varied set of artistic figures, such as German-American Social Scientist Kurt Lewin, Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha, conceptual artist Lee Lozano, Colombian mathematician Antanas Mockus, Chilean video artist Juan Downey, and Italian-born Brazilian modernist architect Lina Bo Bardi, among others.

LISSON GALLERY

W Magazine
28 February 2017



Pedro Reyes is the Artist Donald Trump Should Fear



If Donald Trump were to invent a contemporary artist to berate on Twitter (how's that for fake news?), he might dream up in his fevered mind someone like Pedro Reyes. Reyes might even be too on the nose. Unabashedly brainy, proudly socialist, the Mexican conceptual artist works in an overtly political register—his self-designed home studio pays homage to the work of Mexican artist Juan O'Gorman, who was responsible for Trotsky's burial site in Mexico. Reyes first gained notoriety abroad for artworks that effectively functioned as gun control: *Paletas por Pistolas*, a program in which firearms could be traded in for shovels, and then *Disarm*, for which he melted down firearms into musical instruments. Just before the 2016 election, in Brooklyn, he showed *Doomocracy*, a haunted house of politics addressing abortion, gun violence, and wealth inequality in no uncertain terms. Oh, and he also reads. A lot.

On a recent afternoon during the *Zona Maco art fair in Mexico City*, where Reyes lives and works, he mulled over the current political climate and his upcoming show at Lisson Gallery in New York, opening February 28. We met in his studio, which is planned around his vast, two-story library. The way other people consume food or the internet, Reyes consumes books. He rides his bike to his go-to second-hand stores daily, estimating that he buys around 100 books a month. From 7 PM to 2 AM every day, he compulsively rearranges them.

"It's like your bandwidth. My mind is up there," Reyes explained. He wore square, professorial Saint Laurent glasses, and sat across from the stacks upon stacks of books. "And then you wake up and see all this Trump shit," he added.



It seems to follow that his latest exhibition would be a show largely made up of works on paper, in a departure from his conceptual work—and from any requirement to look at a screen. For the past few months, Reyes created quick, expressive drawings of the intellectual heroes found in the pages of his books: there's Sophocles and Epicurus, as well as modern icons like Lina Bo Bardi and Lee Lozano. (It's a process he has been documenting on Instagram.) These drawings (all 150) will surround concrete, marble, and volcanic rock sculptures in "an environment," he said. "It will feel cave-like, forest-like."

Reyes wanted to make "art that cannot be outsourced," he said, in a political nod behind the largely apolitical work. He hires local workers to create his sculptures because, he said, "I can't do it in the the U.S."—noting the technocracy that led to many of the anxieties that fueled the election. "A robot will do it."

Days after our interview, Mexico City had its first major protest against Trump's proposed trade policies and border wall, which Reyes called "a delusional slogan."

"He is bringing everyone together against him," Reyes said of the response. "That corny idea of winning—it's cheap. I don't know any rich people as corny as Trump."

Next up, Reyes says he will work on a new lab at MIT, where he teaches, studying how to decode and fight tyranny—with one obvious target in mind. "You have to understand the system to make it work backwards," he said.

For him right now, a show that sidesteps politics can be more political than ever. "It's important to think of art as a kind of sanctuary," Reyes said. "These are the things we are fighting for."



LISSON GALLERY

The New York Times
13 October 2016

The New York Times

At 'Doomocracy,' It's Fright Night in Brooklyn

By HOLLAND COTTEROCT. 13, 2016



Phillip Greenberg for The New York Times

[Halloween](#) started early this year. I'd put the date at July 18, opening night of the 2016 Republican National Convention. Trick-or-treating has been nonstop since. The tricks have included a couple of Creature Feature debates, email scandals, xenophobic rants and personal attacks, all of which have too often been received as sordid but tantalizing treats by audience and news media alike. Action in the electoral arena makes any art pale by comparison. But this hasn't prevented Pedro Reyes, an artist-activist from Mexico City, from creating his own bit of fright-night political high jinks in "Doomocracy," an elaborately trenchant performance piece presented by the nonprofit Creative Time in the Brooklyn Army Terminal.

The setting, on the Sunset Park waterfront, is ideally spooky. If you imagine the concept of a military-industrial complex translated into power architecture, that's the terminal. Built in 1919, a military supply depot through two World Wars, it's monstrous: a 97-acre, multi-building complex with two eight-story concrete warehouses and enough space to park 20 ships and a train. Although much of it is now given over to light industry and boutique businesses (furniture designers, chocolatiers), the place still projects a mausoleumlike chill, especially at night.

And, appropriately, night is when "Doomocracy" happens, on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, from 6 p.m. to midnight.

Visitors first gather in a soaring glass-roofed hall dominated by one of Mr. Reyes's wood sculptures. A surreal fusion of the [Statue of Liberty](#) and the Apocalyptic Beast, it hints of disorientations to come.

From that starting point, small groups are admitted, one at a time, to the main event under close supervision on what feels like a cross between a guided tour and forced march. (Tickets are free but must be reserved in advance.) A group is loaded into a van and driven to a distant location on the terminal campus. As the group nears its destination, a disruption occurs.

The van is flagged down by figures who are not, as it first seems, parking attendants, but military police in SWAT gear. They yank the van doors open, flash lights in your eyes, order you out and herd you into a pitch-black building, barking commands: put your hands on the wall; behind your head; line up; move. You know this is theater, but you also discover that being yelled at and light-blinded makes your pulse jump; disarms your defenses; persuades you to do what you're told.

The rest of the show, which is basically a 45-minute mobile drama in a dozen or more short acts, alternates staged reality with zany satire, though, as usual, Mr. Reyes tends to resist making clear distinctions between modes. For earlier projects, he gathered automatic weapons that were turned in or seized by the Mexican Army from drug cartels and melted them down to make garden shovels and musical instruments. He has also organized exhibitions that have fused performance art, sculpture and psychotherapy.

Ambiguity of tone and purpose is one of the elements that makes "Doomocracy" dramatically effective.

Another is the rapid-fire pacing established by the performance's director, Meghan Finn. One scene bangs into another. The SWAT team hustles you down a corridor, then disappears. Now you're in a polling station, being registered to vote while watching ballots being shredded before your eyes. Next, you take a breather in a comfy suburban living room, only to hear a pair of gun-toting housewives warn about unwelcome "new additions" to the neighborhood. The trigger-happy duo have barely warmed to their subject when you're moved on again, into a doctor's waiting room, where an opioid-addicted soccer mom hits you up for a fix.

And you go on: to a corporate boardroom to vote on advantageous deals for the privileged (meaning yourself); to an elementary school classroom that teaches false history (slavery wasn't all that bad) and supplies you with bright-red bulletproof shields; to an anti-abortion witch hunt (this is the show's big song-and-dance number); to a factory that markets artisanal Himalayan air to an environmentally ravaged world. ("Only God breathes air this pure.")

And in one amusing moment along the way, you emerge from an elevator into a cocktail party in a collector's penthouse. The scene, like the art world itself, is a pure cliché: Champagne-serving waiters, an air-kissing hostess, a Christopher Wool word-painting on the wall, and an antsy, importunate artist in residence pitching his latest product. ("It's about gentrification!")

There's more, quite a bit, concluding with an ostensibly nonpartisan, viewer-participation take on the current election battle as a political World Cup match with Earth as the ball in play. Then suddenly you're on your way out of the show, passing a grumbly street prophet wearing a sandwich board and handing out "Doomocracy" fliers.

Given the performance's speed and the pileup of sensory input, it's impossible to take everything in. Enough to say that, while all parts of the piece are not equally strong — satire has to be right on the nose, weirdness-wise, to work, and some of this is too easy — the level of visual invention is high, and the cast of more than 30 actors (among them, a Chihuahua named Dreidel) is impressive. Paul Hufker's script, with contributions by Nato Thompson, Creative Time's artistic director, sounded, on a one-time hearing, sharp, up-to-date and wide-ranging in its talking points, some of which Mr. Reyes cites in the definition of "doomocracy" he has printed in the flier:

1. A form of government in which the supreme power is vested in a tyrant by a terrified general electorate.
2. The esoteric arithmetic that makes the electoral process malleable.
3. A corporate coup d'état in slow motion.

4. Permanent global war waged in the name of freedom.

At present, we're experiencing all of that, not to mention planetary destruction and international homelessness. And if the standard for judging the success of "Doomocracy" is whether it's weighty enough for its subjects, it fails. Most political art does. In a global media age of perpetually cycling digital drama, it feels dwarfed and static. And the audience that really needs to see it won't.

Mr. Reyes knows this, and he knows you have to make the art anyway, and he makes it well, shrewdly and with upbeat panache. When you emerge from "Doomocracy" you've felt the visceral thrill, the thrill that good theater delivers, the sense of having been through something energizing and focusing. You may also feel a reassuring sense that, no, it's not just you; American reality, in 2016, is every bit as out of control as you think it is.

Hold onto that reassurance. You're going to need it. The show wraps up on Nov. 6, two days short of the presidential election. And that event, no matter what the results, will not bring Fright Night to an end.

The Guardian

22 September 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/sep/22/doomocracy-art-installation-pedro-reyes-haunted-trump-and-clinton>



Doomocracy: the funhouse haunted by Trump and Clinton

Described as 'Hieronymus Bosch meets Fox News', artist Pedro Reyes's installation will be a haunted house taking in gun nuts, genetically modified crops, climate change and other modern horrors

Alex Rayner

Thursday 22 September 2016 18.07 BST



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Artist Pedro Reyes at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, site of Doomocracy. Photograph: Will Star / Shooting Stars/Creative Time

The horrors of a haunted house usually end once you push open the final set of black, saloon-hinged doors and step back in the fairground. However, the Mexican artist [Pedro Reyes](#) hopes his nightmares remain with visitors long after they have left his immersive 2016 Halloween attraction, opening in New York next month.

"Monsters have always been a way to speak about our real fears," says the 44-year-old. "Zombies are a fear of poor people; Karl Marx [talked about capital being like a vampire that stalks the living](#); and Mary Shelley's Dr Frankenstein is trying to create life, which is exactly what genetic engineers are trying to do today."

All these bogeymen and more will populate [Doomocracy](#), “a political haunted house” that Reyes is preparing to stage within the vast Brooklyn Army Terminal from 7 October until 6 November in conjunction with the New York non-profit arts organisation [Creative Time](#).

Doomocracy’s spooky run will coincide with both Halloween and the 2016 presidential election, and is appropriately pitched somewhere between a carnival attraction, an immersive theatre production and any given hour or two within today’s news cycle. Creative Time’s artistic director, [Nato Thompson](#), describes the venture as “Hieronymus Bosch meets Fox News. It’s holding up a funhouse mirror to society.”



Seven tombs of gloom: a screengrab from Doomocracy's Kickstarter campaign. Photograph: Supplied



Reyes and Nato hope to offer about 400-500 people a night a ghastly, dramatic interactive trip that takes in gun nuts, genetically modified crops, climate change, deadly fast-food chains and, looming over Doomocracy’s entrance, a chimeric effigy that’s part Statue of Liberty, part Trojan Horse, and, in Reyes’ view, entirely the embodiment of American foreign policy. “The USA doesn’t have true representation,” he argues, “and yet they say they’re exporting democracy around the world.”

Nigel Farage calls Hillary Clinton 'a truly awful candidate' - as it happened

Volunteer chair of the Trump campaign in Mahoning County has resigned after saying in an interview: 'I don't think there was any racism' before Obama

→ Read more

That may all sound as satirical as it is scary. Nevertheless the artist - who has previously staged a fine-art version of [a psychiatric sanatorium at different galleries around the world](#) and overseen [a programme to repurpose firearms as musical instruments](#) - is deeply serious in his examination of fear within today’s political landscape.

“These days, politicians are trying to create fear in order to take power,” Reyes says, “so it’s quite an experiment to be dealing with the production of fear and its political uses.”

He is also highly respectful of the funhouse trope, partly because it is so familiar to people who might not necessarily be avid gallery goers.

“Pretty much everyone can picture a horror house,” he says. “It will, if you forgive the paradox, deal with political issues in a very democratic way. Everyone can engage with the form.”

Reyes and Thompson are keen to ensure Doomocracy keeps pace with events and have been writing and rewriting the dramatic scenarios to reflect the changing nature of the electoral race.

“We’ve been workshopping the scripts today,” says Thompson. “It’s a fluid process. The ground is moving fast this election, it’s hard to keep up.”

Reyes, who visited both commercial haunted houses and guerrilla theatre groups in preparation for the show, also says Doomocracy reflects a general hopelessness within contemporary politics, both in the US and elsewhere.

“Why do people vote against their own interests?” Reyes says. “Is it that we have brainwashed people to make the wrong decisions? There’s a feeling in the US that it’s a downer to have to choose between the [presidential] options. But it’s elsewhere too; it can be said of Mexico and many other places around the world. [Brexit](#) was almost like a democratic, rightwing coup d’état.”

Despite this gloomy view, Doomocracy is still able to engage with some of the norms of campaign fundraising. Its [Kickstarter page](#) looks set to reach its goal of \$80,000 by its deadline of 29 September, offering suitably doom-laden swag for its pledgers, including Doomocracy pennants and buttons, and “Yes We Can’t” bumper stickers.

With all this left-leaning pessimism, Reyes’ haunted house looks unlikely to attract many Trump voters. However, Creative Time’s executive director, Katie Hollander, argues that the work doesn’t favour either side. “It’s not a commentary on the candidates, more a commentary on the issues,” she says.

Indeed, Reyes hopes to take in wider political issues unlikely to be addressed by either party this election year. “It will deal with [mental health](#), the [excessive criminalisation of drug use](#), and the increasing role of the medical industry as a kind of [white-collar drug dealer](#),” the artist says. “There’ll be stuff on the food industry too, and equity or the lack of social mobility – those universal issues, that are experienced in every part of the world.”

While this all may sound nihilistic, Reyes hopes Doomocracy could be liberating too. “Usually my art is more about hope, but on this occasion it is a dark project, and offers more of a space for catharsis,” he says. “After all, Halloween is a moment to go crazy. That is the role of carnival.”

Yet, does he genuinely expect Doomocracy to actually change any visitors’ minds about the issues examined? Won’t most already agree with his position on, say, pharmaceuticals and gun crime?

“There will be people who love it, people who hate it, people who feel empowered, and people who feel offended,” says Reyes. “Making art is one way to elaborate and engage with reality.”

And this autumn, at a time when truth seems if not stranger, then at least as spooky as fiction, one route for meaningful political engagement appears to lie through Doomocracy’s funhouse doors.

Pedro Reyes awarded Medal for the Arts

16 January 2015 News



Pedro Reyes is among a number of artists awarded a Medal for the Arts in 2015, by the US State Department. Reyes, along with Sam Gilliam, Xu Bing, Mark Bradford, Maya Lin, Julie Mehretu and Kehinde Wiley have been chosen for his or her substantive commitment to the State Department's cultural diplomacy outreach through the arts, and in particular recognizes their work with the "ART in Embassies" program which promotes American art abroad. Previous winners of the award include Cai Guo-Qiang, Shahzia Sikander, and Carrie Mae Weems.



This is a dwelling for the caveman of the future; the ruins of a civilization, now extinct, which was more advanced than the one we're living in now,' explains Mexican artist Pedro Reyes. He's referring to the house he's built with his wife, fashion designer Carla Fernández, in Coyoacán, in the south of Mexico City. Ancient Aztecs meet *The Martian Chronicles* in the form of hammered concrete walls, chunky furniture hewn from volcanic stone and an abundance of rich, overblown greenery. A 'pyramid' at one end is Carla's studio, a yard behind it will be Pedro's. It's currently a ramshackle plot occupied by the team of artisans that is helping finish the house.

The couple is in good company in Coyoacán. Fellow artists Damián Ortega and Gabriel Orozco are nearby, Frida Kahlo was born locally, and it's where her pal, the exiled Leon Trotsky, was murdered in 1940. Those in Mexico's creative circles joke that Carla and Pedro are the modern-day Frida and Diego (Rivera, Kahlo's artist husband). Like their predecessors they are bon vivants – 600 guests came to their housewarming – and like their communist forebears, they are politically engaged.

In 2008, Reyes set up *Palas por Pistolas* (guns for shovels) in the city of Culiacán, a project that resulted in the military collecting 1,527 guns in exchange for coupons for domestic appliances. The weapons were melted down and turned into 1,527 shovels used to plant trees across the city and beyond. In subsequent projects, *Imagine* (2012) and *Disarm* (2013), he turned destroyed weapons into musical instruments. Lisson Gallery founder Nicholas Logsdail, who represents Reyes, says: 'His work is both symbolically and actually transformative, evidenced particularly in monumental and far-reaching projects such as *Disarm* and »



'Concrete is canonical, very clichéd, but it has many possibilities'

ABOVE, THE LIVING ROOM FEATURES A CEILING LIGHT AND GEODESIC DOME INSPIRED BY BUCKMINSTER FULLER
RIGHT, THE COUPLE DESIGNED THE CONCRETE TABLE AND KITCHEN THEMSELVES



Sanatorium. (The latter is a transient 'clinic' first set up at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 2011 to provide therapies and placebos for 21st-century ailments.)

Before becoming an artist, Reyes trained as an architect at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City. His plan in designing the house was to transform his 1,000 sq m home from a '1980s monstrosity with an indoor pool and various eccentricities' into a modern space that 'includes hints of all of Mexico's many modernities'. A stone floor is inspired by the nearby Anahuacalli Museum, the 'temple' designed by Rivera in 1957 as a depository for his collection of 60,000 pre-Hispanic artifacts. Elsewhere, hammered concrete floors and walls were inspired by the Mexican brutalists, in particular 89-year-old Teodoro González de León, who built many landmarks across the capital. 'The use of concrete is very canonical, very clichéd, but it has many possibilities,' says Reyes, pointing out the handmade bricks covered with a wax-like concrete paste, which he developed with his men. 'There's a palette of finishes still waiting to be recovered from brutalism.'

The couple also designed much of the furniture. The lava-stone master bath and basin and the concrete kitchen table are artworks in themselves. A ceiling light, made of copper tubes threaded through electrical wire, is inspired by Buckminster Fuller, as is a 4m-high geodesic dome being completed in the living room. »



In Residence

ABOVE LEFT, ONE OF REYES' 'MANO-SILLAS' CHAIRS, WITH ARTICULATED 'FINGERS' THAT CAN BE MANIPULATED TO MIMIC HAND GESTURES

ABOVE RIGHT, A STAIRCASE FEATURING HANDMADE BRICKS COVERED IN A WAX-LIKE CONCRETE PASTE, WHICH WERE DEVELOPED BY REYES AND HIS TEAM

RIGHT, THE CONCRETE AND LAVA STONE BASIN AND MATCHING MIRROR IN THE MASTER BATHROOM



In Residence



It's for a show this autumn at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan.

Reyes' sign language-inspired 'Mano-Sillas' chairs appear alongside international and Mexican midcentury classics from the likes of Charles and Ray Eames and Clara Porset, and simple rural pieces such as milking stools, leather butaque chairs and seats woven from palm fronds. 'The technique was used by the Aztecs and has been recovered by the design-conscious, but not in any official way,' says Reyes. 'It would be great to make them on a large scale in other raw materials.'

Revisiting ancient indigenous skills and developing a modern Mexican language lies at the heart of Fernández's work, in particular. For 15 years she has built her label on high-fashion interpretations of traditional Mexican garments. Both her boutiques in Mexico City sell her ready-to-wear dresses, shawls, scarves and rebozos, and her mobile fashion laboratory Taller Flora rolls from one indigenous people to another and results in a demi-couture line. In 2013 she published her book, *The Barefoot Designer: a passion for Radical Design and Community*, in which she declares the future is handmade. It's accompanied by an exhibition on the process of making, which has recently travelled to museums in LA and Asia.

Between them, the couple has an impressive collection of textiles and art. Fernández is drawn to fine cottons from the town of Xochistlahuaca in Guerrero that are dyed with mud, cochineal, indigo and snails and loves the thick, rough wools from the highlands of Chiapas, Puebla and Tlaxcala. Her tablecloths are embroidered with fantastical animals by shamans from Hidalgo. Reyes swaps works with

ABOVE, IN THE DINING ROOM, LUSH GREENERY AND A BRIGHT YELLOW SKYLIGHT BRING A SENSE OF THE OUTDOORS IN
BELOW, THE HOUSE'S FACADE, FEATURING WALLS IN BOTH HAMMERED CONCRETE AND BOARD-FORMED CONCRETE

contemporaries such as Spanish artist Santiago Sierra while collecting Mexican works from the likes of Ernesto Mallard and the late Mathias Goeritz.

Between the master bedroom and the two children's bedrooms is space for one of 'the best hammocks in Mexico'. These are woven by women from cooperatives in Izamal in Yucatán and Calkiní in Campeche, take two months to make and can sleep a family of four. So hectic are the couple's schedules that finding the time to curl up in their hammock is a fantasy rather than a reality. Time for that later. Right now, their unique version of *mexicanidad* is in hot demand, and it's their mission to provide it. ✱
pedroreyes.net; carlafernandez.com



Pedro Reyes

In Conversation With Peter Dobey

I first found out about Pedro Reyes's project the *People's United Nations (pUN)* while attending the 2013 Creative Time Summit in New York. There was a booth in the auditorium there for recruiting individuals from all over the world to represent their homeland as part of the exhibition at the Queens Museum, the site where the UN General Assembly met from 1946 through 1950. The *People's United Nations* congregated its 150 citizen-delegates for two days in late November of last year.

Reyes' contribution at the Creative Time Summit was the organization of conversations between himself and former Bogotá mayor Antanas Mockus Šivickas, who famously introduced mimes to curb traffic accidents in Bogotá, as well as numerous other political endeavors that took cues from art and creative impulses in general. The conversation was entitled "The Absurd and Urban Transformation," and successfully brought genuine curiosity and playfulness to the very dry bureaucratic problem of tax collection. The conversation culminated with the two of them offering tokens of public resources in the form of sacramental bread to the mouths of audience members.

Long an admirer of Pedro's ethics in the form of art projects inspired by psychotherapy, I was now a follower of his aesthetics, which I perceived to be adorations to humanity and the complexities of human psychology and spirituality. The following freeform interview is an attempt to understand the mechanisms behind his therapeutic thought process.

Can you tell us how you originally came up with the idea for People's United Nations?

The dream of making a parallel organization to the UN may be something that I thought since I was a child. I used to read *Mafalda*, which was a very influential cartoon for several generations in Latin America. Different from Charlie Brown (Peanuts), *Mafalda* was always commenting on the Vietnam War, the tensions between the Pentagon and the Kremlin, or the dictatorships in Latin America. Her dream was to grow up to become an interpreter at the UN to smooth the exchanges between countries. Many years later I got invited by Larissa Harris to present a project for the reopening of the Queens Museum. The building was the first home of the UN and where many historical events, such as the partitions of Palestine, and North and South Korea were discussed. Two other factors were crucial: the Queens Museum has a special vocation for social practice with a unique community outreach, and Queens is perhaps the most ethnically diverse place on Earth.

Your work is political, in a direct sense, and yet it seems to work precisely because it is not overtly political. It is transformational rather than political. Can you say something about the positive outcome you hope for with much of your work, especially your project People's United Nations?

We live in a world where different cultural environments overlap as in a kind of palimpsest. Each cultural environment has its own set of parameters to assign value. My work in general is very optimistic and Panglossian, as in the character from Voltaire's *Candide*. It suggests optimism regardless of circumstances, and is very utopian. Dr. Pangloss is someone who speaks all languages with all species, the Latin *pán* for everything, all, and glossa for a list of words: glossary. *People's United Nations* is a totally Panglossian project in the sense that it aims to bring everyone together—one representative from every country in the actual UN. Humor is a very important aspect of all of this. One of the main theses of my work has to do with humor and the way that jokes work. Most jokes have a setup and a punch line. The setup involves something that is wrong or is going in the wrong direction. To tell a joke is a process of things becoming an awkward situation, and the punch line is this shocking delivery far below your expectations. And when something is far below your expectations, when someone is in a ridiculous and embarrassing situation, the way one can best handle such shock and disappointment is with laughter. For instance there is a joke where a guy goes to a doctor and the doctor says to the patient, "Here is your analysis and it says that there is not much time left, only ten." The patient replies anxiously, "Ten months? Ten weeks? Ten days?" And the doctor says, "No...10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5..."—you know? You have to have a setup that is a kind of warning and a delivery that is between your expectations of reality and the realpolitik. The way that a joke allows one to deal with disappointment is through laughing. According to biologists, laughing is a kind of reaction where, say, you thought you were being attacked but you realized it was a false alarm, and then a scream is produced that is this kind of a spastic thing that we call laughter.

What I am trying to do with pieces like *p(UN)* is reverse the mechanisms of jokes. So you have an extremely optimistic punch line, something that is so far above your expectations that the shock value is a resolution that is extremely, hilariously optimistic. I do that because I believe that the shock value of optimistic projects is something that brings new ideas to life. It is a little bit messianic, but it is based in spontaneity.

In his book on the psychology of jokes and laughter, Freud says that jokes produce revelations through their technique—creating something that makes sense via the mechanisms of the nonsensical, juxtaposing two conflicting ideas—and in this way jokes are akin to how our unconscious mechanisms make sense in dream displacement, allowing for new interpretations to arise. Can you say something about the thought process of conflict resolution in *p(UN)*? You say that diplomacy has proved not to work, so you want to try alternative play therapies.

For instance, one of the workshops at *p(UN)* consists of breaking down the participants in groups of five or six, and then for the first ten minutes everyone has to share the most embarrassing thing about their own country. Then the participants have a workshop where they envision an ideal world where, if they were to open the pages of a newspaper, they are to imagine the polarities were switched around from the worst to the best. For instance, people who were from the Philippines were angry that the Catholic Church had ruined the reproductive rights of women. So then they were able to imagine a joint venture between the Catholic Church and the State to open abortion clinics nationwide, and they expressed this idea through the workshops. Another example emerged when the people of Turkey were embarrassed that they had the highest number of journalists in prison. The reversal of that fact was that Turkish prisons could become journalistic meccas and that a newspaper called the *Turkish Prison Times* would sweep the Pulitzer. Because really it's not that farfetched; it's actually a completely plausible idea. Imagine that you create some kind of network inside a Turkish prison that becomes an online newspaper through which they smuggle their texts. It really could be!

What I'm trying to do comes from this basic thing that I believe in, that there are two ways to deal with reality. One is to focus on the problem, and the other is to focus on the solution. But the focus on the solution has to be something that is daring. And I do that in sculpture as well. With *Disarm and Imagine*, a continuation of my project *Palas por Pistolas*, I transformed seized guns into musical instruments. Turning a machine gun into an electric guitar is a successful, positive transformation. Many of the operations that are underlying my work are basically quite systematic in the sense of identifying an agent of suffering and death and destruction and making a change in polarity where these agents become something extremely positive. For instance, I may do a collage where I turn a tank into kind of a musical-mechanical orchestra on wheels, or I take a drone and I turn it into a dove, and it becomes a drone-dove. Visualizing something positive is a stepping-stone towards that reality. You have to have a vision.

It would seem to me that a concentration of yours is to play with the given polarities of a situation. With projects such as *Disarm and Imagine* you have made a pretty straightforward reversal of polarities, from this extremely negative force of the weapons to this very positive source of the musical instruments. However, it's a great deal more nuanced with something like *People's United Nations*, where the act is not necessarily reversing or transforming a given situation, that of the UN, but rather presenting viable resolutions that could easily be implanted by the already existing state of affairs. Nonetheless, there is a visceral reaction to the solutions offered through *p(UN)*, such as the absurd and hilarious ones you have mentioned with the delegates of the Philippines or Turkey. Why do we have this internalized reaction to these great solutions that says, "that's clever, but it's totally crazy, too crazy to work"?

I believe it is because the status quo is insane by nature, how things operate normally is often wrong from the very get-go. What we are used to accepting as normal is in fact insanity. It's why R.D. Laing would say something along the lines of "perfectly normal people have killed two million people in the last century." The idea is that you are never going to run out of incredibly wrong things in the world that need to be corrected. They're everywhere, from energy for communication, or distribution of wealth, everything is wrong.

For instance, food, when I was doing the catering for *People's United Nations*, I wanted to do a kind of prototype dish that could become the staple food for the future, and my rationale for doing this turned into the "GrassWhopper," which is a hamburger of crickets, of grasshoppers, and if you stick to the most rational solution, this is it! The GrassWhopper is the most kosher thing to grow in this way, because insects such as crickets don't need refrigeration, and they are pure protein, and no suffering is involved. If a cricket eats

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SFAC 2014



Selected portraits from *Citizen Delegates*, 2013. Documentation from his exhibition *The Peoples United Nations* (p.u.N), Queens Museum, New York City. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

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SFAQ, 2014



Disarm 2013. Instruments made from de-commissioned weapons, Lissom Gallery, London, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Lissom Gallery, London

100 grams of grass it becomes 100 grams of protein in its body so it's a kind of 1:1 translation, whereas a cow has to eat the equivalent of hundreds of football fields to create a single pound of meat. There are so many aspects to illustrate how this food choice is in fact the most rational, economical choice of all. It may look exotic and strange, but that's only because our regular world is wrong and completely upside down.

Intuitively we laugh at the GrassWhopper and jump a bit because it sounds disgusting and absurd to our usual sensibilities. However, if you were a super-rigid bureaucrat crunching the data, it would be something where to see this on paper it would be the most pragmatic food solution.

One of the things that art does best is to bring estrangement. You have to make the familiar strange in order to reveal the arbitrary standards that we live inside of. And you have to make the strange familiar to introduce something new. Monotony is gray. Art brings color, and when it punctures the monotony of the everyday, it creates estrangement. In order to do this you must make the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

This idea of estrangement is really interesting in the context of People's United Nations because it seems to be at odds with the espoused mission of the actual United Nations. What I imagine is that the United Nations seeks to be seen in the public imagination as bringing people together to create a common understanding and set of solutions, and in this way presents itself as diametrically opposed to estrangement. So then, the artistic component of p(UN) would seemingly go against that logical, rational, practical ideal of the actual United Nations. I'm trying to contextualize the idea of estrangement within the kind of cultural politics that play out at the UN that supposes a goal of "mutual understanding" and "democracy." But what makes it work has to do with it being not only estrangement; it's also role-play. Estrangement is one condition present but the reason these individuals felt like they needed to be there, the reason people were so committed to the project, was because of the aspect of role-play, and playing a part that is already inside of them. I was afraid the volunteers would not show up, because this was in New York where people's time is very coveted, and especially since it was freezing and all the way up at the end of the 7 line in Queens. It was a big request for people to do this for free. But in the end they not only showed up for the first day but they came enthusiastically for the second because they were passionate about it. They really devoted two whole days to this, and these people were all very busy people, important people in their respective fields. I really believe that

the reason why they committed was because of the aspect of role-play. The moment that they accepted their roles as delegates, they would fail their countries if they failed to be there. Their countries would not be represented. So they had an honor and a duty to—

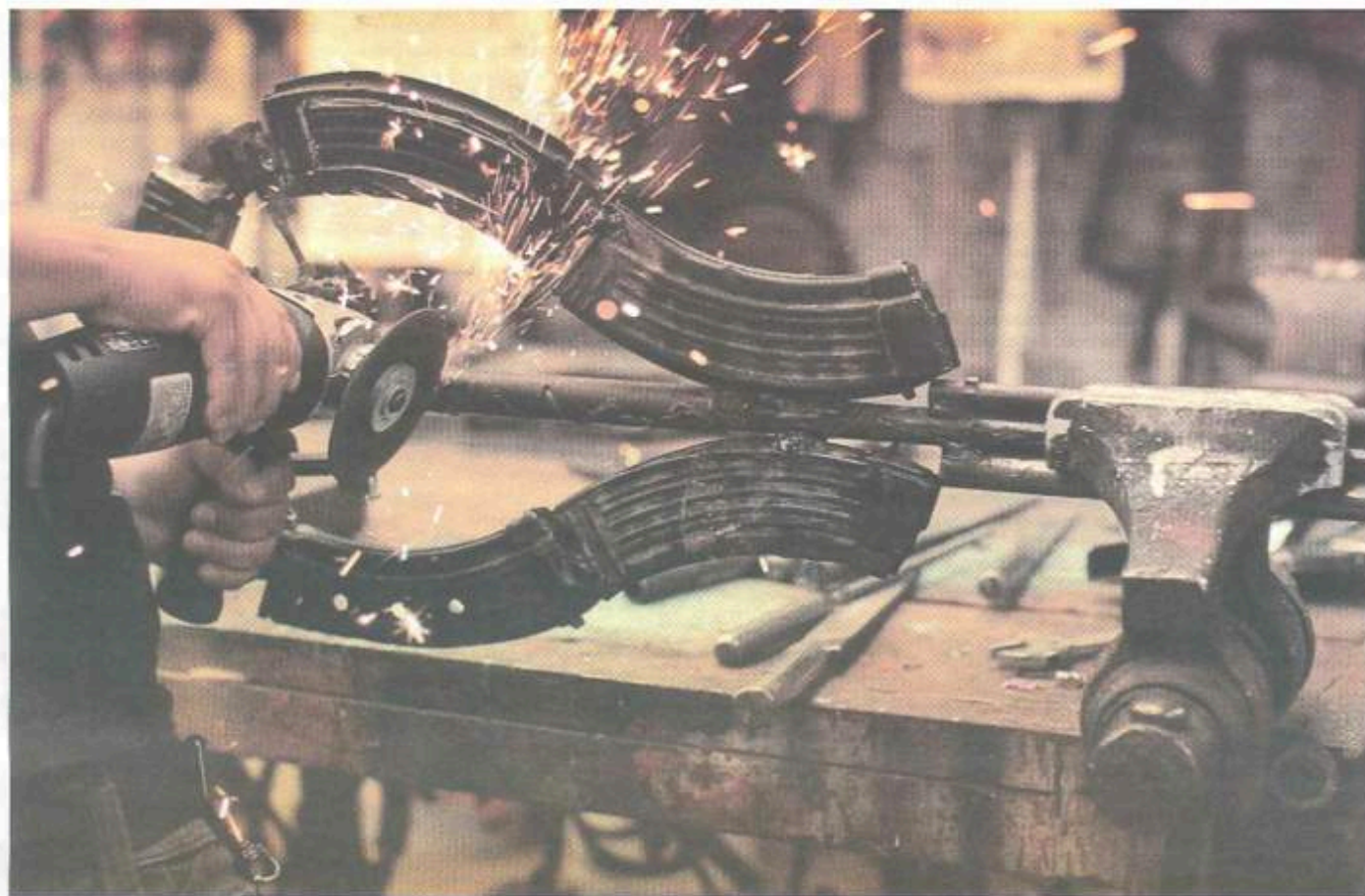
Their identity. Twice removed, and put back again.

Yes, helped by the fact that they were wearing a badge. I believe a lot in the rich role of props. So they were asked to dress in business attire or their ethnic clothing, just as in the UN, and also they were wearing a badge with their flag and their name. If these same people were just at a party it would be different, but the fact that they became delegates created a kind of atmosphere of respect and admiration for each other, and it was all because of role-play. Estrangement is just a kind of substrate; it is this role-play that brings a certain cohesion to the psychodynamic.

In some way this role-play becomes a dress-up game where someone becomes themselves again, albeit in the role of their entire country. But of course they were not alone. You have people in character talking to other people in character but the character is themselves.

In New York everyone is from everywhere, but during p(UN) they were delegates and they were talking on behalf of their nations and their legacies and their cultures. They had to advertise and advocate for their countries. They took it very seriously because they were around others doing the same, which set up opposition that would not exist on the streets of NYC normally. As for coming together with the other delegates in new ways there was a therapist from the school of Milton Erickson doing couples therapy, and I had these people from different countries going to this couples therapy and really talking about their long-standing hatred between their two countries to this therapist. There were many other situations where there was socio-drama. I use a lot of psychology, mainly Milton Erickson and Jacob Levy Moreno, founder of psychodrama and socio-drama.

It seems that the most important thing is that you have made a space for various new psychological states to play out, in this case literally psychological "states"! What strikes me is how seriously the delegates took role-playing. Because in a way it was also a state of play, a universal country of ridiculousness. And it is within this very psychological playground of absurdity that all of this was taken very seriously.



Imagine, 2012. Documentation of fabricating a musical instrument out of a destroyed weapon. Courtesy of the artist.

I believe that the mind loves cognitive dissonance. When you don't know if it's real or if it's a joke, then you're actually paying attention. And above all, the existence of the two possible interpretations, the coexistence of those two: Is this serious? Is this a joke? I've been talking with a neurologist, that I've had a long-standing conversation with, about how we get excited by cognitive dissonance. You are playing a role and you are aware that it's a joke, and at the same time it's serious. And that is exactly what provides you access. I have these opposing interpretations, that it all has to do with our own meta-theater. The mask frees you to perform roles that otherwise would be unbearable. Because if this were pretending to be serious it could be about worthiness or it could be patronizing, or it could be messianic, but you're stating, you're warning, that this is a joke and a game, so then people relax, and precisely because they are relaxed you can talk seriously. If you talk serious straight-talk to people you scare them off. You have to present it as a game for it to become serious; at least that was my framework for this project. In other scenarios there is a demand and a place for earnestness as well, and some aesthetic experiences demand this earnestness. For instance, in *Sanatorium* at documenta, I had different people coming in, but there always had to be a place for this ambiguity between play and earnestness. It was also a big role-play game. Suddenly I had some serious workshops that had to be conducted in full earnestness. I had a Protestant pastor at documenta who came to give a blessing workshop...

[Laughs]

Why do you laugh?

I laugh because it could have only been a Protestant pastor doing such a thing—the Protestants who once swore off aestheticism, and yet he's doing it in a place that is highly aestheticized. On one hand it's this very aesthetic experience of the blessing, one probably most associated with the aesthetics of the Catholic Church, but this priest would be reprimanded immediately if he was Catholic. He has traded one aesthetic venue for another... for an ethics and aesthetics of earnestness.

A blessing is something that has to be earnest. It consists of you saying something positive to someone and then complementing that with a physical gesture. Wishing someone good, it's very powerful. Most importantly, it's beautiful.

It's interesting though that you use a blessing as being exemplary of earnestness in the face of role-play and an open-ended play in general. Pre-

senting serious matters as a game was at the heart of the conversation you had with Antanas Mockus Šivickas at the Creative Time Summit. Can you introduce our readers to this project of Antanas's and the conversation you two had around it?

Antanas Mockus is a mathematician, philosopher and used to be the mayor of Bogotá. I was interested in showing a very particular policy that he implemented that increased tax collection by 30% in Bogotá. He created something called "110% for Bogotá," where the citizens of Bogotá went to the tax service office to pay taxes and you could opt for paying 10% more and you could choose where that extra 10% would go. What was most exciting about the project was the idea of empowering people to take part in direct democracy. It was not something that you could do online—you had to go to an office to pay your taxes. He created a casino in these places.

PD: At the beginning of the talk you remarked that he had "turned the entire city of Bogotá into a game."

It was a very sophisticated and wacky game that worked. He has one of the wackiest minds I know. He created this pseudo-casino and people were using this kind of dreidel called a *pirinola* that you spin, which has six sides and it says things like put one, take one, take two, pass, etc. Every time you bet money you lose or you gain. Antanas is so sophisticated that he created a seven-sided *pirinola*. So when you spin the *pirinola*, you will end with two faces up, so you have the freedom to choose whether to be selfish or altruistic, and that is how one decides how to spend this public money. The citizens became addicted to this democracy and were going back to the cashier to pay more taxes to get more points and bet more on which projects they wanted funded.

A fantastic phrase, "addicted to democracy."

Yes! So tax collection was then able to be increased 30% because people were very excited to take part in this addictive and fun game to promote paying taxes. And if you paid 10% extra you were given these chips. For whatever you were paying you were given a stack of chips and then you could enter these tables where people were gambling for where the money should go, and you would bet on certain projects, which made the whole process very exciting. People would lose their money and then go pay more taxes to get more chips and get the projects they wanted funded. And these chips resembled and acted as the body of Christ, the *hostia*, and they said on them "Public Resources-Sacred Resources," and the citizens were given a small piece of paper with which they had to classify where the resources would be put—social justice, roads, etc.—and

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SFAQ, 2014

he was trying to create a cultural change by saying that stealing public resources was a worse scene than stealing private money. He sees money given as a tax to be holy, and he was teaching people that the biggest proof of love for your country was to pay your taxes. That is how some of the pain of paying taxes could be relieved. You had to be extremely careful about how you handled your public resources. And so that's why we ended the Creative Time talk by giving away these pieces that resembled the communion bread as if we were in mass. People made a line and we gave it to them in the mouth while saying "public resources, public resources" instead of "body of Christ."

This blessing gesture you surprised the audience with was a brilliant mix of play and earnestness. And I believe Antanas beautifully placed it into language when he said at the end that he was convinced that humanity cannot change many of its problems without taking a look at religious traditions. I believe a lot in the importance of religious mythologies, aesthetics, and ethics in art. I am Catholic in this sense.

I am Catholic but I don't know what I am now...

But, I bring this up in light of the certain dichotomy and dialectic that was at play, if you will, with the presentation you and Antanas made by giving the body of Christ as if at mass, because this gesture is at once the most serious, and indeed earnest gestures imaginable if you are a believer, but the way it was presented was very playful and childlike, and outside of the usual context it's given at the Church. It seems to be a fundamentally artistic gesture.

Antanas would say so. One of his favorite quotes is, "When I don't know what to do, I ask myself, what would an artist do?" And so now I ask myself, "What would Antanas do?" To me he's a genuine genius.

You have said that your artwork has an intention to heal. Can you speak a little bit about this?

The idea is not creation for creation's purpose; I believe that art has to have a purpose. At least for me. There is this story of Bashō, the Japanese poet, who is working with an apprentice, walking in a field where there are many dragonflies, and the apprentice says, "Master, I have a haiku," and the master says, "Okay, tell me." "A dragonfly takes out its wing and you have a pepper pod." And the master says, "No, that's not a good Haiku. You have to say, 'take a piece of pepper, and add wings and it's a dragonfly.'" So it has to be something that adds positively and that is a kind of healing process that reveals something beautiful and good, and I'm not afraid of having that ethos, that moral intention in itself. That's why I insist on, you know, that the work is not completely open-ended, that the work has an intention to heal. It's about healing.

In this sense it's an Aristotelian ethics, something which aims toward the good and the positive rather than inverting things.

It's a categorical imperative. And I acknowledge that this is strange within the art world, because in the art world there is a kind of parenthesis or exception where you don't have to be ethical, you only have to be aesthetical. I don't know why, but I believe that things have to make the world better. And I don't believe that all art has to be like that. It's only something that I ask for most of my own work.

When I create group activities I hope for collective creativity and spontaneity to produce a spectrum of different ideas. This is coming from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He is possibly the most important philosopher from Latin America in the 20th century. He states an obvious thing: there are the rich guys and the poor guys, and the rich guys think the poor guys are inferior. You cannot expect change to come from above—you have to teach yourself if you want liberation. One must take responsibility for one's own liberation process, and when you have a problem you have to socialize the problem. Then I have to turn to Augusto Boal because he takes Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and he creates *Theatre of the Oppressed*, wherein what you do enunciate the problem with a one-act play, a short play, with a critical moment where the oppressed face all the oppression, and you don't have a solution. Then you stop the play at that moment, and you invite the audience to contribute with solutions, but they cannot verbally say the solutions, they have to act them out. The people from the audience come on stage and decide which actor they want to replace and then you have different endings. You have a problem and you have the audience who become "spect-actors" through which you explore all the potential outcomes of the problem. You have a spectrum, a rainbow of solutions.

In the end it is about the difference between learning and teaching, learning and being taught. Augusto Boal says that the whole problem started with Aristotle because Aristotle was a hack for the government, you know? Aristotle, when he created the idea of tragedy, he was first of all saying, okay, drama is going to be a prescription where we're going to show what those people should not do, because if they do that they will end up destroyed. So you should not sleep with your mother, etc....

Yes, of course. This is the double-edged sword of the Aristotelian ethics of the good, "You must do this."

Yes, Aristotle alienates the audience by creating the chorus. You don't need to participate now that there's a chorus that will sing for you, that will lament when there is disgrace, or will celebrate when there is victory. He alienates reactions from you. He basically separates the audience from the actors and he kills spontaneity and agency from the public. Augusto Boal and Jacob Levy Moreno, through psychodrama, group therapy, and the encounter movement, basically brought back theater to its primitive stage where the audience could participate and change the end of the play.

One can change the trajectory of the story because they have their own understanding and not someone else's.

I believe that you have to create an idea that the audiences can experience and make as their own. If an idea is truly valuable everyone will understand it. The idea that an artist should not create small curtains—basically, I don't want bullshit.

I see a kind of curatorial dictation in art today that reminds me of this flaw of Aristotle's—all too often the way an exhibit is organized and written about demands an art spectator to experience it with a strict, often oppressive pedagogy, where they tell you how to look at a piece of art. That seems like bullshit.

Well, I like obscurity and I like art—I enjoy some art about art. But I don't expect other artists to follow the same rules that I make for myself. I don't think that it's bad that there's self-referential art. But I do believe that art should speak to most people, even though when I do this I put myself in a risky position because I know that in reaching out, your audience may have curators in it.

But what I appreciate in much of your work and your thought process is what I see as creations of open spaces that let the viewer see for themselves, spaces that one can navigate on their own and decide between what is good and what is not, because the most basic and yet most profound thing one can understand is their own lived experience.

I have a kind of a very personal dogma that my work has to be understood by everyone.

Has to be or could be?

Has to be. Yeah.



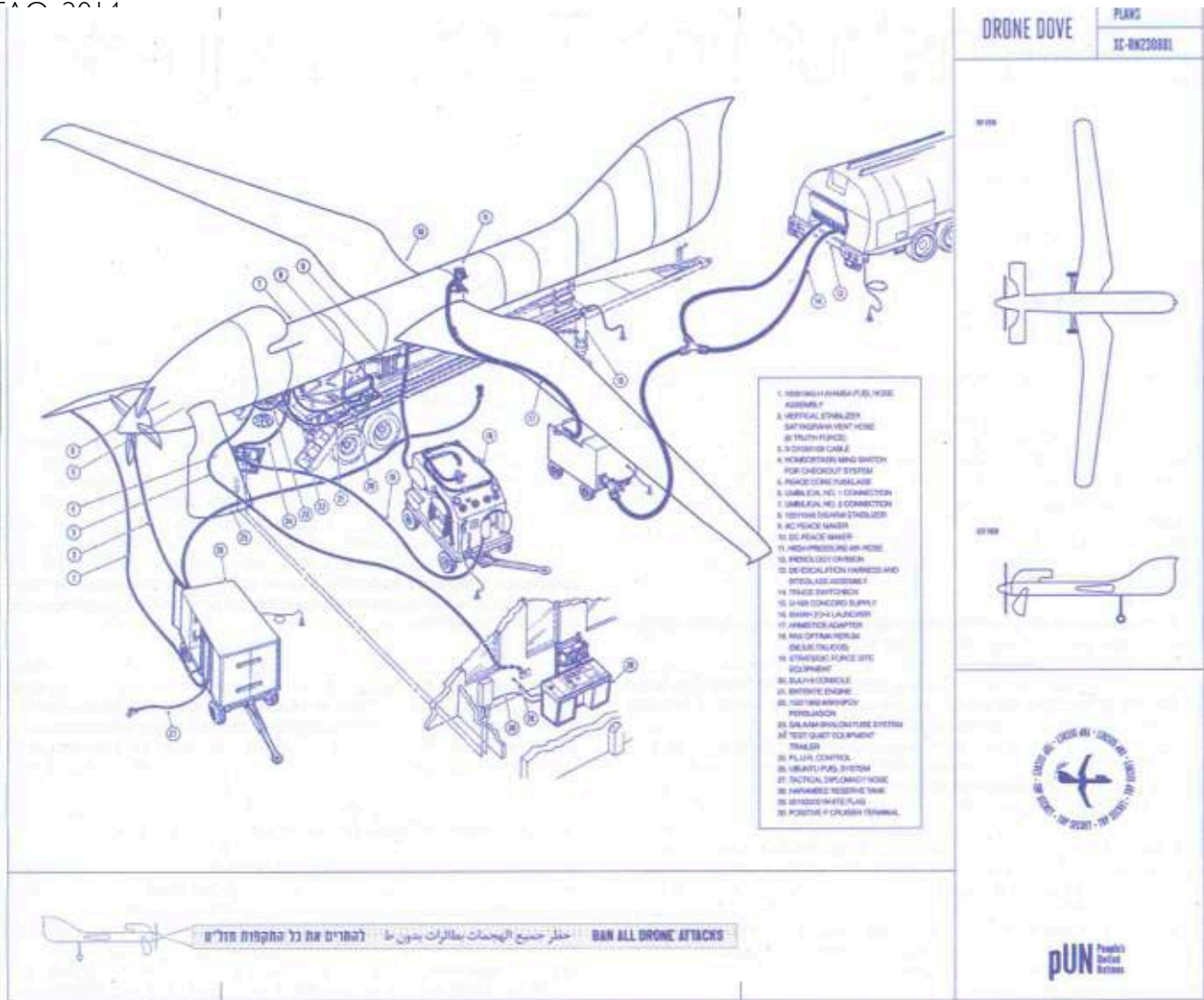
Citizen-delegates and other participants of The People's United Nations (pUN), Drone Dove in foreground and official pUN flag with motto "Hands-on with a vision" in background, Queens Museum, New York City, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.



Antanas Mockus Swickas offering a Public Resource-Sacred Resource to host Lucy Lippard during the

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Pedro Reyes, Blueprint plans for Drone Dove, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.



Pedro Reyes, Drone Dove, 2013, artist rendering. Courtesy of the artist.



December 5, 2014

Artist Pedro Reyes is Staging a Madhouse at Art Basel

Hannah Ghorashi



Currently on view at ICA Miami for Art Basel, Pedro Reyes' on-going performance project and utopian installation, the 'Sanatorium', enlists role-playing therapists and receptionists in treating victims of depression, loneliness, neurosis, family violence, suicide, and other social pathologies that encumber contemporary social life. Therapeutic success depends on a visitor's ability to suspend disbelief, encouraging individual agency in the creation of change. "It's similar to quackery," Reyes tells us, "but with a fundamental difference: in quackery the patient is led to believe a lie, while in the 'Sanatorium' you are told upfront that this is not real, and it is up to you to believe."

The 'Sanatorium' simulates a temporary mental health clinic, offering visitors an environment in which they can experience three of the sixteen available therapies that draw as much from theatre warm-up exercises, corporate coaching, and anger management exercises as they do from shamanism, sorcery, iconography, and even practical jokes. The Sanatorium is dedicated to the advancement of sociatry, an obsolete term for the science and art of healing society. "I realise that it may be too much to ask for a work of art to have such an impact," Reyes says. "But I see art as a warm-up phase that prepares us for change. What is most important to achieve is a

mental state where we have the confidence to produce changes." We asked Reyes more about the change he'd like to see in the world, and received an education in return.

How did you come to create the Sanatorium?

The Sanatorium was conceived as a delivery system of placebos, therapies that put self-suggestion mechanisms into action. In practice, when you enter the Sanatorium you sign a paper acknowledging that this is not a real hospital, and these are not real therapists. Paradoxically, the mind loves cognitive dissonance — that is to say, being aware that you are telling yourself a lie won't necessarily prevent you from believing in it. The hypnotic adoption of an idea can be an effective way to initiate behavioural change.

Are the therapists played by actors?

In the Sanatorium, we play roles, using props such as lab coats to free us from the one-dimensional labels society assigns to us. While doctors use white coats, these are also used in schools when you go to the lab or in other work environments. So the white coats actually have more than one connotation, and there is room to play here. [Philosopher] Friedrich Schiller says that someone is only fully a person when she plays, and she has to play to fully become a person.

The visitor must suspend their disbelief when visiting. Because of this, do visitors almost become actors, playing the part of themselves?

Every therapy is like a small ritual that helps you reconcile your desires and change your mind-set. The problem is that you often access rituals in a religious or esoteric context, so you have to subscribe to those systems of beliefs. So what the Sanatorium attempts is to reproduce the same psychodynamics by conducting rituals without any ethnic specificity, without their aura of authenticity. It is not only about creating an alternative space from the health system; it's also an attempt to create alternative spaces to those provided by magic, religion, etc. because these places are also industries in which a few gurus concentrate huge followings.

Why do you describe the Sanatorium as a utopia?

In the early 90s, [curator and art historian] Harald Szeemann came to Mexico. I attended a week-long seminar where he presented some of his ground-breaking exhibitions in detail, but what left the biggest impression on me was his exhibition about Monte Verità, which was established in 1900 in Ascona, Switzerland, as a cooperative colony based on the principles of primitive socialism. It later became the Monte Verità Sanatorium. The members detested private property and practiced a strict standard of conduct based on vegetarianism and nudism. They rejected marriage, dress, party politics, and dogmas. One remarkable aspect of Monte Verità is how many artists spent time there, such as Isadora Duncan, Paul Klee, Hugo Ball, Mary Wigman, as well as

intellectuals such as Carl Jung and Rudolph Steiner, among many others. So it was not only noteworthy for its utopian ideals but for the imagination it took to come up with it and what it inspired in these people.

What is your opinion on conventional modern therapy, for societal pathologies like stress, loneliness, hyper-stimulation?

These days therapy is a luxury for a lot of people, and every day there are more people in the world who need it but can't afford it. There is also a stigma attached to it that makes many people think that those who go to therapy must be crazy. Yet today, especially in cities, there is a vast population who could benefit from it. That's why I'm so interested in alternative structures in which human connection is paramount. You won't find it in prescription drugs or hospitals, but it's crucial to generate healthier communal life.

Do you believe that people have a greater agency than they realise in the creation of societal change?

[Educator and philosopher] Paulo Freire articulated this in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and his ideas had enormous penetration in Latin America from the 60s into the 70s and 80s. In his own words, the school system "teaches the need to be taught," when true learning has to be driven by the curiosity and desire of every person. Today we cannot expect to reach good results out of pure spontaneity nor pure planning. The Sanatorium is not conceived as a substitute for existing therapies and social services, but as a space for encounter, since so many of our everyday pathologies result from this lack of connection.

pedroreyes.net

icamiami.org



Images courtesy the artist.

i-d.vice.com/en_gb/article/artist-pedro-reyes-is-staging-a-madhouse-at-art-basel

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3rd July 2014

<http://moussemagazine.it/pedro-reyes-lisson-2014/>



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Pedro Reyes "Statues" at Lisson Gallery, Milan

July 3~2014



A colloquium, meaning a discussion or a conference, is being held at Lisson Gallery in Milan, between five distinguished speakers from the early modern period of radical thought and revolutionary politics. Stone portrait busts, collectively part of a new *Statues* series, of Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Vladimir Lenin, Frida Kahlo and David Alfaro Siqueiros are arranged within the space as if deep in conversation at a salon or *tertulia*, as it is known in Spanish. While this grouping never met together in one room (although Trotsky's final years in Mexico provide a starting point), they are linked by their shared Communist ideology, derived from Marxism and passed around a burgeoning international network of like-minded artists, philosophers and intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century. Pedro Reyes specialises in creating such hypothetical situations and possibilities for parallel histories, through theatrical, experiential or, in this case, sculptural means.

Outside, in the courtyard, is a multi-partite, marble installation entitled *Colloquium (Ironism)*, a work that consists of interlocking forms in dialogue with one another, although their shapes – each a blank cartoon speech bubble of one variety or another – suggests that any communication between them exists without or beyond words. Reyes has long organised ad-hoc, mobile seminars – notably for his touring clinic *Sanatorium* (2011–13), which invited participants to undergo unexpected therapies based on sources ranging from psychodrama and hypnosis to shamanism and anger management, as well as for *The People's United Nations* (2013), which saw an alternative gathering of delegates of immigrant New Yorkers from every member or observer state represented in the real UN.

For his second solo exhibition with Lisson Gallery, Reyes's ongoing concerns with social or moral cohesion have been ossified into the static forms of sculpture, as if halted or frozen in the acts of exchange and discussion. The five historical figureheads, each carved from volcanic stone, recall the angular forms of famous artists such as Amedeo Modigliani, Constantin Brancusi or Umberto Boccioni, while the marble *Colloquium* is indebted to the interlocking sculpture and assemblage of Isamu Noguchi, influences that Reyes employs to position his characters and ideas within the heady milieu of Western Modernism. Reyes is also interested in how these ideas might still permeate contemporary thinking, as not only is each stylised bust titled individually – including, for instance *The Head of Karl Marx* (2014) – but they relate to another series of quasi-pedagogical puppetry films produced since 2008 under the banner of *Baby Marx*, which are being gathered together for 'The Permanent Revolution – An Ideological Screwball Comedy', concurrently on show at the Museo Jumex in Mexico.

at Lisson Gallery, Milan

until 18 July 2014

Cross Platform

Mexican artist
Pedro Reyes
transforms guns seized
during the country's
war on drugs into
instruments of peace.
But can you play them?
asks **Phil England**



Pedro Reyes, *Disarm (Kalashniclock)*, 2013

"When you live in Mexico," says Pedro Reyes, "the worst thing is that you get used to these things, these daily killings, and you just hope it's not gonna be you. But for me there's a sense of urgency. I cannot afford to be cynical about this issue."

In 2012, the Mexican artist was offered a cache of over 6000 guns that had been decommissioned by the authorities. In a spectacular public event, the weapons were run over by a tank and a steamroller, sawn into pieces and attacked by blowtorches. Previously he had organised his own gun amnesty and collected a smaller cache of 1527 weapons, which he melted down and turned into 1527 shovels to plant 1527 trees (*Palas Por Pistolas*, 2008). This time he handed the scrap metal over to a group of six musicians who converted the materials into an orchestra of 50 instruments over a period of two weeks, which he collectively titled *Imagine*. There's a rugged brutality and a metallic coldness to the creations, which are familiar yet unfamiliar. They hold a faint echo of their former selves, but a transformation has taken place.

"I'm interested in developing a cultural rejection of the weapons industry by repurposing agents of death into agents of life," says Reyes, explaining his wider artistic vision. "It's almost like a change in polarity." As small groups of the *Imagine* instruments have been exhibited around the world – in Mexico, South Korea, Turkey, and now at London's Lisson Gallery – Reyes has arranged for local musicians to perform with them. "In Mexico there was a special feel because people were very aware that these weapons had killed people," he recalls. "Having them now made into instruments is like a sense of victory over the beast. So it felt a little bit like an exorcism, but also a sort of requiem, a reconciliation."

The Mexican government recorded 27,199 homicides in 2011, and the country is awash with an estimated 15 million civilian guns. But Reyes says his motivation stems from both the particular circumstances in Mexico, and the problem of small arms globally. "Being neighbour to the US we are very vulnerable to the weapons trade," he says. "The US is the place where all the weapons that are

fabricated all around the world enter Latin America. We have a war against drugs but we don't have governments waging war against the weapons trade. Governments are actually part of the business."

With that in mind, I wondered whether he had any reservations about accepting weapons from the Mexican Secretary of Defence. Is he helping them look like the good guys? "The truth is that the government is made of hundreds of different agencies that often don't talk to each other," he replies. "I believe that if you are interested in producing change, you have to become the problem. You have to do some work in the interior of the organisation or the system. There's always going to be persons that want to do things. I believe it is the citizens' or the artists' responsibility to find these people."

For the Lisson Gallery exhibition, Reyes gave some of the remaining destroyed weapons to Mexican music and technology artists COCOLAB to produce a set of automatic instruments that come alive as a computer sends them fragments of scores on a

random basis (*Disarm*, 2013). The new instruments include an E-bow cello encircled by dozens of welded-together handguns, and the Kalashniclock, which turns the cheap hollow handles of AK47 assault rifles into a circle of tuned percussion instruments.

Reyes also wanted to make a record to complement the London show. Lisson Gallery director Joanna Thornberry approached guitarist and Treader label boss John Coxon, who put together a six piece group including his former Spring Heel Jack collaborator Ashley Wales, one-time This Heat drummer Charles Hayward and Brooklyn based multi-instrumentalist Eben Bull. Over the course of a day in the studio, the team laid down a mixture of loosely structured, propulsive rock grooves and exploratory improvisations that work with the instruments' unique sonic properties.

Both instrument makers and musicians have had to struggle to overcome the inherent non-musicality of the source materials. "The flutes are very hard to play because they don't have proper mouthpieces," says Coxon a few days after the private view concert. "The drums just go clunk because they're solid things made of gun metal. The easiest one to play is actually the lap steel."

Reyes agrees: "These are instruments that are very primitive in a way. Very cumbersome, not as lightweight

and with nice acoustics. They have an almost caveman quality that I feel has had an effect on the music. The music is as much about the energy, which has a radical positivity, but also has a certain brutality."

The collective name of Reyes's instruments inevitably recalls John Lennon's "Imagine", a song emblematic of a time when anti-war sentiment was at its height. The extent of Lennon's influence can perhaps be measured by the fact that in 1972 the Nixon administration attempted to deport him from the US, fearing that a former Beatle's anti-war activism would impact negatively on the President's prospects for re-election. Today we live in an era when popular music's political potency has effectively been neutered. Can Reyes's project ever have the potential to force a wider change and tap into a more optimistic social conscience?

Of today's circumstances, Reyes has written: "This is a large industry of death and suffering for which no cultural rejection is expressed. Guns continue to be depicted as something sexy, both in Hollywood and in video games; there may be actors who won't smoke on the screen, but there has not been one who would reject the role of a trigger-happy hero."

Nevertheless, Reyes is upbeat. He sees human progress as a constant process – slavery was brought to an end, women won the vote. Sooner or

later disarmament too is inevitable. "I think that when you have a positive, clear intention, people join and help," he says. "It's a collective process that I can't do on my own. It's not an idea that I think I possess, it's an idea that I would like to be replicated in many other places. In the city of Chihuahua, the only week of the year when no deaths were recorded was when there was a music festival. People were with their families in the street and there was an unspoken truce. So music has a winning factor over fear. Not everyone has a relationship with literature or visual arts. Pretty much everyone has a relationship with music."

"There's been hundreds of orchestras in Latin America with a focus on musical education as an agent for change," he declares. "I want to do a similar project but with teens, where you can get involved with welding and rock music. This is a demographic to which no one is paying enough attention and which is most vulnerable to dropping out of school and joining a gang."

"I find his idealism quite invigorating," says John Coxon. "He feels like he's making a serious proposition here. It's very un-British." □ *Disarm* is at London's Lisson Gallery until 4 May. The *Disarm* LP is available from the gallery in a limited edition. lissongallery.com

Left to right: John Coxon, Eben Bull, Ashley Wales, Rupert Clervaux and Beatrice Dillon perform with Pedro Reyes's instruments at Lisson Gallery, London, March 2013



Pedro Reyes Brings Sanity to Brooklyn

by *pierre alexandre de looz* 06/13/11

Over the last two weeks, a nondescript, cavernous storefront in downtown Brooklyn that was once home to Sid's Hardware, local purveyor of Christmas ornaments and power tools, hosted a Guggenheim-organized pop-up installation by Mexican artist Pedro Reyes. Above the foyer, a sign in periwinkle neon reading "cashier" was all that loyal shoppers might have recognized of the evacuated retailer. Sanatorium, Reyes's interactive piece in the form of an ersatz mental clinic, called out to those in need of an emotional or mental tune-up.

Those in need or simply curious could book an appointment online or simply walk in for a therapy session administered by a team of nearly 70 attendants and comprising a selection of activities or tests, offering services ranging from a measurement of couples' compatibility to a deep tuning session, a method created and led by Mel S. Kimura-Bucholtz to address underlying emotional issues like trauma through focused meditation on senses and mental visualization. Unsurprisingly, it takes nearly nothing to caricature an impersonal healthcare environment, Reyes told A.I.A. Here the key ingredients were fluorescent lighting, monochromatic surfaces and the lab coat, a nearly "magical" uniform that professional caregivers know how to exploit, Reyes said. While certainly all masquerades of sorts, none of Reyes's therapies are disingenuous or impersonal. Sanatorium was intended to deliver real healing, though a successful treatment relied entirely on how much a participant invested in the piece: "The Sanatorium is a delivery system for placebos, a set of tools, tricks and techniques where you activate your own healing processes. These are all techniques you can teach yourself," the artist told A.I.A. Seemingly vacuous on the surface, at its best Sanatorium triggered a display of raw and often tender human content.

The artist has worked extensively with group psychotherapy and dynamics over the last decade, with pieces such as Alien Report, a group activity performed at the ICA Boston in 2006, in which urban youth of differing backgrounds confronted the question of being alien in America by imagining extraterrestrial alter egos through meditation and by actualizing that identity through community canvassing. Building on this previous work, Reyes' Sanatorium sought to confront potentially unsettling issues, revitalizing art through the psychic energies of performance, and to abandon institutional formats like fairs and museums. At the Sanatorium, Reyes explained, "We let people have access to a creative process using their own personal narratives, so they can take the art experience with them."

As the inaugural effort of a two-year outreach program of events and installations--"stillspotting nyc"--conceived by the Guggenheim's Assistant Curator of Architecture and Urban Studies, David van der Leer, Sanatorium appears to have worked. "People were leaving with a different expression on their faces, as if they really picked something up," van der Leer observed. The Dutch-born curator hopes the work returned its audience to the pressures of urban life refreshed.

If city living causes its share of mental pathologies, anxieties and stress, van der Leer is proposing something of an antidote with stillspotting nyc, a two-year initiative meant to explore, identify and study restorative oases or "stillspots," curated events that can counteract the hectic pace and sometimes gnawing effects of city life. More than an escape, however, Sanatorium brings the urban jungle, with its seductive tangle of disappointments and desires, into intense focus.

In comparison to other commonly available curatives for the big-city blues, like a spa treatment or a yoga session, Reyes argued that the price of admission (\$15) was a great deal. Sanatorium asked for much more than a ticket, however. It encouraged spilling of secrets, reflections on loved ones and on desires and frustrations, and, perhaps most notably, listening to others. While the treatments were individual, they occurred in a group setting, so others could comment and share reactions.

Sanatorium pulled the audience into a personal and perhaps uncomfortable interaction with the work, and by extension the artist. In this way, Reyes crafted a provocation not unlike that created by the early work of James Lee Byars or Dan Graham. At the same time it relied, like other pieces by Reyes, on a tradition of psychodrama indebted to sociologist Jacob Moreno, in which patients explore emotional issues and internal conflicts through dramatization, role-playing and audience participation. If there is any measure of success for this technique, it may be that even a New Yorker's hard, self-involved shell can crack under calculated conditions and reveal something else: "I am really ecstatic and moved because we all have an excess capacity to help each other and those participating in Sanatorium really got into it," Reyes exclaimed. With this engrossing installation, Reyes and van der Leer have pointed to a project whose promise may lie farther afield. Such an arts clinic, if taken seriously, could emerge in any community and connect to any public, which is more than a tonic at a time when art must define its place in the sustainable future of all environments.

LISSON GALLERY

New York Times
3rd June 2011

What is Sanatorium?



A transient clinic which provides short, unexpected therapies. Psychological help made accesible to all ages, social backgrounds, and time schedules.

Sanatorium is inspired by the City Dweller's remarkable fascination with a variety of therapies that help them cope with hectic schedules, demanding lifestyle choices, and often complicated relationships that the city stimulates. As a result, cities count a disproportionate number of psychotherapists, self-improvement instructors, life coaches, and counselors. In the temporary clinic, Sanatorium, we alter the city's existing therapy landscape with short, unexpected, experimental treatments where visitors experience up to three sessions from over a dozen options through meetings with a series of "therapists."

Balancing reality and parody, Sanatorium draws from Gestalt psychology, theater warm-up exercises, Fluxus events, conflict resolution techniques, trust-building games, corporate coaching, psychodrama, and hypnosis. While some of the sessions should be experienced alone, others are specifically catered to couples and larger groups or intended for families.

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THE ART & CULTURE MAGAZINE
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A dynamic photography festival redefines European social identity

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Art meets culture and politics in a major retrospective in New York City

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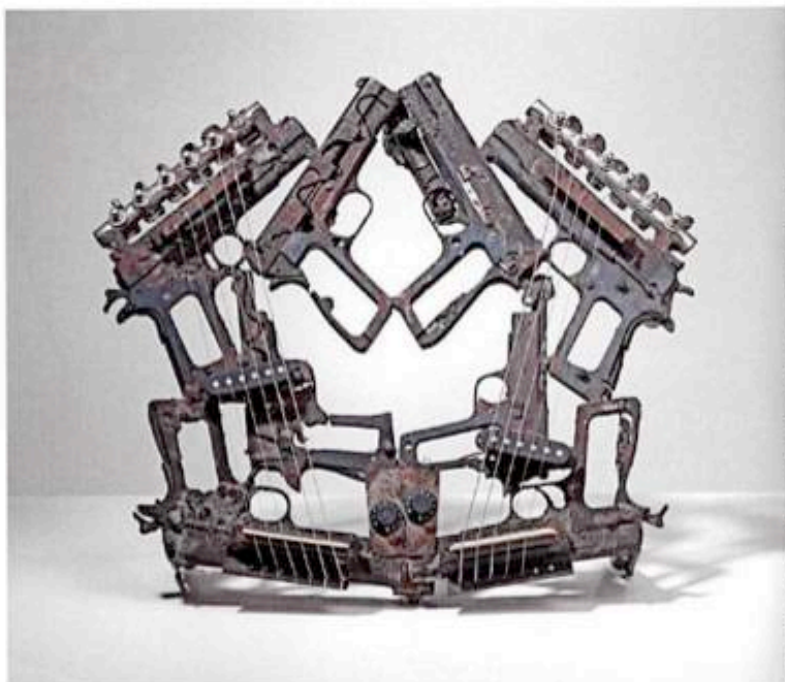


IN CONVERSATION WITH

Pedro Reyes

Artist

Transforming confiscated firearms into musical instruments and shovels, Mexican artist Pedro Reyes (b. 1972) believes in the ability of art to change societies permanently. In a new exhibition, *Disarm*, the artist showcases sculptural works, screen-prints, vinyl recordings and a live musical performance. *Disarm* continues until 4 May at Lisson Gallery, London, www.lissongallery.com.



Pedro Reyes's *Disarm* (2003). Roughly 100cm x 100cm x 100cm. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery.

The works in *Disarm* are made of guns; how did you approach this?

The danger in making art about guns is that you can easily be seduced by the object, so the result can end up glorifying rather than critiquing it. Some art uses cardboard or recycled materials to "make" guns and I think that, in these instances, it is not always clear what the artist is expressing. It may be that within the contemporary art world they stand as good pieces, but for my own agenda I need the message to be clear so that my works have currency for a general audience. I am interested in how the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō worked. He believed that what constitutes a Haiku is both technical construction and a moment of insight: when an object or image is seen in a new light or when something is added or revealed in a meaningful way. To me, this says that we don't have to be afraid of radical optimism. I think Bashō worked with art in a way that we now call "upcycling." This is what we are doing with *Disarm* – taking weapons and turning them into musical instruments.

How did you decide to make musical instruments out of confiscated weapons?

In 2007, I was invited by the Botanical Gardens of Culiacán to make a public art project. I proposed *Palos por Pistolas* (shovels made from guns), for which we collected 1527 weapons in a voluntary campaign. The arms were publicly crushed and then the melted material was constructed into 1527 shovels: one shovel for every gun. These shovels were then distributed to schools, museums and other institutions that are helping to plant 1527 trees. So far we have done this in over 20 cities worldwide and are still counting. In January last year, I received a call from the federal government after they had learned about *Palos por Pistolas*. They told me that a huge number of weapons seized from criminals would be destroyed, and asked me if I was interested in keeping the metal to make more shovels. I was happy to accept, but this time I wanted to do something different and decided to make the destroyed weapons into instruments.

These instruments are played too; is art always interactive for you?

I have always been very interested in how an artwork can activate group dynamics, so this project is a collaborative undertaking in which many musicians and craftsmen have participated. But it is also intended to have a wider social impact, fostering discussion about gun control and how we can use culture to create a safer community.

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Do you believe that art in general plays a crucial role in challenging the wider constructs of society?

The most important resource people have is their creativity. The solution to most problems is not found in money nor in technology, but rather in culture. I want to create community responses that lead to cultural change.

How would you describe your performance project *Sanatorium*?

The *Sanatorium* is a transient clinic that provides short unexpected treatments, mixing art and psychology. In order to experience this project, you have to sign up as a patient and participate in sessions that may be individual or conducted in groups. There are a variety of techniques used, such as Gestalt psychology, theatre warm-up exercises, conflict resolution techniques, Shamanism, corporate coaching, yoga, psychodrama and hypnosis. I conceived the *Sanatorium* as a system of placebos, or therapies that trigger self-suggestion mechanisms. We tell the patients up front that the *Sanatorium* is not real and it is up to them to believe; they even sign a piece of paper acknowledging that this is not a real hospital and these are not real therapists. Paradoxically, the mind loves cognitive dissonance and being aware that you are telling yourself a lie won't necessarily prevent you from believing in it. The hypnotic adoption of a created idea can be an effective way to initiate behavioural change. The therapies have the humble goal of remedying mild afflictions, a bit like a psychological first-aid kit where the raw material is your own personal narrative. Overall, I think the *Sanatorium* is a happy place that offers a plethora of insights, allowing visitors to make meaningful discoveries about their lives while helping others.

What inspires you?

Second hand bookshops – that's where I get all my ideas. I am a compulsive book buyer on every subject; the ideas pile up and merge into each other, so I have a whole reservoir of projects for years to come.

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The most important resource people have is their creativity. The solution to most problems is not found in money nor in technology, but rather in culture. I want to create community responses that lead to cultural change.

How would you describe your performance project *Sanatorium*?

The *Sanatorium* is a transient clinic that provides short unexpected treatments, mixing art and psychology. In order to experience this project, you have to sign up as a patient and participate in sessions that may be individual or conducted in groups. There are a variety of techniques used, such as Gestalt psychology, theatre warm-up exercises, conflict resolution techniques, Shamanism, corporate coaching, yoga, psychodrama and hypnosis. I conceived the *Sanatorium* as a system of placebos, or therapies that trigger self-suggestion mechanisms. We tell the patients up front that the *Sanatorium* is not real and it is up to them to believe; they even sign a piece of paper acknowledging that this is not a real hospital and these are not real therapists. Paradoxically, the mind loves cognitive dissonance and being aware that you are telling yourself a lie won't necessarily prevent you from believing in it. The hypnotic adoption of a created idea can be an effective way to initiate behavioural change. The therapies have the humble goal of remedying mild afflictions, a bit like a psychological first-aid kit where the raw material is your own personal narrative. Overall, I think the *Sanatorium* is a happy place that offers a plethora of insights, allowing visitors to make meaningful discoveries about their lives while helping others.

What inspires you?

Second hand bookshops – that's where I get all my ideas. I am a compulsive book buyer on every subject; the ideas pile up and merge into each other, so I have a whole reservoir of projects for years to come.

LISSON GALLERY

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Tuesday 26 March 2013

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Weapon for change

Mexican artist Pedro Reyes has turned firearms into musical instruments for his show, *Disarm*, opening at the Lisson Gallery tonight. He hopes making a noise about the violence in his homeland will help put a stop to it, he tells **Ben Luke**

PEDRO Reyes introduces me to an artwork he calls a "Kalashniclock". It's a circular structure, with 12 of the curved chargers which normally protrude from AK47 guns at its edge. Above them are 12 wooden drum beaters and the chargers are held together by a frame of rifle barrels. He taps one of the beaters against a metal charger and it emits a resonant percussive sound exactly like a cowbell.

The Mexican artist is installing his exhibition, *Disarm*, at the Lisson Gallery just off Edgware Road, and all around us are ingenious, surreal and macabre instruments (more than 30 in total) similarly fashioned from recycled weapons. He plays a xylophone made from rifle barrels with a pistol trigger for a beater and then points out the electric guitar and psaltery made from strings, stretched over clusters of welded pistols and shotgun parts.

Tonight, at the exhibition's opening, this firearms orchestra will feature a group of musicians including John Coxon from the band Spiritualized, whose improvisations with the instruments can be heard on a specially produced vinyl record. For the rest of the exhibition's run, the instruments will be played automatically, triggered by an off-stage computer.

Now 41, Reyes was born in Mexico City, where he still lives with his wife

and two children, aged five and seven. He is gaining a growing reputation for his socially-minded, collaborative and participatory artworks. This summer he will bring a quite different project, *Sanatorium*, to the Whitechapel, turning the East End gallery into a playful clinic, where visitors can experience what he describes as "mash-ups" of forms of therapy, performance art events, and theatre warm-up exercises.

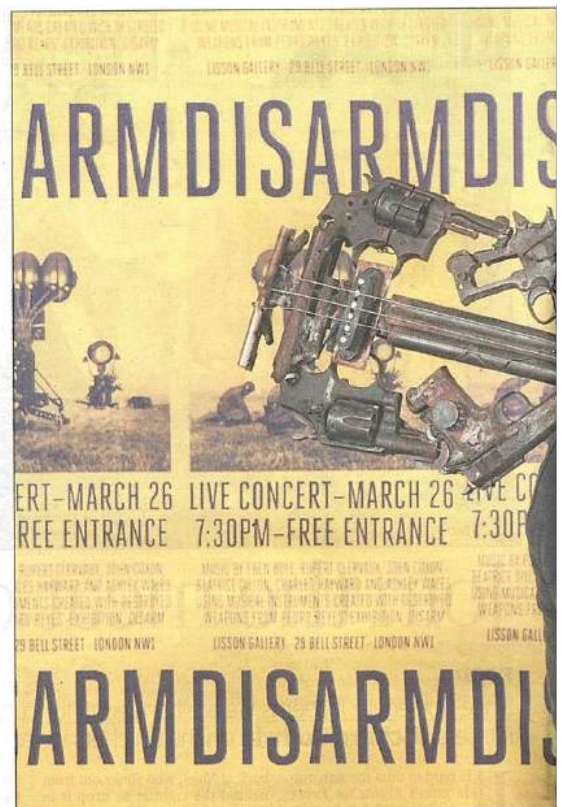
Reyes originally studied architecture at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City, which he says has stuck with him. "Architects often have a mindset where you solve a problem, so you have a set of needs that you have to address," he says. "Often I feel that my projects have to have concrete applications." No art for art's sake here.

Disarm is born of a profound and sincere desire to address the well-documented violence in his homeland. Its origins lie in a project for the contemporary art programme at the botanical gardens in Culiacán, western Mexico – a "very violent" city, Reyes says. The gardens' art projects are sponsored by Agustín Coppel, a local businessman who made his fortune from electronic goods. Reyes came up with the idea to ask local people to donate weapons in exchange for household appliances.

"We did a number of television slots that were aired on local TV, inviting people to bring their weapons to the city hall, and then they could trade a gun for a microwave," he explains. "A record number of weapons was collected – 1,527, that were melted in a foundry. And with that metal I made exactly the same number of shovels to plant 1,527 trees." He planted one in 2010 on Mabley Green in Hackney, as part of the Serpentine Gallery's Map Marathon.

"I am on a crusade to come up with creative initiatives to disarm all these cities," he adds. And the Mexican authorities, desperate for solutions to the violence, are only too happy to help – the shovels project prompted an invitation for Reyes to use close to 7,000 guns impounded by the department of defence. Initially, he thought he would make more shovels but he began thinking about wind chimes, and that snowballed into the full-blown orchestra of *Disarm*.

Music seemed an ideal way to get his message across. "We have to find ways to remove weapons from circulation and build trust," he says. "Music is a universal language that does that in an effortless way. In the end, a gun is an instrument to make someone surrender to your will or die, and music is exactly the opposite – it's seductive and invitational."



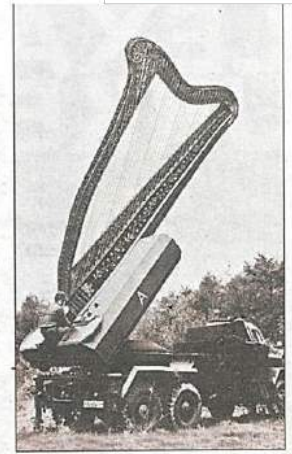
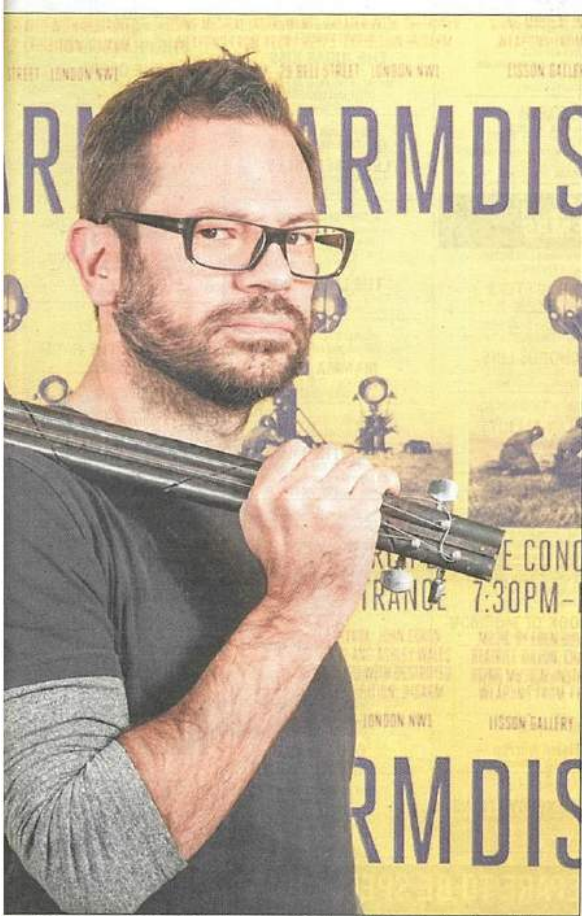
On a crusade: "I definitely believe that art is the best way to produce social change."

The key aspect for Reyes is "changing the weapons' polarity", as he puts it. "From being an agent of death, they become an agent of life," he explains. "If you have a shovel that was formerly a weapon and that's being used by a school to plant a tree, there is activity organised around the planting of the tree. In the case of the instruments, an activity is organised around them. So there's a social event that has a psycho-

logical impact – you're winning over a situation that was seemingly intractable and overwhelming."

He likens the process to alchemy. "A weapon kills people and makes people in cities dominated by fear," he says. "But if you turn it into an instrument, it's like social gold. It brings people together and you build trust."

To escalate the project, Reyes is setting up workshops on turning weapons



weapons industry. For the situation to change radically, he says, it requires an ethical shift, where investing money in arms "should be considered a sin, a really dirty thing like child pornography. It's a cultural change which is still in a very early stage."

In the Lisson exhibition, a video shows the guns before they were given to Reyes being crushed under the wheels of a tank, a process which prompted a series of surreal collages featuring heavy artillery made into vast musical instruments. "The tanks left an impression on me," he says with a laugh. "I thought maybe if I can persuade [the army] again, I could get a tank and can make a whole carillon. So that's why I started making these collages. They're like sketches for sonic warfare. What I like about them is that the tanks are emasculated – there's this phallic element of the cannon, and it is almost that they've had a transgender operation, they've been castrated and now they are music machines."

Playfulness is fundamental to his outlook and his ambition. "I believe in serious fun," he says. "If you're focused

Gun law: Pedro Reyes's works on display include, above, *Machine Music (Decoy)* 2013, above right, *Machine Music (Tank 10)* 2013 and, below, *Imagine (Double Psalter)* 2012

on complaining or criticising, you have the impression that it has some effect but often very little change is produced. So that's why it's very important to have desire.

"If you desire something, then you have some imagination of what kind of different reality you'd like to see. And having wild or audacious desires is important. Daring to imagine makes you laugh."

Reyes's unashamed idealism in the face of Mexico's huge problems is refreshing, as is his conviction in the power of culture. "I definitely believe that art is the best way to produce social change," he says. And that process is underway – spectacularly, if relatively modestly – with Disarm.

Reyes knows that change has to happen beyond Mexico's borders but is positive about the future. "I think that probably the worst has passed. I want to believe that," he says.

■ **Pedro Reyes: Disarm** is at Lisson Gallery, NW1 (020 7724 2739, lissongallery.com) until May 4. Open Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm; Sat, 11am-5pm; closed Sundays. Admission free.

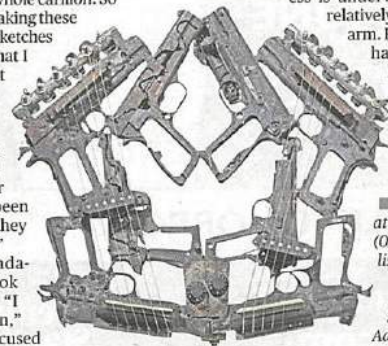
says Pedro Reyes of his mission to persuade fellow Mexicans to lay down their arms

into instruments throughout Mexico. "The hope is that these ideas are replicated," he adds, "and not necessarily just in Mexico but everywhere."

But while Disarm is already having a tangible local impact, he also recognises that he is in "a cultural battle" with wider implications. "It's virtually impossible to buy a weapon in Mexico but across the border it's the easiest thing. In Walmart and at the 7,000 sales

points on the border, you can buy high-powered machine guns, stuff with which you can take down an aeroplane, literally... The paradox is that the United States, for us, is a very dangerous country – it's dangerous for us to be neighbours with them."

He talks of the "invisible violence" which underpins the urban disarray he is confronting – governmental arms trading, financial investment in a global



Pedro Reyes dissects the war on drugs

By Geoff Edgers | GLOBE STAFF JULY 18, 2013



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

With "Pharmasphere," Pedro Reyes is improvising with high school students to open society's relationship with all drugs to new ways of scrutiny.

Pedro Reyes is laughing now, circling and high-fiving with the more than 50 high school students gathering for a rehearsal at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts earlier this week. It may feel like an icebreaking exercise at summer camp, but "Pharmasphere," the partially improvised show he's preparing with the kids, was inspired by the darkest of experiences in his native Mexico.

He has lost friends and relatives to violence he says was directly connected to the war on drugs. That campaign, coined during the Nixon administration and driven for decades by the US government's attempt to fight the national and international drug trades, has, he says, flooded his country with illegal guns. "Pharmasphere," being premiered Friday night in the MFA's Shapiro Family Courtyard, will feature teens from area schools as well as unrehearsed participants from the audience. Reyes calls them "spect-actors."

The purpose is to create a one-act play with multiple endings.

"The idea is to use this tool from theater that is often used as a warm-up exercise to use the stage as a way to dissect a situation that is quite complex," Reyes said this week in an interview at the SMFA. "How do we deal with drugs? The consumption, the addiction, the trade, the criminalization of drugs. And the reason to put this on the stage is basically to look at the subject not with a moral perspective but rather anthropological perspective. Trying to look at it objectively without putting a direct judgment on it."

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▼

Reyes, 41, calls himself a sculptor, but in reality, his theatrical creations — blending improvisation and a loose script — have earned him notice in recent years. In "Sanatorium," which premiered at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2011, Reyes created a kind of mock clinic with therapists ready to help visitors deal with a variety of emotional issues. His "Baby Marx" puppet comedy has been presented at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. And "Pharmasphere" will be staged at the Queens Museum of Art in New York in the fall.

Last week, Harvard University's Cultural Agents Initiative sponsored another of Reyes's projects. "Palas por Pistolas,"



PHARMASPHERE

Museum of Fine Arts, 617-267-9300.

<http://www.mfa.org>

Writers: Pedro Reyes, performance artist

Date of first performance: July 19

Ticket price: Free with museum admission

launched in 2007, uses shovels made from guns to plant trees. To date, more than 1,000 trees have been planted, the latest on Friday with Reyes at Arnold Arboretum.

Liz Munsell, the MFA's assistant curator of contemporary art who organized "Pharmasphere," has been familiar with his work for years. Munsell speaks fluent Spanish, was a Fulbright Scholar in Chile, and traveled extensively through South America. And she was thrilled to find out that Carla Fernández, Reyes's wife, would be in town for three weeks this summer as the artist-in-residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. That led Munsell to approach Reyes.

In an interview, Munsell talked of Reyes's work in relation to the Brazilian Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed," a technique created in the 1960s to inspire social and political change. She spoke of Reyes's training in architecture and sculpture and her own interest in linking those to performances.

But in the end, she says it is the artist's personality that she expects will define the experience, whether it's the workshops he's running this week or the performance itself Friday night. The rough script, which includes such characters as "Smart Mouth" in her hipster or skater outfit, frat boys in togas, and the Mexican president, is peppered with statistics: that far more people die from prescription drugs than illegal ones; that the United States spends billions of dollars on the drug war.

Reyes hopes to raise questions about what we, as a society, take both at the urging of doctors and on our own.

In an interview before the rehearsal, Reyes, who has a black beard sprinkled with gray, thick glasses, and waves his hands as he talks, smiles easily, even when he's talking about serious issues.

"The thing is, for instance, I'm not advocating for drug use but if we were to spend those resources on education or job creation, you would see better results," Reyes said.

He also emphasizes what he considers the problem with legal drugs. He talks about the addictive opiates prescribed by doctors, the pills that are often used where he

believes therapy could work. He considers alcohol a drug that should be examined more closely.

The idea is not, he says, to ban these drugs, because he believes prohibition doesn't work. He would like to discuss legalizing what's now against the law, to regulate, and to take the market away from criminals.

When Reyes gathered the teens at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts for a first rehearsal, it was a loosely structured session, with the students not given a script until partway through.

"What we are trying to do is look at it as if we were scientists and we were coming from another planet," Reyes said by way of an introduction, "and thinking, what is going on with the Homo sapiens? What is this fascination they have with all kinds of substances?"

The questions hung in the air as the teenagers waited. Then, Reyes led them in loosening-up exercises. Before long, they were laughing and forming a human sculpture created by Reyes.

Looking ahead to the Friday performance, Munsell said, "I think it's going to be a blast actually, because Pedro's such a fun guy. And these are issues I don't think teenagers get a chance to work through in their everyday lives."

What will happen during the performance? Reyes doesn't know.

"I'm interested in participation and how art can help you find solutions," he said. "The idea is that if you are uncomfortable and you feel something is wrong, you are invited to say so. If you don't like how it is, how would you do it right?"

Geoff Edgers can be reached at gedgers@globe.com.



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Reyes hopes to question what we, as a society, take at the urging of doctors and on our own.