

Santiago Sierra – New Works

30 November 2007 – 19 January 2008
29 & 52-54 Bell Street

For his new exhibition at the Lisson Gallery, Santiago Sierra presents new major works that relate to challenging projects realised in India, Mexico and Venezuela between 2005 and 2007. In addition, for the opening night of the exhibition, Bell Street will be the stage of a new sound installation.

The gallery at 52-54 Bell Street is dedicated to one of Santiago Sierra's most challenging sculptural projects to date, on display for the first time: *21 Anthropometric Modules Made of Human Faeces by the People of Sulabh International, India, 2005-06*. The 21 minimally shaped modules, each measuring 215 x 75 x 20cm, are made of human faeces mixed with Fevicol, an agglutinative plastic. The faecal matter was collected in New Delhi and Jaipur, and was left to dry for three years, during which time the material became inert and degraded back to an earth-like substance, rendering it harmless from a sanitary point of view. The modules are exhibited within the wooden cases in which they were moulded, dried and transported from New Delhi to London. The work seems to have just landed into the gallery, which functions as a frame, enabling the transubstantiation of the faecal matter into art.

This work has been made possible through the collaboration of Sulabh International in India, who sponsored the project by working on it without accepting any compensation. Within the minimal shapes of the modular elements, the work captures the history and present condition of Indian society and, in particular, of the members of its lowest cast: the scavengers. According to government statistics, an estimated one million people in India are manual scavengers (the majority are women) whose work involves the removal of human faeces from public and private latrines and open sewers. Unofficial estimates of the actual number are much higher. Scavengers clean public latrines on a daily basis, using a broom and a tin plate. Human faeces are piled into baskets carried on the head to a location that can be up to four kilometres away from the latrines. At all times, and especially during the rainy season, the content of the basket will drip onto a scavenger's hair, clothes and body. The continuous exposure to dirt and human faeces, coupled with poor living conditions, make people employed as manual scavengers vulnerable to serious illnesses, amongst which tuberculosis is the most common. Despite various governmental acts that prohibit the employment of scavengers or the construction of dry, non-flush toilets, this practice is still common throughout the country.

At 29 Bell Street, Sierra is presenting works that relate to five challenging projects recently realised in Venezuela and Mexico. *Economical Study of the Skin of Caracans, 2006*, is the first of three projects Sierra has realized in Caracas in the last year. The work is made of 35 black and white photographs. Although the piece has been made possible by the involvement of individuals who agreed to have their backs photographed, the subject of the work is not labour, but the socio-economical and racial segregation that still characterises the Venezuelan capital. The work's central elements are 'political monochromes', whose different gradation of greys, black and white represent the economic circumstances of individuals in relation to the colour of their skin. This work embodies many of the elements that have made Sierra's work prominent: the concurrent beauty

and repulsiveness of the body, the economy of means of the presentation, and the articulation of issues of power and social division into formal equations.

The other two works realised in Caracas function as a diptych that stands for the most obnoxious, widespread and yet intangible elements that permeate the Venezuelan capital: noise and pollution. With *Four Black Vehicles with the Engine Running inside an Art Gallery*, 2007, Sierra placed four cars inside a public art space, Sala Mendoza. The smoke produced by the engines had to be diverted through tubes running from the vehicles' exhaust pipes to the outside of the gallery. The work references a famous project by Gustav Metzger, *Project Stockholm, June (Phase 1)*, 1972/2007, finally realised in its full scale for the Sharjah Biennial 8. In the case of Sierra's work, the smoke produced by the running engines is not collected nor made visible, but dispersed in the already highly polluted metropolis. What is turned into a sculptural installation is the production and circulation of the polluting gas. Transient substances are injected into the atmosphere, disappearing into the air, but in this way making visible all sorts of other polluting gases that constantly overcast the city.

For *Concert for a Diesel Electric Plant*, 2007, Chacao Foundation's Experimental Room was converted into a completely blacked-out theatre. The stage was dominated by a diesel electric plant, surrounded by a wall of speakers amplifying the noise of the machine. These two projects reference the strategies of Futurism and Dadaism without celebrating the destructive elements of our urban environment, and are manifestations of Sierra's most irreverent and anarchic stance.

Submission (formerly Word of Fire), 2006-07, is an impressive work of monumental scale, realised in Anapra, a semi-desert area on the Mexican side of the border with the United States. Each letter, in Helvetica font, is 15m high – roughly the size of the letters of the Hollywood sign. While referencing the tradition of Land Art, the work spells out, enlarged to gigantic proportions and engraved into the landscape, the word SUMISIÓN (Submission). The work deals as much with a specific place as with the displacement of individuals constantly seeking a better condition of life. On the one hand, the piece denounces the reality of a situation of endured subjugation, at the site where the USA government is planning to build a huge wall along the border; where highly polluting factories are the cause of malformation, anencephaly and respiratory diseases; and where families of migrant natives of all different Mexican regions have settled seeking a job in factories or as street vendors, sometimes attempting and failing to cross the border. On the other hand, the same word is unacceptably offensive to a society facing an everyday situation of struggle. It foregrounds the local geo-political situation, like a Saint Thomas poking his finger in Christ's wound, as in Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (around 1600). Highlighting issues of security and ecological threats as their rationale, the local government intervened on two different occasions to prevent the completion of the work, and fire was never allowed to be lit in the cavities of the word SUMISIÓN. The installation at Lisson is a digital slide projection of over 500 images documenting the different stages of the making of this ambitious work.

1549 State Crimes, Sierra's most recent work on display, is the sound recording of a public reading that took place in Mexico City during three consecutive days and nights, from 22 to 25 October 2007. The public reading lists the name, place and date of death or disappearance of 1549 men and women who succumbed to political violence in Mexico between 2 October 1968 and 2 October 2007.

The list of names was obtained through a six month long investigation by a team of researchers from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma, Mexico City. This is not a complete list of all men and women who disappeared due to political violence in Mexico during the period, but the outcome of the first in-depth research of this kind, which is based exclusively on reliable sources, focusing on the most visible acts of repression that took place during the past forty years.

An additional work will be installed outside 29 Bell Street. *Door Plate*, 2006, lists all those to whom entrance is prohibited.

Santiago Sierra gained extensive international recognition in 2001, when he was commissioned by several major institutions worldwide. The resulting works include *Workers who cannot be paid, remunerated to remain inside cardboard boxes*, curated by Klaus Biesenbach for Kunstwerke Berlin, Berlin; *A person paid for 360 continuous working hours*, curated by Carolyn Christov Bakargiev for P.S.1, Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York; and *The wall of a gallery pulled out, inclined sixty degrees from the ground and sustained by five people*, curated by Montserrat Albores, for Acceso A Gallery, Mexico City. The same year he was invited to take part in the 49th Venice Biennale, where he exhibited *Persons paid to have their hair dyed blonde*, for which illegal vendors were invited to have their hair dyed blonde in return for \$60. Two years later Sierra was invited by Rosa Martinez to represent Spain at the 50th Venice Biennale. Sierra's previous exhibitions at Lisson have included the sealing of 29 Bell Street with corrugated iron in 2002, and in 2004, the spraying of ten Iraqis wearing protective clothing, with toxic insulating foam.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a new illustrated catalogue in English and Spanish: *Santiago Sierra – 7 Trabajos / 7 Works*.

Notes to Editors

Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, who sponsored *21 Anthropometric Modules Made of Human Faeces by the People of Sulabh International, India*, is a pioneering NGO based in New Delhi. It has developed an efficient and economically viable scavenging-free flush toilet system that has been implemented throughout India, in order to reduce the still widespread, inhuman practice of scavenging. www.sulabhinternational.org
Santiago Sierra's website: www.santiago-sierra.com

Upcoming

On Thursday 6 December 2007, 8pm, Resonance FM will broadcast a selection of Santiago Sierra's sound works, in a programme curated by Tim Girven. www.resonancefm.com

In December 2007 Sierra is presenting two new works at Matucana 100, Santiago de Chile, Chile

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