

FRANKFURTER
KUNSTVEREIN

MECHANISMEN DER
GEWALT

Regina José Galindo / 19. Februar – 17. April 2016

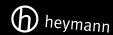
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Steinernes Haus am Römerberg
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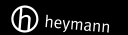
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Regina José Galindo

The Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo addresses physical and psychological violence that is caused by unbalanced power relations in her work. Her most important medium for this investigation is her own body, which she defines in her actions as a political body. With her performances she creates striking images that are documented on photographs and video, thus mediating the live events beyond their fixation to a specific place and time. She deliberately submits herself to extreme situations, which investigate the interdependencies between active and passive positions in a field of power relations. Although Galindo's practice can be associated with the tradition of Body Art and artists such as Ana Mendieta, Marina Abramović or Ulrike Rosenbach, it originally derived from poetry. In most cases, the artist composes short texts prior to a performance, which serve as a metaphorical foundation for an action or explain the specific context of a work. In the exhibition, these texts are present in form of wall texts in order to give space to Galindo's voice and writing. The exhibition gives an overview of Galindo's whole oeuvre, highlighting the following key topics of her work.

A History of Violence – Guatemala

Regina José Galindo grew up during the time of the civil war in Guatemala (1960–1996). More than 200.000 people died and thousands had to leave the country because of this violent conflict, fought between leftist guerrilla organizations and the government. Galindo's practice has been shaped by this turmoil in her country that persisted also after the signing of several peace treaties in 1996. One of her earliest and also best-known works is **“¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?”** (2003) (engl. Who can erase the traces?). This performance was a direct reaction to the candidature of Efraín Ríos Montt for the presidential elections in 2003. Ríos Montt has been president and dictator of Guatemala already in 1982 after a coup d'état. During his one year of presidency he was responsible for numerous massacres on the indigenous population and remained exempt from punishment for decades. During her performance, in commemoration of the victims of the armed conflict and as a sign of protest against Ríos Montt's candidature, Regina José Galindo walks from the Constitutional Court to the National Palace in Guatemala City. With her feet dipped in blood, she leaves highly symbolic traces on her path. Eventually, in 2013, a trial was opened against Ríos Montt and he became

the first dictator in the world to be charged with and convicted of genocide in his own country. This event has been a catalyst for a whole new group of works by the artist. The sculpture in the entrance hall of the Frankfurter Kunstverein shows the Spanish lettering **“ESTOY VIVA”**, which can be translated with “I am alive!”. Most of the victims of the violent conflict in Guatemala were part of the indigenous population of the country. They were accused of supporting the Marxist guerrilla, one reason for the military government to literally deprive them of their livelihood through a policy of “tierra arrasada” (engl. “scorched-earth” policy). It was the protests and efforts of the Ixil communities that lead to the possibility of this case eventually going to court. In the proceedings of the trial their testimonies of families being killed, of raping and torturing, were heard for the first time. The exclamation “I am alive!”, which has been cast into steel by Galindo, also stems from these hearings. The works **“La Verdad”** (2013) (engl. The Truth), shown in the basement of the Kunstverein, and **“Tierra”** (2013) (engl. The Earth) both deal with the protest against forgetting on the one hand and the struggle for justice on the other.



Regina José Galindo „Tierra“, 2013, Photography, 90 × 135 cm, © Photo: Bertrand Huet
Courtesy the artist and prometeogallery di Ida Pisani, Milan / Lucca

Power through Violence – Femicide

The term femicide was introduced in order to better denote and grasp violence against women because of their sex. Due to an increase in violence against women, femicide has been discussed in Latin America as a problem related to social power structures since the beginning of 2000. Guatemala is among the countries with the highest homicide rate of women in this region of the world. Galindo repeatedly addresses this discourse in her work. The works **“No perdemos nada con nacer”** (2000) (engl. We don't lose anything by being born) and **“Perra”** (2007) (engl. Bitch), which are assembled in the exhibition rooms upstairs, speak of this subject matter. Also connected to this debate is the work **“Piel”** (2001) (engl. Skin), which was commissioned for the 49th Venice Biennial. To deprive someone of their hair is usually seen as a way to humiliate and to mark someone as standing outside of society. Galindo shaves off all her bodily hair and then walks naked through the streets of Venice, exposing herself to the gaze of passersby. Her artist friend Anibal López, who himself is known for politically provocative works, documented the performance. In the following years Galindo started to increasingly incorporate the reactions of visitors into her performances and became interested in the position of the viewer as an active element in her work.

Activeness and Passiveness

In many of her works Regina José Galindo attributes an ambivalent role to the audience and participants of her performances, as well as to the viewers of their documentations. One example is the performance **“Caparazón”** (2010) (engl. Shell) that took place in Naples, which is famous for its domes: Galindo lies naked in a fetal position under a perspex shell. A group of people armed with sticks, who had signed up voluntarily beforehand, hits the small dome relentlessly until their weapons start to break. The participants seem to let themselves get carried away by their aggression and step into the role of the perpetrator. Galindo surrenders herself to this situation. She appears to be protected by the perspex shell, but this protection could break anytime. Visible in the background are the ones who only take part in this event as passive spectators – just like the viewers of the video documentation. Galindo initiates an active involvement that is carried out by the participants and through which the performance

gains a considerable momentum. Her purposeful employment of the shifting boundaries between passive and active spectatorship leads to a fundamental questioning of the consequences of our actions.

The Body as Sculpture

In some performances Galindo uses her own body as a kind of sculpture by way of remaining motionless. In works like **“Mazorca”** (2014) (engl. Corn), this becomes most apparent in situations she arranges in different landscapes. State territories and the soil of the ground within their borders are not just the backdrop but an integral part of power struggles. **“Mazorca”** speaks of this fact in more ways than one. Regina José Galindo stands in the middle of a field – first hidden by high corn cobs. Around her men are cutting down the corn with a scythe. The work creates a historical connection to testimonies from the time of the civil war that reported how government troops purposefully destroyed fields and acres to rid the surviving victims of their livelihood and wield power over them. Today, cornfields are sites of another, more global power struggle. The company Monsanto develops genetically modified corn, which is supported by a US law for the protection and safety of plants. This means that farmers are not allowed anymore to grow their corn seeds themselves, but they have to buy patented seeds every year. Guatemala signed the so-called **“Monsanto Law”** under the pressure of its trade relations with the US. But in 2014 protests, mainly initiated by small farmers of the indigenous population, led to a repeal of this law. In her work **“Mazorca”**, Regina José Galindo interweaves past and present through the symbol of the cornfield and its respective denotations.

About Secrecy: “Secreto de Estado”

For her presentation at the Frankfurter Kunstverein Regina José Galindo developed a new performance that took place during the opening of the exhibition. Under the title “Secreto de Estado” (2016) (engl. State Secret) we see Regina José Galindo lying on a stretcher, carried by two volunteers. Blood is dripping from the stretcher to the floor. What the audience cannot see: the blood comes from a plastic bag under Galindo’s back. It contains her own blood which had been sampled before. The body of the artist is suspended in motionlessness and reveals what is hidden only over time. With the performance “Secreto de Estado” Regina José Galindo questions what we think we know. She uses her own body as metaphor for a political body: it reveals itself to the audience and therefore to a public. What we see is a staging in which the visible and the real course of events deviate. “Secreto de Estado” is an allegory of our perception and awareness of political conditions and relations, which might lead to the wrong conclusions and consequences.



Regina José Galindo „Secreto de Estado“, 2016, Documentation of the performance at Frankfurter Kunstverein, Photo: Neven Allgeier © Frankfurter Kunstverein

Biography

Regina José Galindo was born in Guatemala City in 1974, where she lives and works. She participated in the 49th (2001), the 51st (2005), the 53rd (2009) and last in the 54th Venice Biennial in Italy (2011). Furthermore, she was part of the 10th Sharjah Biennial, United Arab Emirates (2011), the 31st Pontevedra Biennial, Spain (2010), the 17th Sydney Biennial, Australia (2010), the 10th Ha-vana Biennial, Cuba (2009), the 2nd Moscow Biennial, Russia (2007), the 3rd Auckland Triennial, New Zealand (2007), the 4th Valencia Biennial, Spain (2007), the 2nd Prague Biennial, Czech Republic (2005), the 3rd Tirana Biennial, Albania (2005) and the 3rd Lima Biennial, Peru (2002). She was awarded the Golden Lion of the 51st Venice Biennial in 2005 for Best Young Artist. Galindo’s work is part of several important museum collections such as the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA, the Castello di Rivoli – Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin, Italy, the Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zurich, Switzerland, the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, USA, the Museum of Contemporary Art, San José, Costa Rica, the Pérez Miami Art Museum and the Cisneros Fontanals Collection, both Miami, USA.



Portrait Regina José Galindo, 2016
© the artist

Arcangelo Sassolino

The creaking of wood, glass shatters on steel, the sudden noise of a loud bang, followed by motionlessness and silence: In his sculptures and installations, Italian sculptor Arcangelo Sassolino brings the materials he uses to their limits, creating images of inner mental conditions. These works are based on questions about existence and finitude and the precarious balance between the two. The exhibition "Mechanisms of Power" at the Frankfurter Kunstverein presents a selection of monumental works and gives an insight into Sassolino's artistic practice. Specifically for the exhibition, the artist has also created a new work with the title "Purgatory" (2016).

Sassolino develops mechanically precise and materially dense sculptures and large scale installations. The materials used he borrows from big industry, which gives them an air of cool, factual inanimateness. Displayed in a minimalist manner, materials like glass, steel, concrete and nitrogen are being transformed by the workings of massive forces. In an interplay between the generation and consumption of energy, between tension and resistance, these materials are subject to the competing physical forces that keep our world in balance. To achieve the highest possible level of accuracy, Sassolino calculates the attributes of his works in collaboration with mechanical engineers, physicians and mathematicians. The form of the sculptures is therefore defined by their function. The materials used are brought to their limits by gravity, pressure and tension, forces which suspend them in a state of near destruction at any time. In this residue of unpredictability, risk and control collide: the artist's liminal experiments carry with them the danger of sudden destruction.

The sculptures of Sassolino inhabit the rooms of the Frankfurter Kunstverein like sleepers and only over time reveal their true nature. The processes initiated by Sassolino remain invisible over a long period of time, while their effects are immediate and enormous. Like secret agents who carry out their mission only after waiting a long time, the machines point towards the possibility of their activation only formally. Again and again, these machines lie still; then all of a sudden, movement occurs. Many times, these moments of abrupt activity generate impressive acoustic phenomena. We can only guess the impact of a setting like the installation "Afasia 1" (2008), when glass bottles hit a steel wall with 900 kilometers per hour and burst into countless particles.

The work "Afasia 2" (2008) on the other hand, remains in continual standby mode and functions as a kind of reservoir for vast amounts of energy: its steel case contains 250 bar compressed nitrogen. The potential for destruction resting inside the sculpture manifests itself above all in the relationship with the viewer, whose perception is altered by the knowledge of the destructive force. For the work "Untitled" (2006-2007) Sassolino utilizes the claw of an excavator. Dismantled from its original body, it has been deprived of the capability of fulfilling its function. Although its immense power and presence are maintained in Sassolino's installation, those are employed in vain against the stone floor of the exhibition space.



Arcangelo Sassolino „Untitled“, 2006-7; steel and hydraulic pump

Photo: Norbert Miguletz © the artist; Courtesy Galleria Continua and Galerie Rolando Anselmi

Held only by one steel rope, the 800 kilogram heavy sculpture „Purgatory“ (2016) is suspended above the ground. A hydraulic piston applies alternating pressure onto the six wooden beams, each of which is four meters long. This external force causes these tightly constrained planks to align under the massive pressure. Each beam can move only within a minimal space, the hydraulic construction forces the separate pieces into one inseparable unit. Arcangelo Sassolino transfers a calculated power onto the wood, which is now trying to resist, adjust or bend. The beams respond to this pressure according to their individual features. In the course of time, moments of rest are incessantly followed by action. The extreme tension cannot be seen but heard by the viewer as a creaking noise fills the room. It remains uncertain, whether the wood will resist the forces.



Arcangelo Sassolino „Purgatory“, 2016, Oil piston, steel, wood, hydraulic system , 360 × 400 x 35 cm, Photo: Norbert Miguletz; © the artist, Courtesy Galleria Continua and Galerie Rolando Anselmi

The striking ‘machine sculptures’ by Arcangelo Sassolino call into question their own principles, of construction, execution and existence due to the fact that they carry with them the possibility of their own destruction. Disintegration also signifies the release of energies, destruction means transformation into another state. Sassolino’s artistic practice is therefore neither solely focused on the creation of forces nor the simple destruction of materials. In the end, his work resists a binary opposition between existence and mortality. Despite their massive scale and power, these machines are not indestructible. In fact, they stage and display the possibility of their becoming (activation) and their termination (destruction) both at the same time.

Biography

Arcangelo Sassolino was born in Vicenza, Italy in 1967, where he lives and works. His solo exhibitions include Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, USA (2016), MACRO Museum, Rome, Italy (2011), Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2008), the environmental projects presented in Z33 House for Contemporary Art in Hasselt, Belgium (2010) and in the context of “Art and The City” in Zurich, Switzerland (2012). Sassolino’s work has been featured in a number of group exhibitions, including shows at 104, Paris, France (2015), Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi, Florence, Italy (2012, 2010), Swiss Institute, New York, USA (2011), Tinguely Museum, Basel, Switzerland (2010), Autocenter, Berlin, Germany (2009), Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy (2009), Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden (2008), FRAC, Rheims, France (2007) and ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany (2004).



Portrait Arcangelo Sassolino
Photo: Pamela Randon
© Pamela Randon

Accompanying Programme

- Thursday,
18. Februar, 8.30 pm Performance „Secreto de Estado“
by Regina José Galindo
- Thursday,
17. März, 7 pm Artist´s Tour
with Arcangelo Sassolino
- Thursday,
7. April, 7p m Curator´s Tour
with Franziska Nori (Director and Curator)

Guided tours of both exhibitons take place every two weeks on Thursdays at 6.30 pm and on Sundays at 2 pm.
Tour fee is 3 € plus admission.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Thursday, 6.30 pm: | Sunday, 2 pm: |
| 25.2.2016 | 21.2.2016 |
| 10.3.2016 | 6.3.2016 |
| 24.3.2016 | 20.3.2016 |
| | 3.4.2016 |
| | 17.4.2016 |

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