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bride of the sun

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Bride of the Sun

500 years Latin America and the Low Countries

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99 Carlos Capelán

Landscape and map

on. It is as though Capelán is driven to leave his mark on everything and with every material he works with.

He has made us a witness to what seems a private act, at once remote and familiar, a shared past, seducing us to enter a terrain which is composed of a multilayered imagery we have participated in creating.

Carlos Capelán's life is as complex, multifaceted and fascinating as his work. His diaspora seems to coincide with that of many millions of people. As a young man he was forced to leave Uruguay because of his commitment to fight totalitarianism, the outrageous injustices done to those in favour of freedom, the torture and systematic silencing of anyone opposed to the fascist oriented government.

After leaving Uruguay, he became a political organizer in Chile during the times of Salvador Allende. He was imprisoned and nearly killed when Allende was overthrown, but was given asylum in Sweden where he now lives. He remarks: "Even though it is possible to return to Uruguay, return is never possible, going on is".

The meaning of Capelán's imagery seems to resist definition, or translation into words, although — and nevertheless — his obsessive linear drawing renders these images as writing, as a score, or as a diary. One follows the band and fingerprints going over the surface of a wall, paper, or any material he may choose, like skin that is being tattooed. What appears in the process is strikingly figurative but, paradoxically, they persist looking like writing. There are haunting heads, cut up in fragments, hands searching for something to hold, gesturing as indicators or as reminders of probable directions. There are bodies, embracing or giving birth, carriers of omniscient eyes, or decapitated, martyred, gushing blood that flows into the next images, feeding and nurturing those. All of these are recurring, repeated again and again.

The whole is made up of the parts and simultaneously the parts are whole. But, to isolate one element would be to see a fragment, a piece of documentation that is detached from the on-going process Capelán is involved with.

One of his strongest purposes is to generate an art, a 'language' with which to articulate his experiences, not those of an 'a priori' formulated agenda.

A work that can show pairs of opposites and contradictions coexisting. Capelán is also not interested in producing an installation or 'finished product' preferring the work to happen, to afford it a context it can develop, breathe and move in.

Everything that occurs in his work is closely connected to the special condition of being an Uruguayan exile living in Sweden. Instead of assimilating into his new environment, or hanging on to some kind of Latin American minority in exile and becoming the subject of the exotic 'other', he has opted for another strategy. His is to articulate work in accord with his own specific needs, which have over the years in exile become increasingly more personal. Aware that the 'mainstream' may define his work in relationship to their references and their own discourse, Capelán utilizes this as part of his creative landscape without allowing their definitions to become attached to his work.

Another concern reflected as a personal preference, deals with the notion that the repetitiveness of certain figures turns these into signs, as in mass media or even baroque art, creating a more generic and conceptual framework. But for the most part, it points strongly to the peculiar landscape of the individual memory which is especially poignant in the daily life of an exile. It therefore seems that these images have been there with us all the time, much in the same way that certain thoughts and ideas have always been in our memory since, to some extent, we have all been 'exiled' from our past. In exile, the surroundings are perceived to change all the time, but memory remains constantly the same and is repeating itself over and over.

In Capelán's journey as an artist — he began painting when he was fourteen — he has passed through various places, such as Mexico, Cuba and the U.S. In Mexico, he was invited to teach burin engraving at the Molino de Santo Domingo School, in 1979/80, and met Carla Rippey and Jaime Palacios. He also showed at the 'Galería Alternativa' in Coyocacán, Mexico City. In 1984 he participated in the first Havana Biennial, where he met, among others, José Bedía, Juan Francisco Elso and Luis Camnitzer, who invited him, with a grant, to his summer printmaking studio in Italy. In 1986, he also met Silvia Gruner, María Magdalena Campos, Adolfo Patiño Magali Lara, and again Jaime Palacios and the Cuban artists in Mexico.

1991

Installation: stones, books, earth, ink, bottles, burned books, lamps, etc.

Lund, Collection of the artist

The very first response and what strikes the viewer when looking at an installation of Carlos Capelán, is the sensation of being in the presence of a ritualistic process that is in the shaping, that does not seem to have a precise beginning nor a specific end. It is as though you expect the artist to still be there, working it out.

His powerful drawings, done with mud, sand or ink, the stones and rocks, the stacks of eroded, rescued or burned old textbooks, the fragile branches, the salt and sugar, and all that he incorporates, appear to be part of a continuum. The drawings incessantly move around, up and down a wall, across a floor, drifting into corners, onto the ceiling, and so

Some of the issues and concerns reflected in his work are shared by these artists. Capelán uses earth from all over the world, principally interested in combining the earth from 'Tierra del Fuego' with that of Lapland, thereby confronting two extreme peripheries of the world we live in. These polarities he has set up as a collection of earth sent to him by friends from other parts of the world. He thus reverts the meaning of the 'Other' to that of the other's experience of his/her world, rather than taking objects of the 'Other'. The earth is one of the most powerful tools of associations with nature, it brings to mind femininity, the obscure and interior space which constitutes the originating and germinating force. This he has coupled with ashes, seen by Capelán as part of a Latin-American landscape where one is constantly in touch with the energies of those that were before us, those that left behind something like 'Memorias del Fuego' (Memories of the Fire).

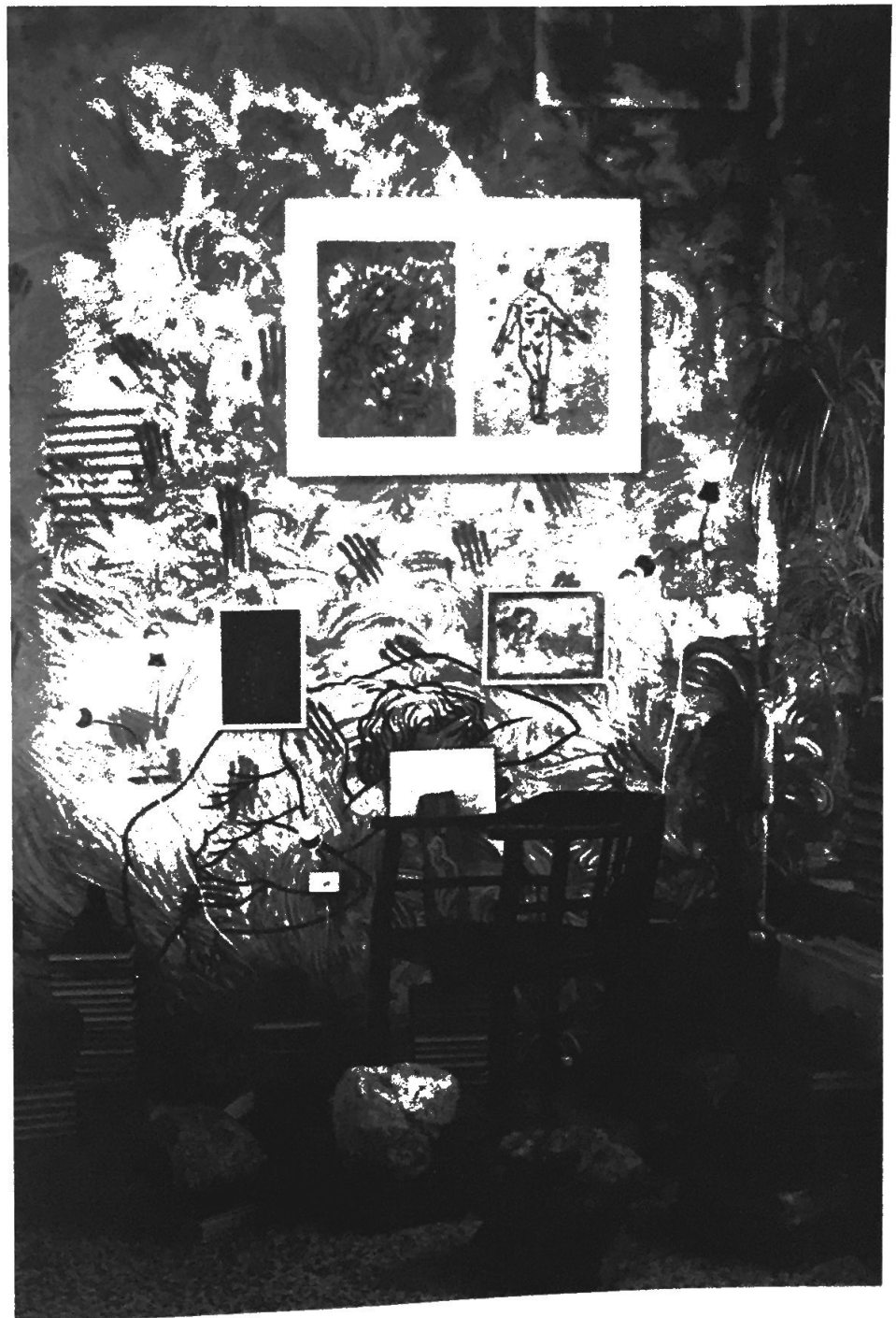
The old textbooks he employs as a cultural testament, appear as stacks held down by the weight of a rock, like certain small devotional and ritualistic monuments one sees in the countryside. There are also burned books whose ashes have been put to rest in bottles like those we throw out to sea in hope that the message is received somewhere. Then there are books with 'painted' pages, that illustrate some of the ideas expressed in his installations.

On the walls, aside from the images, and as an analogy, Capelán integrates quotes from books, magazines, proverbs, art history anthropology, sociology and quotes from friends, inscribed into the earthy, mud and pigment surfaces.

The lighting these installations require is of a non-descript, non-museum and un-gallery type, more like the anonymous, cheap mass-produced reading lamps we find everywhere, from the home of those uninterested in design, to the hidden offices of any Latin-American secret police.

The totality of these and other elements become like a living map. A map that acts provokingly as a global vision of culture, one where local and regional projects are in dialogue with modernist premises. Capelán reveals a Latin-American entity that moves in the border areas between who and what they are, and the always ambivalent Western notion of 'Ego' and the 'Other', otherness of magical ethnicity.

Carla Stellweg



(Carlos Capelán was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1948. He lives and works in Sweden.)

Naturaleza recuperada

1990

Installation, rubber and stones
400 × 180 × 200
Mexico City, Collection of the artist

Gabriel Orozco is a twenty-nine year old artist, born in Jalapa in the State of Vera Cruz, Mexico. From the intensely sensorial surroundings of Jalapa's mountainous landscape, full of tropical trees and flowers, coffee plants, avocado and rubber trees, he moved to Mexico City and in 1981 enrolled in the National University School of Art.

In Jalapa, a city that has one of Mexico's best and experimental university art departments, Orozco was also inspired by the extraordinary museum of anthropology and archaeology located there.

The National University's Art School in Mexico City is situated right next to the Zocalo plaza, where the pre-Columbian Templo Mayor, with its 'Tzompantli' (an Aztec pyramid erected with the stone-carved skulls of the sacrificed victims) has been excavated, removing the colonial palaces that were built on top after the Spanish conquest in 1521. The 16th-century cathedral, facing the Templo Mayor, has since been gradually sinking into the ground. Amidst this diverse and starkly contrasting imagery, loaded with historical and political meaning, Orozco makes his art. His work derives from a direct approach to his natural surroundings, walking through the streets and exploring each corner of the landscape. As he walks, he finds the propitious place

to pause and combine two or three found elements, connecting them and thereby provoking a meaning to their otherwise ignored existence as 'junk'. Orozco is not another silent witness but an active participant among the random objects of his city. The motivating energy is centred around Orozco's touching and feeling the visual evidence he encounters in the much abused, ravaged, pillaged, destroyed and reconstructed, earthquake prone, contaminated capital of Mexico City with its twenty million inhabitants. The actions he takes along his path have little to do with an artistic intention. Sometimes he is not clear about the conceptual intention either, and the relations that are generated between the various elements and their surrounding space do not have a self-evident meaning.

The purpose is for them to just be there, placed together and combined by Orozco in order to have something new occur. How did the object/element get to be in that specific space? Why do I feel this when I face these things which for many people go unnoticed? These are some of the questions the artist is posing and asking himself. And by acting upon the elements, arranging or re-arranging them, intervening as it were, Orozco does not turn them into fetishes or into something they do not need to be. It is Orozco's personal need, to familiarize, to touch and feel, and not to be foreign to the images that have attracted his attention. At the same time, he hopes to find a certain structural essence, and some order among the chaotic, fragmented world he lives in. Mexico City is the subject of constant archaeology, in and of itself. Sometimes Orozco's street interventions become 'inhabited', acquiring a personality. This is reflected in the titles Orozco gave them, such as *Heroe del Temblor* (Hero of the Earthquake) or *Doctor en su Jardín* (Doctor in his Garden).

From these outdoor pieces, resulting from a fluid moving about and in a given urban setting, Orozco began working indoors in a studio, doing pieces that eventually can be installed in a home, gallery or museum. In *Expropiación y Encubrimiento* (Expropriation and Covering Up), 1990, Orozco set up two circular rubber hoses, each pair connected with wood and hung on either side of a helmet shaped structure which is attached to a rectangle of compressed, rubber hoses. A circular wheel of carved stone, used for grinding 'nixtamal' (corn dough for tortillas), sits passively on the ground in front. The immediate allusion is to pre-Columbian deities, sacrificial stone, the objects are mute and they have been cancelled by other objects. But at the same time, there is a pervasive sense of some futuristic scenario at hand, conjuring visions of a hybrid state of affairs somewhere in the twenty-first century, as in

the movie *Blade Runner*. Orozco has annulled a fixed time, making the future and the past interchangeable and intermittent. During 1990 Orozco also showed an installation in New York City, at the now defunct Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, where he elaborated on these possibilities in his *Naturaleza Recuperada* (Nature Recuperated). In this installation he used a huge black rubber inner-tube of a gigantic 'Mack' trailer. Inflated like a globe it sits in front of four columns of door mats, made of re-cycled car tyres, as though the original trailer had left its mark on the mats. Two circular wheels of the carved stone used for grinding 'nixtamal' are positioned in front but with the structure resembling the rims of a car wheel, one that has shed its tyre/skin. In an abstract sense, there is the referral to industrialized materials, nature recuperated, because of its minerals, petroleum/oil and rubber. On another level, where the composition is concerned, the piece remits to a stylistic pre-Columbian symmetrical geometry that likens order. Parallel to this, the aspect of humour, of seeing a doormat made of used, recycled car tires, which have become participants in a ritualistic situation.

In 1991 Orozco began to use clay, the most immediate and oldest form of 'sculpting'. The earth as mother, the fertilizing energy from which all life originates, 'la madre tierra'. The work is entitled *Mi corazón son mis manos*. Not by accident did he arrive at the heart shape. Digging hands into the moist clay and pressing, impressing, transmitting his own being into and with the primeval substance of the soil, Orozco's body and soul are united in the heart of clay. It underscores a personal attitude towards artmaking, away from a national cultural statement and one which Orozco believes brings artists together. "Any person can make a clay heart", he has said. It doesn't come out of a passive, contemplative attitude toward art, but is rooted in objective events which become 'malena prima' the source, and the direct and intimate contact with this. Orozco considers symbols and stereotypes, national and otherwise, too removed and cold, easy to draw from. His concern is with an expressiveness that demonstrates a passion for the materials and issues at hand.

An expressiveness that is evocative and emanates the emotive and erotic forces of art. The clay heart is, therefore, not a metaphor but the embodiment of the actual organ, the heart of the matter, the one that takes, gives and is its own offering.

Carla Stellweg

(Gabriel Orozco was born in 1962 in Jalapa, Vera Cruz, Mexico. He lives and works in Mexico.)