

Miguel Angel Rios

Portfolio 2022

Miguel Angel Rios

Born in Catamarca, Argentina, Miguel Angel Rios (1943) now divides his time between Mexico City and New York. He received worldwide appreciation when he first showed his work *A Morir (Till Death)*: a ground-breaking three-channel video of audacious ambition exploring colonialism and globalization by creating a darkly romantic narrative with spinning black and white tops—'trompos'.

Rios made several works in the series of spinning-top videos, in which he expresses his primary concerns of social power struggles, violence and geopolitics on an intriguing symbolic level. In his more recent films, Rios continues to compose powerful metaphors for violent subjects, combining control and coincidence to represent the uncertainty and temporariness of the human condition.

Miguel Angel Rios (1943, Catamarca, Argentina) has had solo exhibitions at museums across the world, including Röda Sten Konsthall, Göteborg, SE (2019), Galería Barro, Buenos Aires, AR (2019), MUCEM, Marseilles, FR (2017), ASU Art Museum, Temple, USA (2015), Museum of Fine Arts Houston, USA (2013), Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City (2013), Des Moines Art Center, Iowa, USA (2012), Museo Carrillo Gil, México DF (2011), Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2009), Maison Européenne de la Photographie MEP, Paris (2011 and 2009), Fries Museum, Leeuwarden (2008), and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington (2005). His videos have been screened during La Biennale de Lyon, FR (2015), Liverpool Biennial, GB (2011), and), the Biennale of Sydney, AU (2010). He participated in group exhibitions at a.o. Suzanne Dellar

Sound sketch for META, 2010, paper cut-out, photograph (META is an audio installation, 2010, duration 5:40 min.)

Centre, Tel Aviv, IL (2021), Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA (2021), UCCA Dune, Qinhuangdao, CN (2019), Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo, IT (2018), The Parkview Museum Singapore (2017-2018), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland, NZ (2016), Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, DE (2015), Centro del Carmen, Valencia, ES (2014), New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, USA (2014), Musée d'Art Contemporain de Nîmes, FR (2013), Busan Museum, KR (2012), Tranen Contemporary Art Center, DK (2012), Molaa Museum of Latin American Art, USA (2011), The National Museum in Warsaw, PL (2010), and Daros Exhibitions, Zürich, CH (2009). He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and has received numerous awards including the John Guggenheim Fellowship (1998) for his work exploring the mediums of painting, drawing and collage.



Terra Incognita 2022



The Four Winds, 1993-1994, Pencil, Cibachrome mounted on pleated canvas, 210 cm diameter (74,8 inch)



Overview at AKINCI
Left: *The Four Winds*, 1993-1994, Pencil, Cibachrome mounted on pleated canvas, 210 cm diameter (74,8 inch)

Endless (2015)

“Another characteristic of Ríos is his ceaseless innovation; he is as restless artistically as he is geographically, always pushing himself to work with new materials, new subjects. This was clearly the case with the most recent video in the exhibition, *Endless* (2015);[...] the camera lingers for six-and-a-half minutes over a group of immense wall-like structures made from densely woven-together thorny branches. To create these massive objects, which are made from the huisache or sweet acacia plant, a large indigenous Mexican shrub, Ríos and a crew of 10 worked for four months, cutting the plants with machetes and then pressing them into wooden boxes to create the thousands of modular units required to build the huge walls. Possibly the most abstract of Ríos’s videos, *Endless* is certainly the most meditative. In contrast to the strenuous and often violent activity at the center of his previous videos, the pace is slow and stately. The thick, freestanding walls remain stationary until almost the very end, with nearly all movement coming from the gliding camera. While a few shots recall Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, *Endless* is chiefly in dialogue with abstract painting, especially that of Barnett Newman and, when a zoom fills the entire screen with the wall of entangled thorns, Jackson Pollock.”

Excerpt from *Nomadic Games*, by Raphael Rubinstein, *Art in America*, 2016

Untitled, film still from *Endless*, 2015
inkjet print on 300 gr. Hahnemühle cotton paper, dibond, 80 x 120 cm

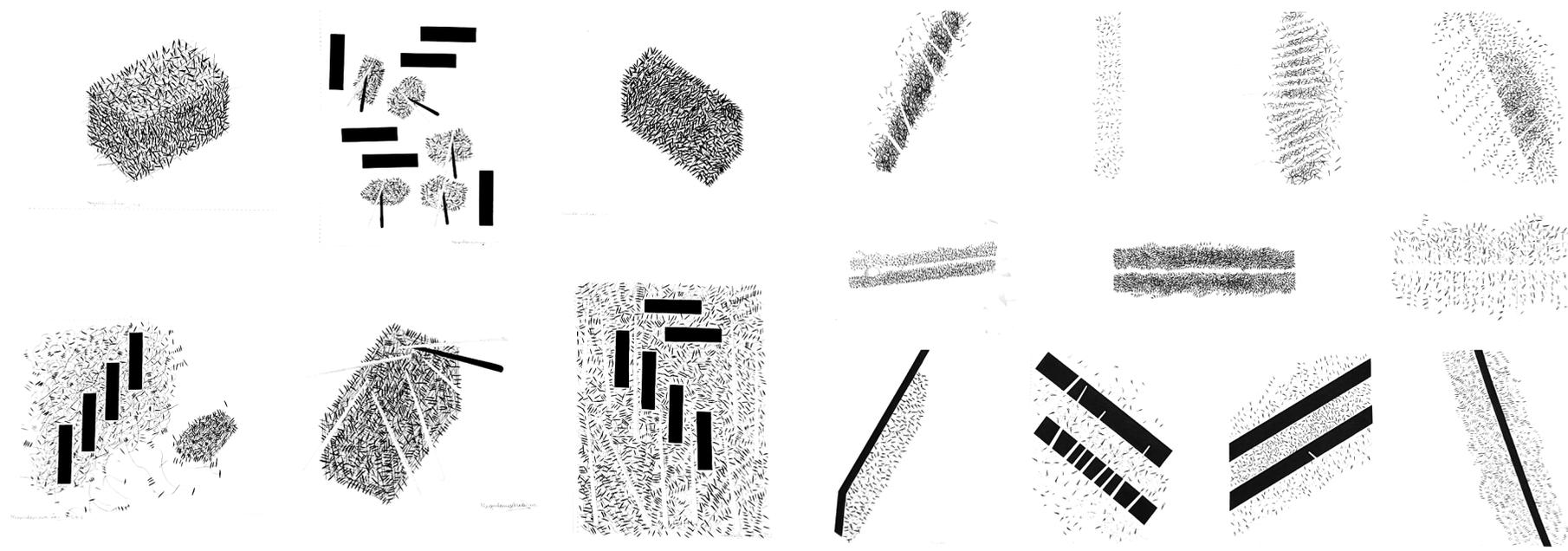
Watch *Endless* [here](#)
password: endless123





Untitled no. 17, film still from *Endless*, 2015

inkjet print on 300 gr. Hahnemühle cotton paper, dibond, 80 x 120 cm



Drawings from the series *Endless*, 2015
ink and pencil on paper, various dimensions

Piedras Blancas (2014)

The project *Piedras Blancas (White Stones)* explores the performance of objects and matter choreographed in a natural landscape. Undefined as to what they are made of, these solid and heavy white balls rapidly roll down from the side of a mountain. Their paths are determined by the existing trails in the landscape, channels eroded by streams of water created by the rain.

The intervention of an unknown element, deployed into the natural conditions of the desert mountain landscape and responding through gravity and chance, lead to an inevitable search for metaphors. Are these rolling stones the supply of drugs coming from the South into the North across the US-Mexico border? Are we witnessing some kind of game, or is it a catastrophe in the making? Are the inclines of the paths the effect of economic globalization on under-privileged populations? Do the white stones represent people caught in a migrating frenzy?

These questions may never be answered, yet there is a haunting sense of urgency in the poetic juxtaposition of motion and matter.

As the white stones proliferate throughout the landscape and begin to mount, the viewer is placed in an all too familiar situation: that of witnessing a rapid unfolding of events (often catastrophic) that remain elusive, beyond comprehension.

Watch *Piedras Blancas* [here](#)
(password: piedras123).



Piedras Blancas, 2014
one-channel video projection, 4:53 min.



Piedras Blancas, 2014
one-channel video projection, 4:53 min.

Landlocked (2014)

Bolivia has suffered a denial of access to the Pacific Ocean for several centuries. The video *Landlocked* is a metaphor for desire. Dogs from the mountains of the Andes, trained to dig and work, create the illusion of finding a way that leads to the ocean.

Watch *Landlocked* [here](#)
(password: landlocked123).



Landlocked (stills), 2014
one-channel video projection, 4:25 min.

Get Lost: The Urgent Work of Miguel Angel Rios

by Natasha Boas

Huffington Post, 18 March 2016

Modernity, Jean-Michel Rabaté tells us, may be nothing but its own ghost. Mexico City and New York-based Miguel Angel Rios' work spans two centuries and responds and interrogates, as inflection and affliction, to the ghosts of the "pre-post-trans-anti-hyper-neo." As such, Rios has garnered the stature of one Latin America's leading conceptual artists and the exhibition "Landlocked" exposes an artist that deals with issues beyond territorial and global concerns at the intersection of video, land art, conceptual art, sound art and performance.

Rios' spatial-political videos bridge the gap between post-modernity's formative context and codified social practices by introducing a kind of "spectral modernity". Through his recurring use of cubes, spirals and games—themes and representations we see throughout the twentieth century in art and literature— Rios is attacking the modern and after-modern art debate surrounding the start and end points of modernity: when does modernity begin and end? The artist asks in his notes about the work "Are we inside or outside the cube?" For Rios, the task of critical art is one of reflecting and restaging these modalities in his expanded artistic practice. Rios' work traverses geographically specific locations (the Americas) and socially specific issues such as post-colonial Western tensions, privatization, de-regulation and global economic liberalization and delivering representations that are equally violent and poetic,

disruptive and generative and distinctly of this time landing in a modernity-is-now resolution.

In the "Ghost of Modernism Lixiviados, 2012" a transparent cube floats like in a Magritte or Ernst surrealist painting—as an aesthetic object in and of itself—over a landscape which moves from urban to bucolic to exurban to deserted, from slums to landfill throughout the borders of the peripheral landscape of Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico and the United States. "Lixiviados": in English 'leachate', a widely used term in the environmental sciences



Overview *Landlocked*, 2015

(photo by Peter Bugg, courtesy the artist and Sicardi Gallery)

where it has the specific meaning of a liquid that has dissolved or entrained environmentally harmful substances that may then enter the environment. It is most commonly used in the context of land-filling or industrial waste.

Waste or what-is-left-after-as-remains is like a “ghost” and this ghost projects shadows just like the history of modernism and its aftermath. As the cube moves through the landscape, it both defines space as an intermedial decal but also casts shadows among the landscapes creating landscapes “cubed.” Rios’ *Ghost of Modernity* shifts from plane to space and could be read as that [that: ghost?] of spatial critique, so prevalent in twentieth-century minimalism and entropic earth art. The floating cube acts as a kind of nodal point that connects in two directions: backwards to the modern history of art, and forwards to contemporary spatial practices. The cube and its “shadow” which is made more evident in the collection of drawings made for the video establishes a crucial dichotomy between that which is to be kept outside (the social and the political) and that which is inside (the staying value of art). This value or residue can also be transferred onto other spaces and non-spaces (to reference the work of Marc Augé and Michel Foucault among others.) In a way this poetic video accompanied by a sound track of John Cage’s— indeed, it is no accident that Cage, the pioneer of indeterminacy of music has been selected for elegiac confrontation on modernity— becomes a comparative analysis of space: an analysis of territories, states, institutions, and their contingent mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, representation and de-presentation. The “ghost” is not just what is shown or delineated by the shadows but also what must be given up or erased in order for one spatial formation to take precedence over

another or in terms of culture and representation—one urgent narrative replacing the old.

In Miguel Angel Rios’ two videos *On the Edge* and *Til Death* it is no longer the cube that haunts but rather the spiralled spinning image which, like the phantom cube, illuminates and makes real the same tensions and spatial conflicts that we see in the “Ghost of Modernity.” “Spirals,” as Nico Israel argues in his recent book *On Spirals* (Whirled Image in Twentieth Century Literature and Visual Art, Columbia University Press, 2015), “are a crucial means through which twentieth century writers and visual artists think about the twentieth century. Approached as images in the sense Walter Benjamin gives the term, spirals in art illuminate how conceptions of modernity, history and geopolitics are mutually involved.” Israel understands spirals in literature and art as “methods” rather than themes and looks at the “dual-directionality” sweeping the twentieth- and twenty-first-century aesthetic production— from Tatlin’s Constructivism to Yeats’s gyres, from Duchamp’s Rotoreliefs to Smithson’s Spiral Jetty, from Ubu’s helicoidal paunch to Kentridge’s whirling cartoons. Where Rios and Israel’s spirals adhere or spin together is in the shared representation that spirals do not simply “express a relationship to the past, but create an opening for potential newness.”

The artist writes about *On the Edge*: “This new project involves a large number of spinning tops distinguished by colour. The random interaction between the spinning tops is choreographed to insinuate the struggle for power in society. White spinning tops are dominant and take the central stage preventing the access of “others” that are subordinate to them by patrolling their territory

by spinning back and forth. Meanwhile, the subordinate black spinning tops come from a lower level and attempt to access the higher ground controlled by the white ones. *On the Edge* stages a dangerous game as a metaphor of the battle for social supremacy. This “struggle for power” or battle for survival is also evident in *Til Death* which is edited in reverse, in a reversed coiling in which the popular Latin-American street game called “Trompos” filmed in Tepoztlan, Mexico, is viewed from multiple perspectives, and confined within a white grid painted on asphalt (the grid is yet another minimalist late twentieth century recurring form.) The Trompo or Whipping Top is a top which is spun by winding a length of string around the body, and launching it so that lands spinning on its point. If the string is attached to a stick the rotation can be maintained by whipping the side of the body. Trompo tournaments are spontaneous, highly competitive street sports that take place throughout Latin America in haphazard, interstitial social circumstances.

Rios’s interpretations of trompo— from the beautiful courtship dance in *LOVE* to a dreaded death game in *A Morir*—from Eros to Thanatos— offer a syncretism of European modernism and indigenous folk art and remnants of Amerindian culture. In *LOVE*, 2006, where I first encountered Rios’ work at Perez Art Museum, Miami, two black-and-white tops, spin forward, then backward, clack together, or nearly miss in a whirling, sometimes violent, dance reminiscent of a tango. The tops move to Maria Callas’ version of the famous aria from the 1892 opera *La Wally* by Alfredo Catalani in which Callas plays Wally, the character who sings about a suffering heart. The tops seem to perform a dance of love, passion and ultimate tragedy as one falls before the other: a final top eventually topples marking the end of love and life-force. When I first saw this

work I recoiled and like a top, I was sent spinning. To recoil has so many definitions—to turn away in fear, to react, backfire, to escape, surrender, spring back to abandon...It’s antonym [is] to spiral or to coil. Viewing the videos and drawings in “Landlocked” was not unlike my experience reading the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier’s or the late Gabriel Garcia Marquez’. Both are authors of what is called “Lo real maravilloso”, or the “marvelous real” or “magic realism” in which the interweaving of surreal stories and unflinching journalistic accounts, of actual horrors of colonial plunder and exploitation and the resulting nefarious reigns rule of dictators, incompetent patriarchs, venal oligarchs, and corporate gangsters in much of the Southern Hemisphere is mixed with dreams, violence, love, ghosts and poetry.

“Landlocked” is in fact not landlocked at all—instead, the exhibition breaks out of the current post-colonial hangover in contemporary art because, Rios, with his sceptres and spirals, keeps us coiled and recoiled, in the trances and dizziness of our contemporary condition, and he is surely not playing games.

Mulas (2014)

Miguel Angel Rios: I wanted to work with the abstraction of landscape and territory, in reference to our drug trafficking problem and the violence used to divide territories.

The video shows two mules carrying a heavy load as if they would know their fate, crossing the rugged landscape of the Andes foothills. The mules are a metaphor for the women who peddle the drugs from one country to another.

Watch *Mulas* [here](#)
(password: miguelmulas123).



Mulas (stills), 2014
one-channel video projection, 5:16 min.

The Ghost of Modernity: Lixiviados (2012)

This experimental film makes use of geometry to explore the anthropological space latent in sensorial perception. *The Ghost of Modernity* puts two fundamental paradigms of modernity center stage: transparency and the cube. Referring to key moments in 20th-century art history, such as the ready-made, abstract geometric art and the specific objects of minimalism, the film questions ideological assumptions as well as the ambitions for art's autonomy, both of which have come to define the modern impulse.

The protagonist in *The Ghost of Modernity* is a transparent glass cube measuring 2.5 meters in height, in width and also in depth. The film was made at different locations in Mexico, Peru and Brazil, each featured landscape standing for specific situations that were activated in a mysterious way, thanks to the presence of this glass cube.

The film has an overall hallucinatory, magic and dreamlike feel, revealing the sovereignty of imagination beyond the spatial coordinates imposed by Cartesian logic. In certain scenes, for instance, the cube will appear to be very heavy, while in others it will seem

almost weightless, as if made from an unknown material that defies gravity. The cube can levitate and move through the air, drown into the earth, float above or submerge into the sea, and can appear and disappear according to its own fancy. Through digital editions of the image, these situations will be presented in the film in an absolutely realist way. The nomadic displacement between natural and urban landscape serves to highlight, on the one hand, the nature/culture



The Ghost of Modernity: Lixiviados
2012, one-channel video projection, 5:55 min

and nature/artifice binaries, and will, on the other, reveal the social contradictions inherent in the Latin-American modernization project.

The fragmentary narrative of *The Ghost of Modernity* is made of several scenes showing the interaction between the device and its surroundings. As the camera follows in a perfect choreography, the movement of the geometric figure travels through cities and natural desert landscapes, focusing on organic and inorganic objects without ever showing the presence of human beings or animals.

The Ghost of Modernity aims to impress, both visually and immediately, the viewer's subconscious, and explore a pre-linguistic layer. For this reason, the film does not contain any dialogue. The metaphysical nature of the cube is made evident through sound effects that correspond to its spatial displacements.

In some scenes the cube's opaque glass surface features a panoramic reflection of its surroundings; while in others the cube is completely transparent, thus framing the landscape like a window. With these multiple perspectives *The Ghost of Modernity* aims to subvert the inherited codes of Renaissance

perspective, which have organized cinematic space since the medium's inception. As such, the film forces the viewers to ask: Are we inside or outside the cube?

Watch *The Ghost of Modernity: Lixiviados* [here](#) (password: miguel123).



The Ghost of Modernity: Lixiviados
2012, one-channel video projection, 5:55 min

Mecha (2010)

Mecha refers to the struggle for survival and a form of fascination, on the part of both the artist and the viewer, for conflict and play. For this film, Rios captures players of a traditional Colombian sport called 'Tejo'. Labourers play Tejo in the slums, forming teams of at least six people (men or women) and playing with metal disks called tejos. Each player throws a disk at an inclined tray filled with mud, trying to make triangular pink targets called mechas explode. The mechas, detonators filled with gunpowder, burst on impact.

For Rios, this game embodies aggression; the violence of a gunshot in reverse, as if the bullet (the disk), instead of being shot *out*, was propelled *towards* the weapon (the detonator). "In this game," says Rios, "there are constant explosions, projectiles, players shouting, spectators yelling and cheering... This atmosphere reminds me of war films and reports from the front. Tejo is an endless struggle between two armies. It's a combat in which a truce is never reached. Even though there are no victims, there is no peace."

Filmed in a shed in the suburbs of Bogotá, the video shows a sombre, threatening no-man's land, delimited by fences that make it look like a cage or a prison. The players seem to be shut inside it like animals, running around and screaming at the flames, the smoke, the sound of breaking glass. A kind of formal beauty nevertheless emerges from

this chaos. The clay is evocative of the primitive raw material of the sculptor, while the circular disks, the triangular targets, the square playing area and the primary colours, make up a setting worthy of 1920's avant-garde art.

Watch *Mecha* [here](#)
(password: miguelangelmecha).



Mecha (still)

2010, two synchronized channel wall projections, 10:02 min.

The Abstraction of War

Sergio Vega about *Mecha* (2010)

The video installation *Mecha* (wick) by Miguel Angel Rios is based on a popular game played in Colombia called 'Tejo'. Groups of players throw thick metal discs at a target made of powerful firecrackers embedded at the center of a wet clay wall. The thrown metal discs ('tejos') either stick muted to the clay wall or score by detonating the triangular firecrackers.

Mecha is a free interpretation of the game of Tejo as a theater of war casualties. With a sensibility reminiscent of Dada's rabid attack on bourgeois rationality, Rios sets himself to attempt an impossible task: the choreography of chance. The language of materiality and the performance of objects are brought by the artist into an unforeseen dimension. Chance encounters become violent clashes through unpredictable coalitions of objects and textures. Metal discs become missiles, the sound of their impact reverberating throughout the space. Wet clay acts as the landscape where bombs are dropped. Gigantic wooden wheels move back and forth patrolling the space as guards in a prison. Danger is anonymous and ubiquitous: people are used to it, some run to escape from the explosions, others walk in nervous silence.

This degree of proximity to violence is further insinuated by the characterization of the camera as an anthropo-

morphized, breathing entity that embodies the viewer's gaze. Broadcasting from inside the scenes it becomes a target, later gets broken and is ultimately destroyed. *Mecha* portrays a violent game gone mad, driven by the power of fire and the endless unfolding of casualties. In this uncanny orchestration, the primordial scene of a death drive is reenacted. A drive in which destruction is so tangible that the visceral reaction to it becomes abstract, as if marking the symbolic return to the inorganic.

It could be argued that since the early days of Arte Povera* there has not been a more compelling and complex engagement with



Mecha (still)

2010, two synchronized channel wall projections, 10:02 min.

materials and actions employed to interpret a larger reality. Operating from behind the scenes stands an insightful reflection on the socio-political reality of Colombia; a country ravaged by civil conflict for more than five decades, where violence has irreversibly affected every single stratum of the social fabric.

In Rios' apocalyptic vision the narratives of war and their moral lessons have been stripped of their signifying power. The drive to destruction operates by its own rules, beyond any logic or justification, as an end in itself.

**Arte Povera expresses an approach to art which is basically anti-commercial, precarious, banal and anti-formal, concerned primarily with the physical qualities of the medium and the mutability of the materials. Its importance lies in the artists' engagement with actual materials and with total reality and their attempt to interpret that reality in a way which, although hard to understand, is subtle, cerebral, elusive, private, intense. (Germano Celant, Arte Povera: Conceptual, Actual, or Impossible Art? (1969).)*

Mecha (still)

2010, two synchronized channel wall projections, 10:05 min.



Room...Room (2010)

Miguel Angel Rios: "This video project explores a game I used to play as a child. I grew up in the Calchaquíes Valley, a remote site located at the foot of the Andes' mountain range in the north of Argentina. There, I used to gather with my friends and play a game we called 'room-room.' This game consisted of attaching a wooden tablet to a cord and spin it until it creates a loud vibration that reverberates throughout the valley. The acoustic characteristics of the site were exceptional given the proximity of the high mountain walls that create an immense echo chamber, expanding sounds throughout miles. As children, we derived much pleasure by making noise through minimal means, a loud sound that could be heard very far away when most adults were taking a nap.

For the production of this video I once again gathered my friends and their relatives and together went to the very same places where we used to play. But now the tablets were wrapped in aluminum foil and each one featured a specific inscription, letters and numbers indicating specific dates of tragic events in recent world history: NY 9-11 (New York), MAD 3-11 (Madrid), OK 4-19 (Oklahoma), MUN 9-05 (Munich), BA 3-17 (Buenos Aires) and others.

As children we used to feel empowered, as if capable of terrorizing those adults who were asleep far away.

We believed the vibration of our tablets could reach them even if they were unconscious in deep sleep. Making this video project so many years later still carries the same hopes we had as children; to reach those in power and wake them up."

Watch *Room...Room* [here](#)
(password: mar020843).



Room...Room (still)
2010, one-channel widescreen wall projection, 3.03 min.



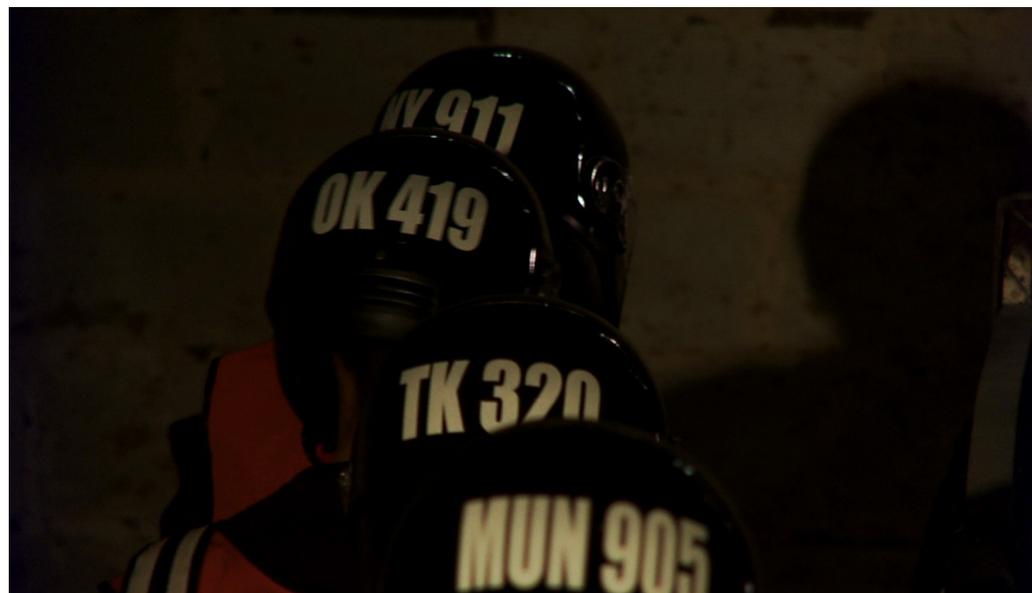
Room...Room (still)
2010, one-channel widescreen wall projection, 3.03 min.

OPUS (2010)

OPUS is fundamentally a sound piece, and can be considered a requiem to violence in our present day and age. It subtly hints at New York, Madrid, London and other places associated with acts of terrorism. The actual protagonist in this video, however, is the Colombian accordion, divested of its own music and turned into a wind machine of pure, dismantled sound.

The sound of the accordion is tolled over by the sound of iron-cast objects, 'tejos', which produce a dramatic noise, resembling small explosions, in the background.

Watch *OPUS* [here](#)
(password: miguel1234).



OPUS (stills)
2010 , widescreen video one-channel wall projection, 4:05 min.

Crudo Dance

William Gass about *Crudo* (2008)

FRIEZE Magazine, issue 118, October 2008

Waging a different kind of theatre, the Mexico City and New York-based Rios' single-channel video *Crudo* (2008) offers no clear solution to the audience dilemma introduced by Newkirk, but perhaps instead reveals the inherent failure of easy or outmoded answers.

One of the dances performed in *Crudo*, the 'malambo,' has historically been a male expression of Argentine gaucho machismo and incorporates 'boleadoras' – heavy balls tethered to the ends of long cords that are used to wrangle domestic animals and hunt wild ones.

They are the gaucho's tool of the trade and essential weapon, but Rios' natty white-suited performer demonstrates none of the violent ball-swinging of his ancestors; instead he has replaced the traditional leather sacks of stones with raw slabs of meat. What may be construed as an activism of identity along the lines of the Afro-Cuban artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons quickly turns grisly as snarling guard dogs rush into frame, demanding their immediate due and snapping at the dancing man.

It is critical to note that Rios has transformed this powerful, percussive dance into something that is essentially a

desperate, even masochistic, offering. The dancer is set up to lose and enters the arena prepared not to be victorious but to endure and taunt and snarl. However, the valiantly pathetic gesture is disrupted by the video's editing, as new dogs and meat are inserted into and removed from the scene.

This introduction of artificiality into what is at first a very poetic sort of singular action, brings the piece closer to resembling a music



Crudo (still), 2008

DVD/master devacam one channel video film, 3:14 min

video (the performer's boots thunder gloriously). With the dancer offering a raw steak to the dogs in the video's climax, the entire piece becomes a pessimistic allegory concerning external pressures to 'be authentic'.

Ultimately both Newkirk and Rios slyly set the stage for theatrical projections of power and helplessness. Their articulation of the problems of vulnerability and apathy in the face of authority may be unresolved, oblique and inconclusive, but Newkirk's reflective surfaces suggest that one possible (and simple) answer is right there in plain sight.

Watch *Crudo* [here](#)
(password: miguelangel123).



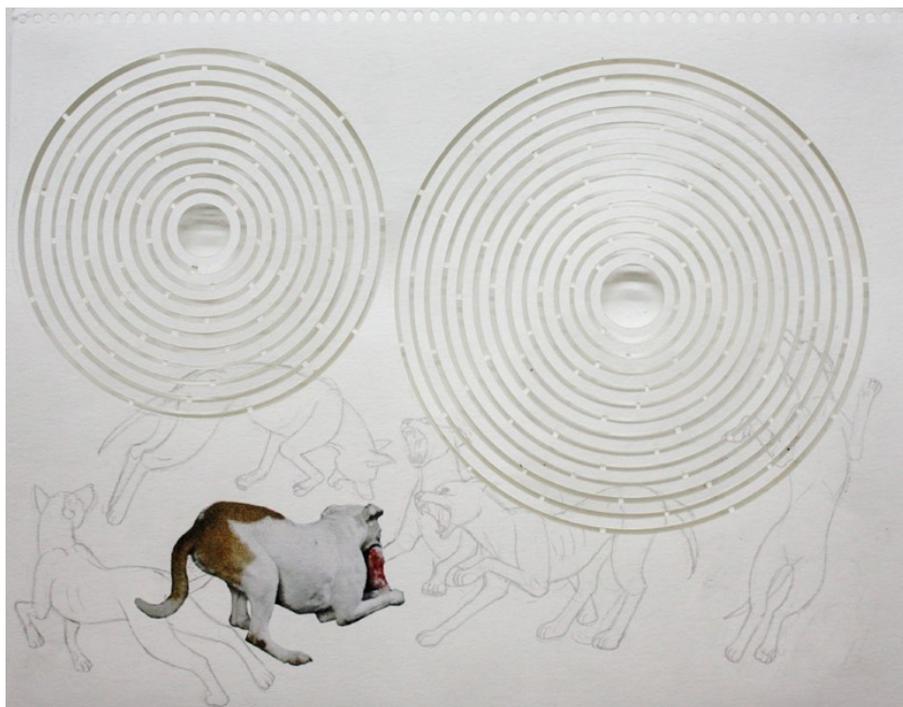
Crudo (still), 2008

DVD/master devacam one channel video film, 3:14 min



Crudo (still), 2008

DVD/master devacam one channel video film, 3:14 min



Drawing out of *Crudo* series, 2007
Pencil on paper with cut-out, 35.5 x 28 cm

Aquí (2006)

Miguel Angel Ríos: This is the fourth and last video of my spinning top series, a popular crafty wooden toy made by artisans of Tepoztlán, Morelos, México. The toy is still played frequently in this town, where I found the best spin top throwers around. The video *Aquí* has a powerful weight, telling us about an event or anecdote leading us to elaborate on metaphors about war and death. I used the zoom of the camera to withdraw the forms and in order to give them a threatening allure.

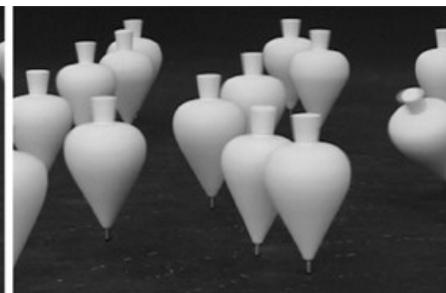
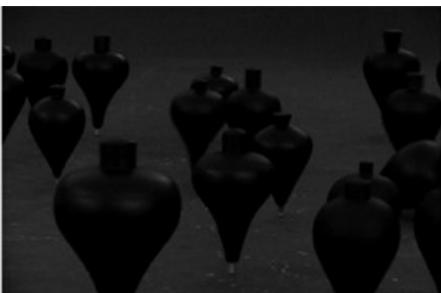
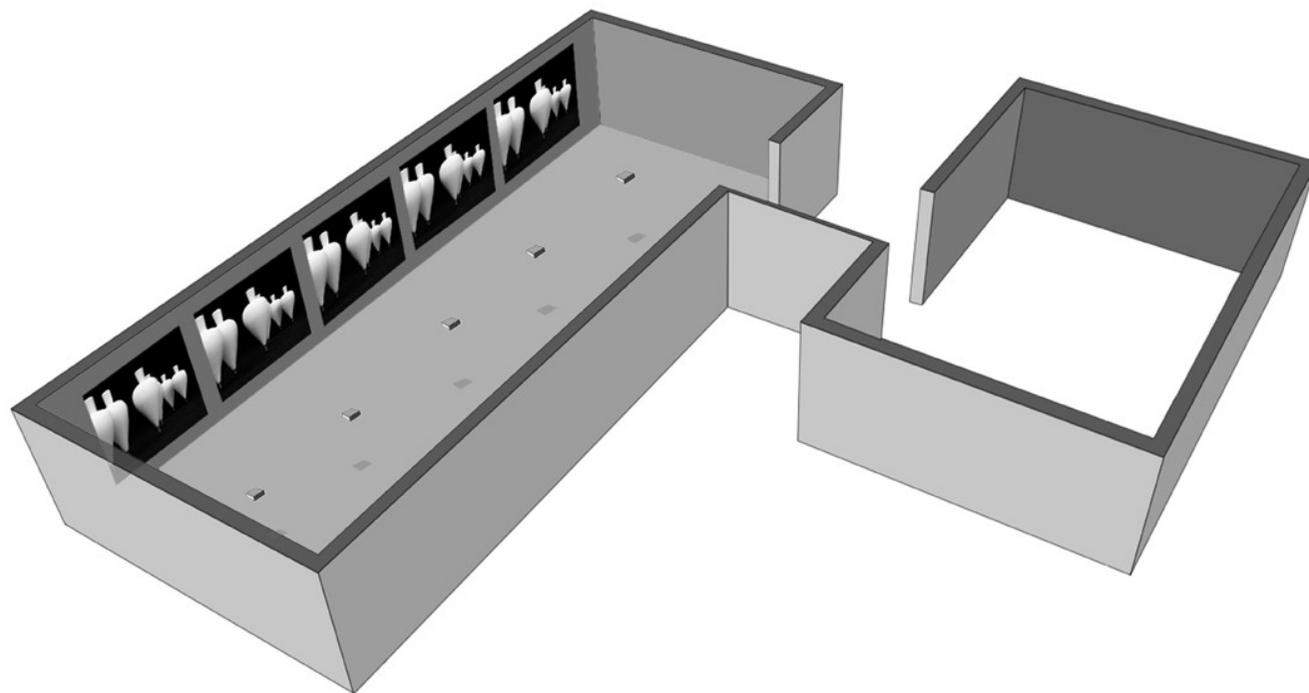
My decision to use five screens is because I want to involve the spectator. He/she needs to rotate, similar to the spinning tops, to watch them trail from one screen to other across the five screens, fighting and trying to occupy places they dispute between them, in a combat to survive, black and white tops colliding between the existential differences in which we live.

Eisenstein's *The battle of the Potemkin* and Lang's *Metropolis*, who were ahead of their time and created interdisciplinary, conceptual models, have been my major inspiration in these spinning top series. I decided to leave my voice, giving instructions to the spin top throwers (as commander would do with his soldiers). Through the direct sound, creating an element of interruption, offers the possibility to find an abstract form of identification and metaphor for war. Using a choreography specially designed by myself, I believe that *Aquí* has become a complex and radical work, where the action on the screen communicates directly to the body and mind of the spectator.

Aquí

2006, 5-channel video projection, 4:27 min.





Aqui
2006, 5-channel video projection, 4:27 min.

A Morir (2003)

The three-channel video installation *A Morir (Till Death)*, shot in Tepoztlan, Mexico, focuses on a popular street game called 'trompos', involving wooden spinning tops. Viewed from multiple perspectives, the video begins with one spinning top and culminates in a cacophonous profusion of numerous tops in a single game that includes thirty of the most skilled players in the town, ages between fourteen to fifty.

Through the documentation of this simple scenario, dynamics of competition, invasion and territorialism are signalled both visually and aurally. The lyrical movement of the tops is accompanied by their intense, syncopating sound. Confined within a white grid painted on asphalt, the masses speak to both space and subjectivity. The relative violence is complicated by the game's high formality and beauty.

A Morir negotiates both politics and poetics in abstracting narrative about urban sprawl, congestion, and war with an emphasis on memory and the fragility of life. Since the video is edited in reverse, the spinning tops rise and go back to their battlefield as a metaphor for the survival strategies of our everyday life.

A Morir, 2003
variations: three channel video installation
and single channel projection, sound 5.1, 4:45 mins.

Watch *A Morir* [here](#)
(password: amorir123).



A Serious Game

Raphael Rubinstein about *A Morir* (2003)
Art in America June/July 2005

As Miguel Angel Rios' recent three channel video installation *A Morir (Till Death)* gets under way, there are a few seconds of tranquillity before the trio of projected images bursts into frenetic activity. One moment the viewer is looking at three shots of an indeterminate charcoal-grey space with a small square white grid in its centre, then suddenly a bulbous black form begins to spin rapidly on its tapered base. It is joined, almost immediately, by other spinning black form of various sizes that swoop into the scene with a noise that sounds like a squadron of dive bombers.

Converging on the white grid, these buzzing, spinning forms, which eventually number around 30, crowd together and repeatedly bump into one another, making little clicking sounds as they do so. Some of these encounters are cordial, as two whirling bulbs merely bounce off each other, staying upright on their now slightly altered courses. But many others are catastrophic, with one of both of the black forms knocked over or sent careening out of the frame. Soon, the grid is littered with fallen spinners, and suddenly another protagonist appears: an elongated wooden rake, much like the device a croupier uses to sweep away poker chips, that thrusts in from above to snatch away the stilled forms.

Although the forms are equally black and bulbous and all of them spin on metal tips, their contours vary subtly. Some are relatively squat and onion like, while others bulk out near their tops, then rapidly turn svelte, like a bodybuilder with the legs of a ballet

dancer. To an art-historical eye, they might recall some of Oskar Schlemmer's streamlined figures, or even Morandi's still-life objects. The structure of the installation highlights these variations by showing three different, synchronised views, on three adjacent walls, of the same sequence of spinning and falling forms. The central image is the largest, at 9 by 14 feet, and the right-hand projection (from a camera looking at the grid from the right) somewhere between the other two in terms of size. The viewer is thus enveloped by the moving images and invited to follow the action from three different perspectives. At the conclusion of the video, only one of the black, anthropomorphic spinners remains upright, until it, too, surrenders to gravity in a whirling, slow-motion fall.

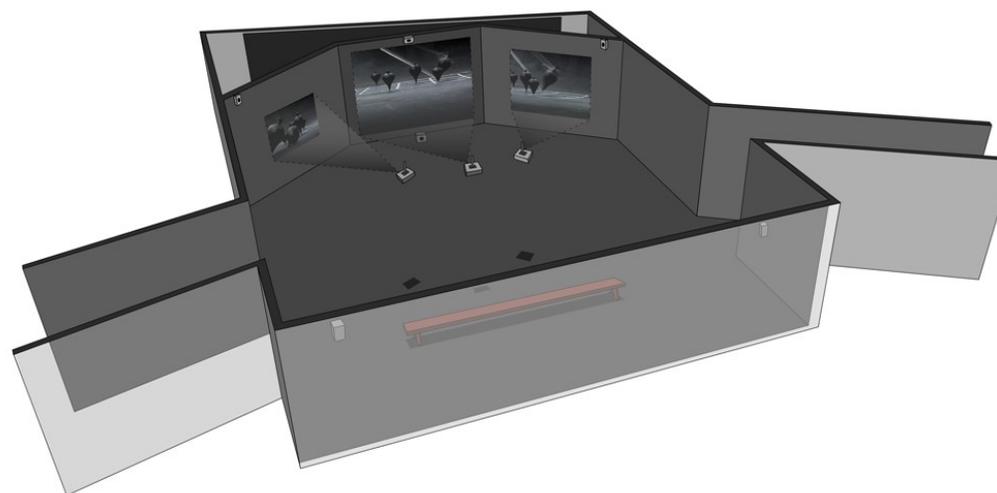
What are these forms? What exactly is going on in this video? Lengths of string flashing into the frame as each new form zooms in help the viewer identify the objects as spinning tops. To create this video, Rios, an Argentinean-born artist who divides his time between Mexico City and New York, went to the Mexican town of Tepoztlan, where the game of *trompos* is a popular, highly competitive pastime. Making his own oversize spinning tops (they measure between 4 and 8 inches in height) out of wood and enlisting the help of some 30 skilled local *trompos* players, age 14 to 50, he then began to experiment, filming the tops from various angles and in a variety of groupings. The final result is a five-minute, single-take DVD that can be appreciated for its formal qualities even as it exudes the ruthless mayhem of a demolition derby.

Part of what makes *A Morir* such a successful work is the way it combines control and chance. Although Rios designed and made the tops, decided on the backdrop and camera set-up, directed the invisible players and rake wielder, and shot 22 full takes (eventually selecting one), he couldn't control the behaviour of the tops, or the graceful, violent dramas of their brief performances. Instead, his role is more like that of a Greek god, observing the passionate struggles of mortals from an Olympian distance.

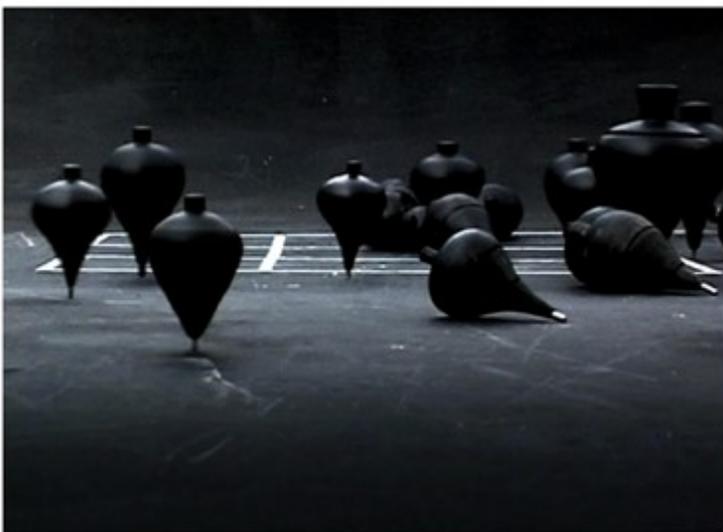
An artist with a substantial career behind him [see *Art in Amerca*, January '94], Rios has increasingly turned to video in recent years. *A Morir* follows another three-channel DVD projection, *Ni Me Busques...No Me Encuentras (Don't Look For Me...You Won't Find Me)*, in 2003, in which Rios is seen encountering hallucinatory phenomena in the Mexican desert. While digital video might seem a far cry from his previous wall-mounted works involving pleated maps and the Andean tradition of the *quipu* (knotted-string record-keeping), Rios continues to be inspired by the culture and landscape of Latin America. In *A Morir* he has seized on a Mexican pastime; in *Ni Me Busques...No Me Encuentras* he celebrates the visionary power of peyote, with a subtle nod to the great Mexican landscape painter Dr. Atl.

Furthermore, his work retains a handmade component, in the tops he crafted for *A Morir* and in preparatory drawings he makes for his videos and the paintings the videos inspire small, elongated, dazzlingly verist landscapes.

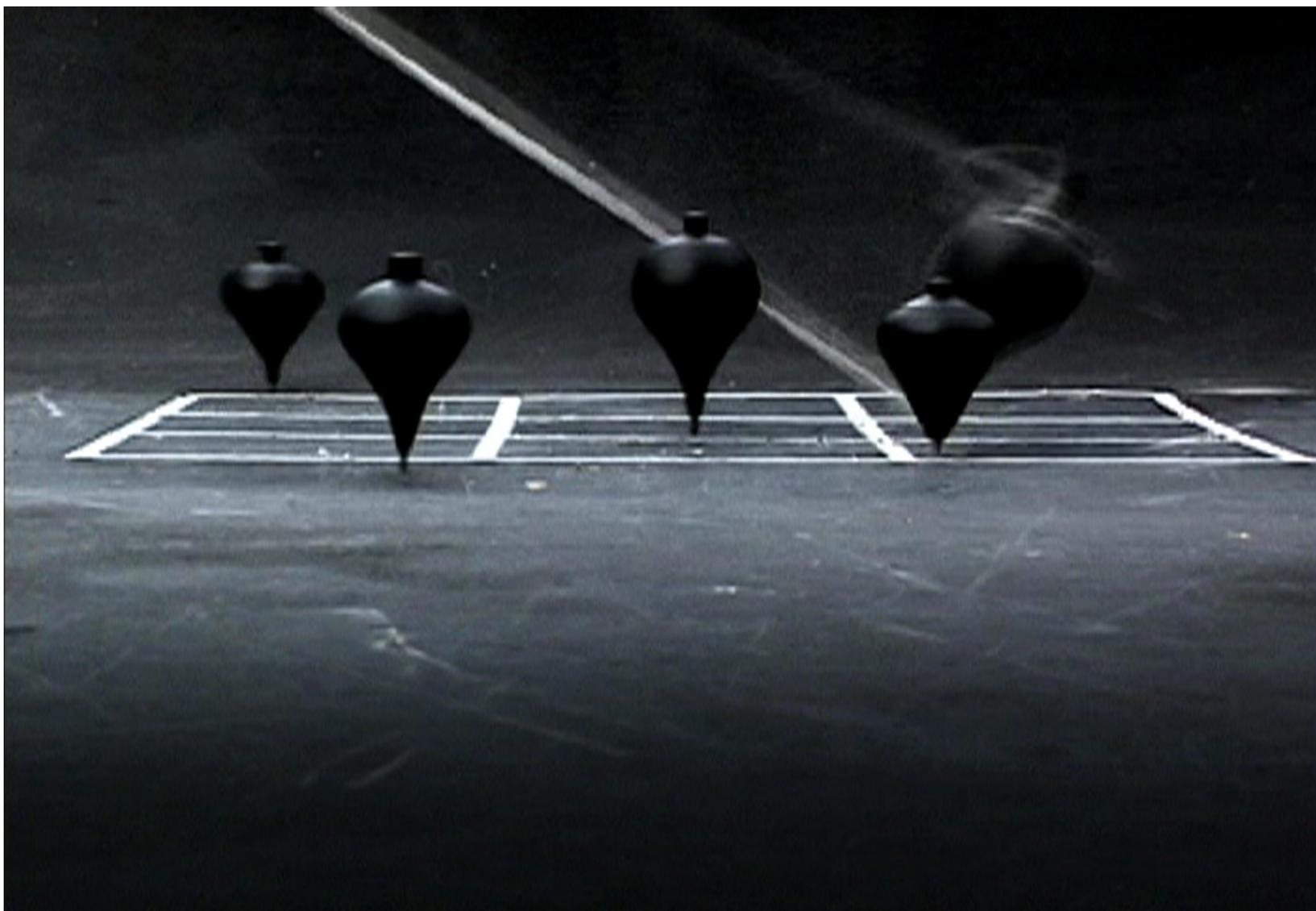
A Morir may only last five minutes, but its visual and thematic richness encourages repeated viewings. Things happen so quickly and there are so many different protagonists that you can't really follow all the action the first time through, nor fully appreciate how it varies when seen from different angles. As a quasi-abstract video-ballet, *A Morir* is pure pleasure to watch, but the title points to the piece's serious metaphorical message: existence is continual struggle, fate is unpredictable and frequently unjust, and the game of life must be played to its inevitable end.



A Morir (installation mock-up)
2003 , 3-channel video and sound installation, 4:54 min



A Morir (stills)
2003, 3-channel video and sound installation, 4:54 min



A Morir (still)

2003, 3-channel video and sound installation, 4:54 min

Los niños brotan de noche (2002)

In the video *Los niños brotan de noche (The children spring forth from the night)*, Rios documents his encounter with a female shaman named Doña Gudelia, who guides him through an experience with psychoactive fungi. Filmed almost in total darkness, *Los niños* signals the artist's exploration of indigenous traditions and customs that are completely alien to him, yet exist within the same geographic proximity.

This video work was made by Rios with the aid of a camera operator and a sound technician, who also took the alkaloid. As a result, the video image is blurry and dark, and we can hardly see the action that takes place during the ceremonial taking of the mushrooms. However, this absence of a clear image reveals the artist's intention of sub-utilizing the medium, and thus of producing an inconclusive document.

Under the influence of the alkaloids, vision and sound are distorted, and it is impossible to convey a clear image. We cannot immediately grasp what is happening or understand what is being said.

Watch *Los niños brotan de noche* [here](#) (password: miguelniños).



Los niños brotan de noche (video still)
2002, single channel video film, 3:30 min.

Mapas Series (1990's)

In the 1990's Rios started his Mapas series, initially created reacting to the five-hundred celebration of the arrival of Columbus to the Caribbean Islands, and criticizing the so-called "Discovery of America".

Since ancient times, celestial and terrestrial cartographers were confronted with the problem of how to represent a portion of a sphere on a flat surface, soon it became clear that some distortions are inevitable. In 1569 Mercator draw a map that was convenient for navigation, while distorting distances and areas, it preserved angles and imposed a grid-like structure. By the nineteenth century mathematicians had developed Ptolemy's and Mercator's ideas into a geometry that underlies modern physics. A repeatedly restated corollary of these scientific works is an essential lack of neutral context, an unavoidable percolation of the political into cartography, geography and concept formation.

Just like this scientific tale, the works from the Mapas series draw our attention to the political act of map drawing, through a series of geometric gestures. Specifically, the artist modifies maps from the Colonial period through the act of amplifying, cutting, folding, pleating and pasting, into new complex compositions. He literally shreds apart enlarged photographic facsimiles of Colonial documents to question and resist the arbitrariness of frontiers.

Fragmented by regular vertical lines, in the work *Magailan*, titled after the captain of the fleet that first circumnavigated the earth, we can still recognize the lands while the sea has been painted in black, erasing the nautical trajectories followed by the colonial ships.

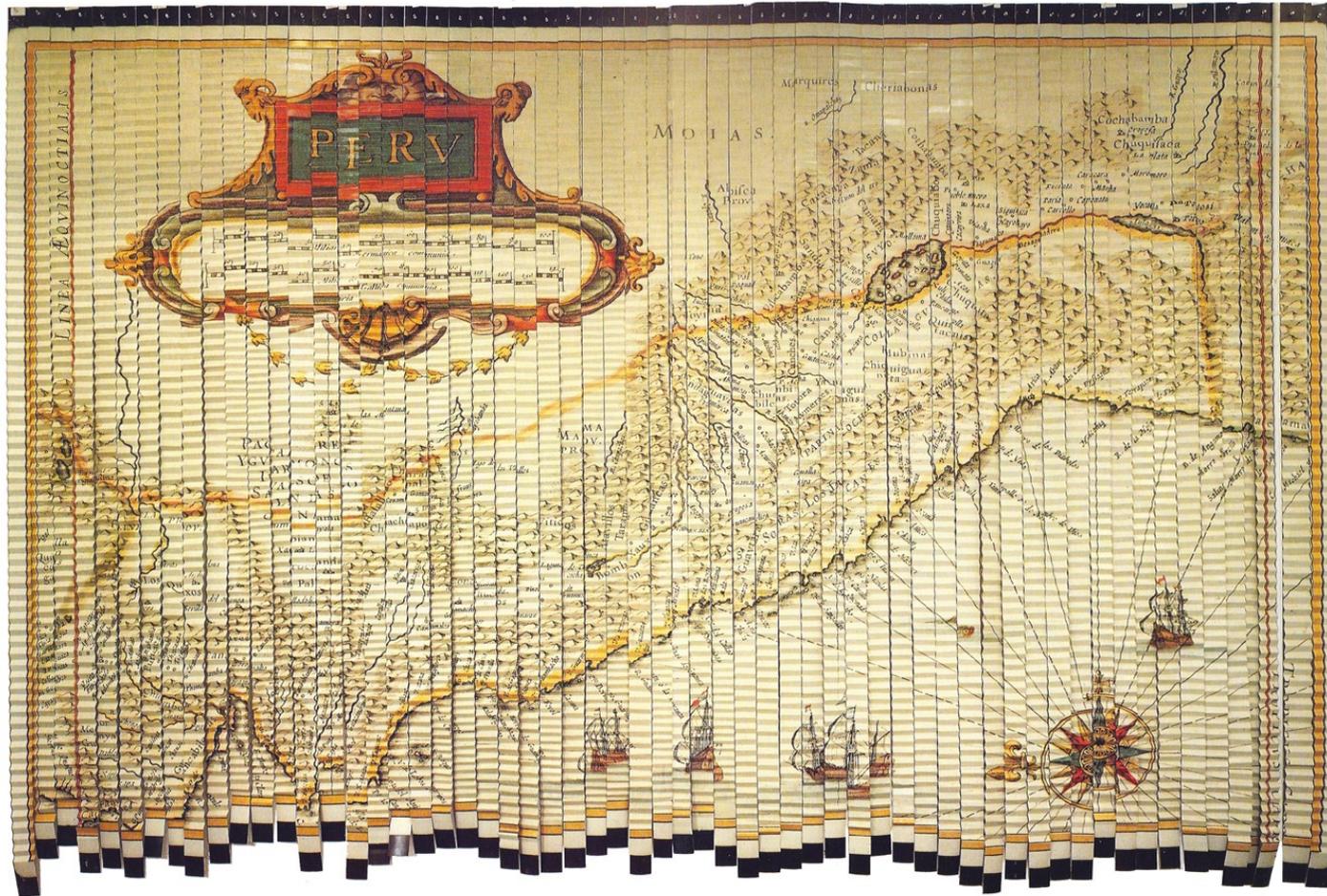
In *Los Quatros Vientos* no territory is mapped: the map is deconstructed beyond recognition through a crisscrossing of lines unfolding around a circular form that erases the north-south dichotomy.

In *Mapa-Poncho* the center of the map has been removed. The title refers to a traditional sleeveless garment used by the Native American peoples of the Andes since pre-Hispanic times. This work gauges the limits between cartography and everyday life combining an instrument of territory control designed by the conquistadors with a garment that survived the conquest. This work might evoke the legend described by Jorge Luis Borges in *Of Exactitude in Science* (1933-34), in which the Argentinian writer describes an emperor obsessed with cartography who orders a map of his empire at one to one scale of such precision that map and territory become interchangeable.

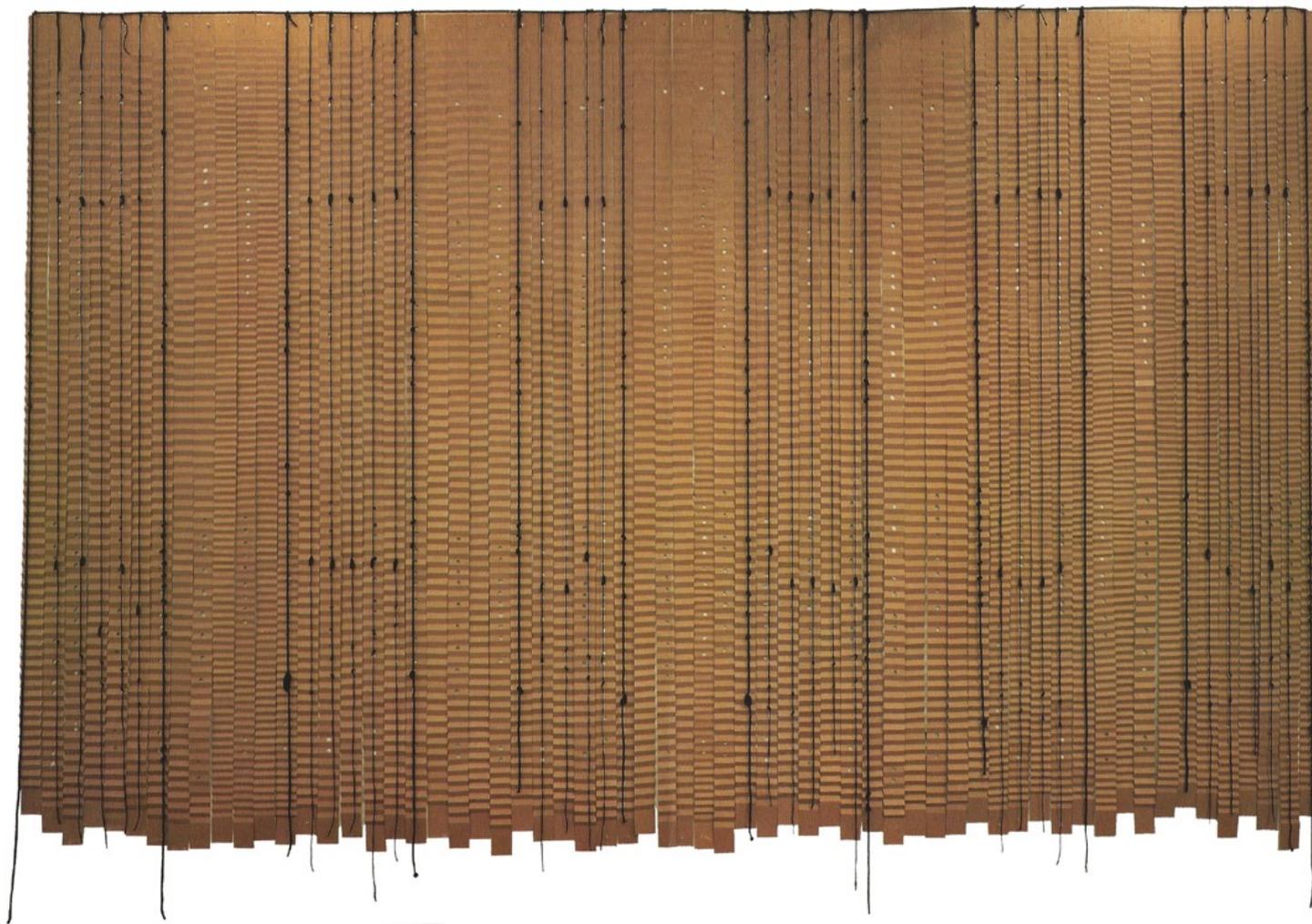
Text by Martina Sabbadini



Los Quatros Vientos, 1993-1994
Pencil, cibachrome mounted on pleated canvas and push pins
Diameter: 210 cm



Huellas del colonizaje, 1992
Photoprint on pleated cardboard, 334 x 500 cm
Collection Biblioteca Arango Bogota Colombia



A 500 años de la conquista, 1992
Pleated cardboard and polyester cord with knots dates, 267 x 503 cm



New Amsterdam No. 2, 1993
Photoprint mounted on pleated canvas
142 x 132 cm



Critica post-colonial No. 16, 1995

Ink on pleated beige cardboard and push pins, 83 x 58 cm

Curriculum Vitae

Miguel Angel Rios

Born 1943, Catamarca, AR

Education

1970-72 School of Fine Arts, National Univeristy of Buenos Aires, AR

1966-69 National University of Tucumán, AR

1965 Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires, AR

Awards

1998 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation

Solo shows (selection)

2021 Deterritorialization, AKINCI, Amsterdam, NL

2019 *No Way Out* (solo exhibition) curated by Mariangela Mendez Prencke, Roda Sten Konsthall, Göteborg, SE

2015 *Landlocked*, ASU Art Museum, Temple, USA

2013 *Memória Futura*, Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art, Lisbon, PT

On the Edge, MFAH, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, USA

A través de la frontera, Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City, MX

Folding Borders, Sicardi Gallery, Houston, USA

The Ghost of Modernity, AKINCI, Amsterdam, NL

2012 *Walkabout*, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, USA

2011 *Deambular / Walkabout*, Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, MX

Mécha, Ruth Benzacar Galeria de Arte, Buenos Aires, AR

2010 *Mécha*, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, FR

Mécha, Galleria Millan, São Paulo, BR

- subZone2: Miguel Angel Rios*, Galerie Adler, Frankfurt a.M., DE
Crudo, AKINCI, Amsterdam, NL
- 2009 *A Morir*, Sala de Arte Contemporáneo Tenerife, Centros de Arte del Gobierno de Canarias, ES
La Maison Europeenne de la Photographie, Ville de Paris, FR
Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, NZ
Contemporáneo 24. Miguel Ángel Ríos 2001 – 2008, MALBA Colección Costantini - Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, AR
- 2008 *White Suit*, Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin, DE
White Suit & Crudo, selected exhibitions in Basel, Switzerland, Paris, France and Turin, Italy
A Morir, Sala de Arte Contemporáneo Tenerife, Centros de Arte del Gobierno de Canarias, ES
Buro Leeuwarden: Miguel Angel Rios – Aqui, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, NL
- 2007 *Aqui* and *On the Edge*, Blaffer Gallery Art Museum, University of Houston, USA
A Morir, The Diana and Bruce Halle Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA\
On the Edge, Annie Gawlak Art Gallery, Washington DC, USA
A Morir, Museo Blanes, Montevideo, UY
A Morir, Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires, AR
Aquí and *Fuego Amigo*, EVO Gallery, Santa Fe, USA
- 2006 *A Morir*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, USA
Aquí, 5 screen channel synchronizer wall projection, Milan Antonio Gallery, Sao Paulo, BR
A Morir, 3 screen channel synchronizer wall projection, Museum for Contemporary Art, Toulouse, FR
On the Edge, 2 channel wall projection video, Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, USA
A Morir, Museum for Contemporary Art, Phoenix, Arizona, USA
- 2005 Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC, USA
Galeria de Arte Nuevo Espacio Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, AR
LOVE, Marco Noire Contemporary Art, Torino, IT
- 2004 LACE, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibition, Los Angeles, USA
Basel Art Unlimited, Basel, CH (courtesy: Marco Noire Contemporary Art)
- 2003 Artists Space, Project Space, New York, USA
White Box, New York, USA
- 2002 Basel Art Unlimited, Basel, CH (courtesy: Marco Noire Contemporary Art)

- 2001 *El viaje del botanista*, Sala Mendoza, Caracas, VE
 1999 *Manhattan Códice*, Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico D.F., MX

Group shows (selection)

- 2022 Terra Incognita, AKINCI Gallery
- 2021 Dance, Curated by Cristina Deniz, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Gran Canaria, ESP
 Networked Nature, Thoma Foundation Santa Fe, MNew Mexico, USA
- 2019 Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991 - 2011, MoMA PS1, New York, USA
 Land of the Lustrous, curated by Yang Zi, UCCA Dune, Qinhuangdao, China
 Creatures: When Species Meet (showing Crudo, Landlocked, Mulas), Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, USA
 MOMENTA | The Life of Things, Biennale de l'Image, Montréal (Québec) Curator: Maria Wills Londoño, Montréal, Québec, CA
- 2018 Reconstructing Eden - curated by Barbara Polla and Paul Ardenne, Art Mill, Szentendre, HU
- 2017 Truth or Dare, a reality show, 21C Museum Hotels, Nashville, TN, USA
 The Artist's Voice, The Parkview Museum, Singapore
 Apocalyps, Art Chapel Amsterdam, NL
 Home—so different, so appealing, Los Angeles County Museum, LA, USA
- 2016 Do Boomerangs Always Come Back?, curated by Annemie Van Laethem & Erik Croux, Castle Oud-Rekem, Belgium
- 2015 La vie moderne, La Biennale de Lyon, FR
 Project Video 2015 - Dias & Riedweg, Miguel Angel Ríos, Melanie Smith, Sicardi Gallery, Houston, USA
- 2014 Trazas, Centro de Carmen, Valencia, ES
 Memórias da Obsolescência, Paço das Artes, São Paulo, Brasil
 Cruce de colecciones, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain
 Beyond Magic, Galerie Xippas France, Paris, France
 Permission To Be Global / Prácticas Globales: Latin American Art from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, MFA - Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, MA, USA
 Daros Latinamerica Collection, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen, Switzerland
 Tiempos Abiertos. Fondos de la Colección Artium de Álava, DA2, Domus Artium 2002, Salamanca, Spain
 Occupied Territory, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City, NY, USA

- 2013 Permission To Be Global / Practicas Globales: Latin American Art from the Ella Fontanals Cisneros Collection, CIFO - Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, FL, USA
Encuentros / Tensiones. Arte latinoamericano contemporáneo Colección Malba + Comodatos, MALBA Colección Costantini, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina
I SEE YOU, Kunsthalle Detroit, Detroit, MI, USA
Moving - Norman Foster On Art, Carré d'art - Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes, Nîmes, France
- 2012 Speaking Artists, Busan Museum of Art, Busan, South Korea
Salvajes – Digesting Europe Piece By Piece, Tranen Contemporary Art Center, Hellerup, Denmark
A la croisée des images, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France
- 2011 ZOOOM! Decoding Common Practice, Persol Art Video | New Media Lounge, The Art Miami Pavilion, Miami, FL, USA
Encuentros, KESSLER, BATTAGLIA GALERIA DE ARTE, Valencia, Spain
Universo vídeo. Fleeting Stories, Laboral, Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial, Gijón, Spain
8th Bienal do Mercosul, Porto Alegre, Brasil Unresolved Circumstances: Video Art from Latin America, Molaa Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA, USA
- 2010 17th Biennale of Sidney 2010, Sidney, Australia
La trama se complica..., Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey MARCO, Monterrey, Mexico
Mediators, The National Museum in Warsaw, The Gallery of 20th-century Polish Art, Warsaw, Poland
The Metamorphosis, Other Gallery Shanghai, Shanghai
- 2009 Matambre, 2008 selected for Videonale 12, Bonn, Germany
Zonas de Riesgo, Caixa Forum Madrid, Spain
Works from the Evo Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico
For You / Para Usted, The Daros Latinamerica Tapes and Video Installations, Daros Foundation, Zürich, Switzerland
- 2008 Art Basel Miami Beach, Andres Millan Gallery, Sao Paulo, Brasil
5th Seoul International Media Art Biennale Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
Fries Museum/Buro Leeuwarden and Vijversburg 6, Netherlands (curated by Too Arends and Ankie Boomstra)
Mediations Biennale, Poznan, Poland – Corporeal/Technoreal (curated by Yu Yeon Kim)
Zonas de Riesgo, Caixa Forum Barcelona, Spain
Interficie, Centre d'Art la Panera, Lerida, Spain
Multiplex, Western Bridge, Seattle, USA
The 61st Locarno International Film Festival, Locarno, Switzerland

- LAX-ART Crudo, Los Angeles, USA
 Tension/Release, Caren Golden Fine Art, New York, USA
 Viva la muerte, CAAM - Centro Atlantico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain
 Face to Face, The Daros Collection, Zürich, Switzerland
 Museo de Arte de de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia en Alianza con la Colección DarosLatinoamericana Collections, Bogotá, Colombia
 Noise: A Hole in the Silence, SPAZIO OBERDAN, Milan, Italy
- 2007
 Aquí, Artgames in MOCA and MOMA, Shanghai, China
 Fuego Amigo, Ex convento de la Natividad, Tepoztlan Morelos Mexico
 Fuego Amigo, The Screen of Art, 48th Festival del Popoli, International Social Documentary Film Festival, Florence, Italy
 A Morir NYC Photo, Phillips de Pury & Company, New York, USA
 Frontera Incierta, ERA Montevideo, Uruguay
 Counterpoint, Art project at Coreana Museum of Seoul, South Korea
 Aquí, PhotoESPAÑA 2007 Matadero, Madrid, Spain
 Allusive Moments, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, USA
 Outlook, Palazzo Bricherasio and Marco Noire Contemporary Art, Torino, Italy
- 2006
 Shift, Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna, Austria
 Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, USA
- 2005
 Marking Time-Moving Images, Miami Art Museum, USA
 Eco, Arte contemporáneo Mexicano, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain
- 2004
 Canaia Lotka-voterra, Mexico D.F
- 2002
 Sidney Biennale, (The World may be Fantastic), Sidney, Australia
- 2001
 The Overexcited Body, Sao Paulo, Brazil
 P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Special Projects, New York, USA

Collections

Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Museum of Fine Arts, Texas, USA; Blanton Museum of Art at The Univeristy of Texas, Austin, USÁ;
 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, ES; Miami Art Museum, USA; Foundation Wester Bridge, Seatle, USA; Foundation La Caixa Forum, Barcelona, BR; Cisneros Fonatanals Art Foundation (CIFO), Miami, USA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington

D.C., USA; Daros-Latinamerica AG, Zürich, CH; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Miami Art Museum; Patricia Cisneros Collection, Miami; Diane Halle Collection, Phoenix, MFAH; Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Reina Sofía, Madrid, ES; Isabel & Agustín COPPEL Collection, Mexico City, MX; Boris Hirmas Said Collection, Miami, FL; Bernardino & Mary Arocha Collection, Houston, USA; Phyllis Hojel Collection, Aspen, Colorado, USA; The Mind's Eye, Amsterdam, NL; Collection EKARD, NL.

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Gilbert Vicario (Hrsg.) *Miguel Angel Rios: Walkabout*, Des Moines Art Ctr, 2012
- 2007 Beverly Adams and Osvaldo Sánchez. "Constructing a poetic universe". Catalogue collection-The Diane and Bruce Halle Collection of Latin American Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Distributed by Merrell Publisher. Pp. 104-105.
"C International Photo magazine, Number four, Publication of Ivory Press London. Intro pp 9, Portfolio pp:185-195.
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Raphael Rubinstein, "A Serious Game", *Extrait de Art in America*, July 2005
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Karina Esmailzadeh, *artgames: Analogien zwischen Kunst und Spiel*. Shanghai Duolun Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai. catalogue pp. 36-37
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Firstenberg, Lauri, *New York: Artists Space*. Invitation. September 6, 2003.
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Medina, Cuahémoc, "El ojo breve." *Reforma* (Mexico City), July 12, 2000, *Cultura*, 4.
- 1999 Gonzalez, Julieta Elena, "Manhattan Códice." *Atlántica Internacional Revista de las Artes*. (Number 24, November 1999).
Smith, Roberta, *The New York Times*. July 9, 1999.
- 1998 Dan Cameron, "Facing Territory" *Trans>*, Volume 5. 1998.
Lebenglik Fabián, "Los Usos y Husos del mapa", *Plástica*, Nov 98, pp. 12.
- 1987 Barnitz, Jacqueline, "Latin American Artists in New York Since 1970".
Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas at Austin; exhibition catalogue.
- 1985 Castle, Frederick Ted, *Art in America*, May.