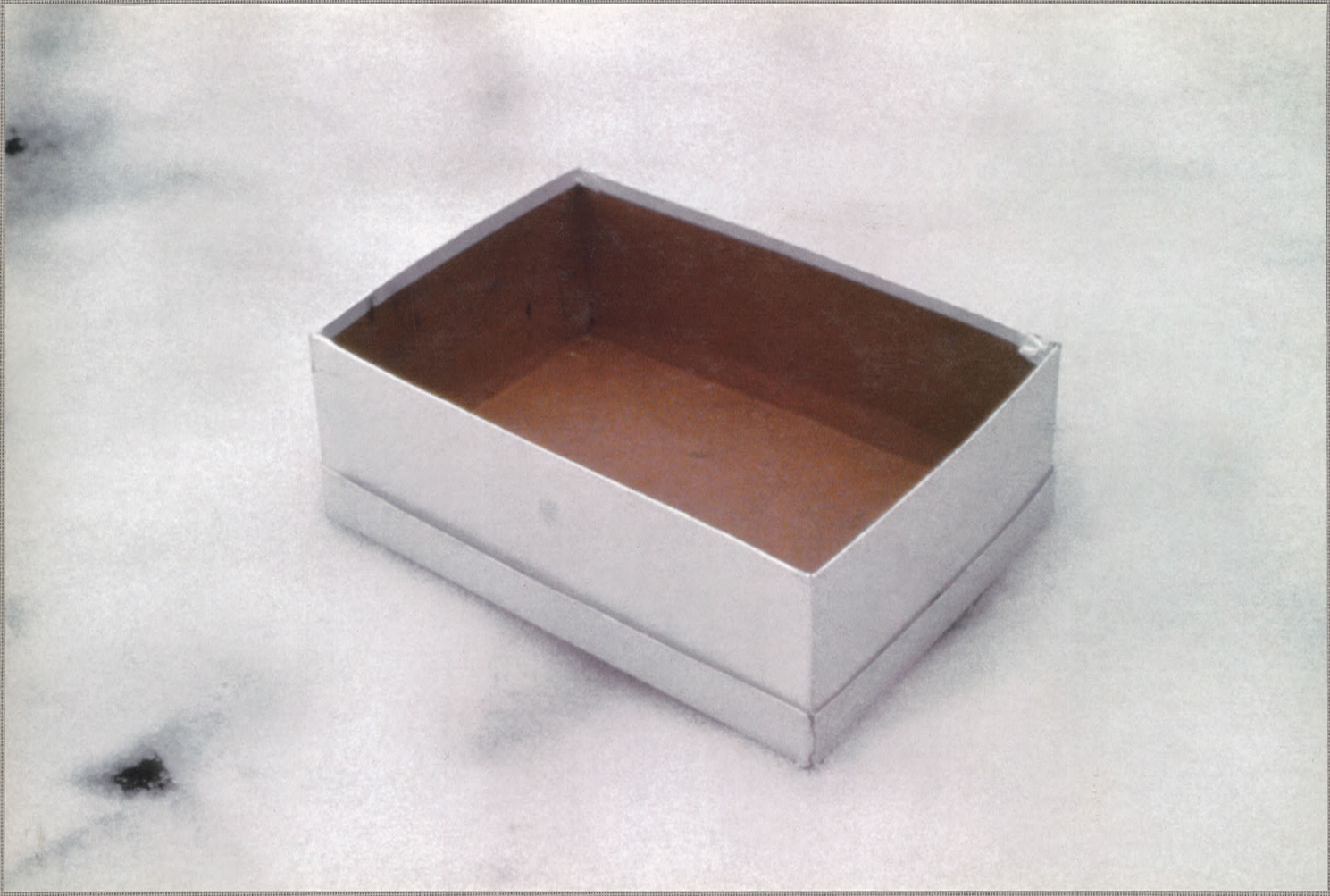
GABRIEL OROZCO

Photographs



Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Smithsonian Institution
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The Cypress in the Orchard

by Mia Fineman

"You see what you understand. You have to be prepared to see the world. The moment of clicking the camera is almost irrelevant. What is really important is what happens before and after you take the picture." Gabriel Orozco[1]

In 1810, just a few months before he shot himself on the beach at Wannsee, the German dramatist Heinrich von Kleist composed a brief, curious essay about the perils of trying too hard. Framed as a conversation between the narrator and a ballet dancer he meets in a public garden, "On the Puppet Theater" unfolds as a series of parables, all circling around a certain quality of unself-conscious grace. The ballet dancer speaks about the mechanical grace of marionettes, who, unlike human dancers, are incapable of affectation. In response, the narrator recalls an incident that occurred after he had been swimming with a modest but uncommonly graceful young man of about sixteen. Shortly beforehand, they had gone together to see the Spinario, the famous Roman statue of a youth removing a thorn from his foot. As the young man was drying himself after swimming, he sat down and rested his foot on a stool. Catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror, he was immediately reminded of the statue. The narrator noticed the resemblance as well, but decided to challenge the boy's vanity and told him that he was seeing ghosts. The young man blushed and lifted his foot a second time to demonstrate, but failed to produce the same effect. He lifted his foot again and again, but in vain; he was utterly incapable of reproducing his original gesture. "From that day, as though from that very moment, an inconceivable transformation began in that young man," the narrator recalls. "He would stand whole days before the mirror; one charm after the other fell from him. An invisible and incomprehensible force, like an iron net, seemed to spread over the free play of his gestures, and when one year had passed not a trace could be detected of that sweetness which had once so delighted the sight of all who surrounded him."[2]

The debilitating self-consciousness of the young man who tried too hard to look like a statue is a curse that can afflict any artist, at any time. Because of this, the world is crowded with "painterly" paintings and "writerly" prose and "architectural" architecture—art that spends a little too much time in front of the mirror, admiring its own artistry. "Such blunders are unavoidable, since we have eaten from the tree of knowledge," Kleist's narrator comments. "But Paradise is locked and bolted and the Cherub is behind us. We must make

a journey around the world, to see if a back door has perhaps been left open."[3] For Kleist, the Fall of Man into self-awareness was not an event in the Biblical past, but something that is happening all the time. At its most profound level, his essay is a meditation on the human condition of knowing both too much and not enough. But it is also a manifesto of sorts, an effort to imagine an art that would partake of the unself-conscious grace of animals, children, and marionettes—an art that would succeed, paradoxically, by not trying too hard.

Gabriel Orozco does not consider himself a photographer. Though he has been working with the camera for nearly twenty years, and has created an impressive oeuvre of several hundred photographic works that have been collected and exhibited widely, he remains coolly disengaged from the history and conventions of the medium. His particular reluctance to identify himself as a photographer has to do, in part, with the overall fluidity of his artistic practice, which engages with but also spills over the traditional boundaries between sculpture, drawing, photography, installation, and video. When pressed to define himself as an artist, he sometimes says that he works "in reality," a zone of operations that encompasses both the materials he uses and the various contexts in which his work is created and exhibited.[4] He approaches photography not as a pictorial end in itself, but as a means of interacting with his immediate environment—as part of an active physical and intellectual engagement with the world. Like his work in other media, his photographs reflect his primary preoccupations: with games and rules; with circles, spheres, and voids; with shifting scale and perspective; and with the enchanting oddness of everyday objects.

Photographs have been compared, famously, to mirrors and to windows, but Orozco may be the first to draw the analogy between a photograph and a shoebox. "You put things in a box when you want to keep them, to think about them," he says. "Photography is more than a window for me. Photography is more like a 'space' that tries to capture situations."[5] The metaphor, which he invokes often in interviews, comes loaded with a playful reference to one of his most talked-about early works: an empty white shoebox that he simply placed on the floor of the Aperto section of the Venice Biennale in 1993. The piece, so understated that it was overlooked and trampled by hordes of distracted viewers, was like a whispered provocation. It was, as various critics observed, a wry comment on the bloated aesthetics of festival art, a vernacular reinterpretation of Minimalism and the austerity of the white cube, a meditation on the conventions of classical sculpture, and an invocation of the continuing legacy of the readymade. It was also exactly and emphatically what it appeared to be: an empty shoebox. (Later that year, Orozco recreated this piece as an image, photographing an empty white shoebox on a patch of snow-covered ground.)

But aside from this winking self-reference, the notion of photography as a shoebox—as a neutral, easily transportable container for images and ideas—is important for Orozco, a peripatetic artist who does not maintain a permanent studio anywhere. His apartment in New York City, where he stores his notebooks and archive of slides, serves as an intellectual home base, but he creates most of his art on-site, using local materials and responding to the cultural, geographical, and economic conditions of a particular exhibition space. While traveling, he uses photography as a form of visual note-taking—a method for preserving and transporting the residue of the phenomenological encounters with the world that constitute his artistic practice.[6] Some of these images end up circulating as prints on gallery walls, or as reproductions in books, but many more are simply filed away in the artist's archive, like mementos in a shoebox.

Photography for Orozco is, above all, a way of pointing to things. The manifest message of nearly all his pictures is the simple imperative: "Look at this." The things he points to are part of the ubiquitous scenery of everyday life: puddles, clotheslines, cars and bicycles, empty chairs and tables, containers and vessels, dogs, kites, trees, fruit, shoes, stray trash, and marbles. He photographs these things in the least "expressive" way possible: from a middle distance, with the primary object of interest positioned bluntly in the center of the picture. His compositions are simple and straightforward, dominated by circles and diagonals, with very little going on at the edges of the frame. Like snapshots of collectibles on E-bay, his photographs depict their objects with a purposeful clarity. He often shoots things from directly overhead, as in *Dog Circle*, 1995, which records the half-moon sweep of a dog's tail on a sandy concrete floor. Occasionally he shoots from below, as in *Under the Table*, 1993, a view of the mottled wood underside of a rectangular table that echoes the rectangle of the frame; and he sometimes shoots through windows, screens, or fences, as in *Coins in Window*, 1994, a blurry view of the Kremlin seen through a window with six Russian coins glued to its surface.

Orozco's photographs are uncomplicated, both formally and technically, which is not to say that he has no idea what he's doing with the camera. His approach to the medium is simple and utilitarian. He uses a point-and-shoot camera, small enough to carry in his pocket on long walks around the city, and he always shoots in color. Because he is not interested in what he calls the "kitchen work" of photography—the chemical cookery of developing and printing—he sends his film to a commercial lab for processing. When he exhibits his photographs, he brings his slides back to the lab and generally has them enlarged as Cibachrome prints on 16 x 20-inch paper—a standard size, not too big and not too small, which produces a legible image without calling too much attention to the print itself.

Orozco began using the camera in the mid-1980s to document the ephemeral arrangements of found objects he had begun creating while wandering city streets. He recalls

making his first photographs in Mexico City, shortly after the earthquake in 1985; the following year in Madrid, he stopped to rearrange some wet scraps of wood he found one rainy day outside a woodworking shop, and photographed the results.[7] Since then, he has made photographs in the streets of New York, Berlin, San Diego, London, São Paolo, Tokyo, and Calcutta, in the rain forests of Costa Rica, on Mexican beaches, on the arid planes of Timbuktu. Up until the mid-1990s, most of his photographs were documents of his own sculptures, installations, or interventions in the landscape—pictures that recorded the results of his physical encounters with the world around him. At the same time, he was also making what he calls "iconic" photographs—images of objects or situations as he finds them. After 1995 or so, the balance of his photographic work shifted toward the iconic—work in which the act of taking the photograph not only records but *constitutes* his encounter with the real.

For the most part, Orozco's interventions are as gentle as breath on glass—or, in the case of *Breath on Piano*, 1993, as evanescent as a moist exhalation on polished ebony. At times, it seems that he is simply adding punctuation to the prose of the everyday. *Crazy Tourist*, 1991, is a view of bare wooden tables at an empty street market in Cachoeira, Brazil—a scene that looks ordinary enough, except for the fact that Orozco, the crazy tourist of the title, has placed a single orange on each table. An artist who notices circles everywhere he looks, Orozco has a natural affinity for the monocular perspective of the camera's lens, but he also likes to complicate and work against it—in this case, providing each receding rectangle in the picture with its own tiny orange vanishing point.

In some of his pictures, he engages even more explicitly with photographic illusionism, subtly exploiting photography's naturalized relationship with visual reality. *Knife on Glass*, 2000, is a *trompe-l'oeil* image of a butter knife that seems to float magically from the edge of a table, as if suspended in mid-fall; only when you look very closely do you see that the tip of the knife rests on a window that gently reflects the light in the room. *Traffic Worm*, 1993, plays on photography's ability to assimilate everything—both objects and images—into a single pictorial space. To make this picture, Orozco opened an issue of *National Geographic* to a double-page spread of a traffic jam in the Middle East, and laid a gray plasticine slug in the gutter between the two pages. The abstracted gray worm seems to crawl over the tiny cars like a creature from another dimension (which, in a sense, it is), denaturalizing the cultural voyeurism inherent in *National Geographic*-style photojournalism by transforming social anthropology into science fiction.

Some of Orozco's most anarchic interventions are recorded in a series of photographs he made in supermarkets in New York and London in 1992 and 1993. Playing with the conventional rules of order that govern most supermarkets—canned goods in one place, fresh produce in another—he rearranged various products to create a sense of meaningful

absurdity. The best of the pictures, like *Cats and Watermelons*, 1992, have the same irreducible mix of surprise and inevitability as a good joke. (Picasso also tapped into this vein of everyday magic when he deftly transformed the seat and handlebars of a bicycle into a bull's head in 1943.) In *Five Problems*, 1992, Orozco exploited the comic potential of potatoes—clowns of the vegetable world—by relocating them to the stationery aisle, placing one atop each of five spiral-bound notebooks. When he was invited to participate in a show at London's Institute of Contemporary Art the following year, he performed this quick-witted conceptual slapstick with a video camera strapped to the back of his head. As he relocated products from aisle to aisle like a mad stockboy, the camera recorded the concerned and puzzled looks of the other shoppers. Then, when he completed an arrangement and turned to walk away, it captured the results: a box of dog food balanced on a metal scale in front of a bunch of bananas; a can of baby food nestled sleepily in a box of cantaloupes; a bunch of carrots sprawled like a lazy teenager atop some cardboard boxes of cookies.[8]

Orozco's iconic photographs are nearly indistinguishable from his documents of interventions, in large part because he tends to see "Orozcos" wherever he looks: in a deflated soccer ball, its concave surface filled with water (*Pinched Ball*, 1993), in the languid white drip of melted ice cream on a rock (*Melted Popsicle*, 1993), in a tight cluster of sheep in the middle of a barren field (*Common Dream*, 1996). While he does not go actively looking for accidental equivalents to his own sculptural interventions, his eye is primed to recognize them when they do occur. Though he rarely photographs people, he is attuned to the visible traces that our bodies leave behind, whether intentionally or inadvertantly. *Breath on Piano*, 1993, is a "made" version of this motif; the "found" expressions include *The Shadow of the Swings*, 1990, a picture of shallow trenches scraped into the earth by swinging, dangling feet, and *Waiting Chairs*, 1998, which records the stains of hair-oil on a wall behind a row of fiberglass chairs in Calcutta's National Museum. This slippage between the found and the made reaches an exquisite level of refinement in Orozco's recent work in Mali, where he traveled in 2002 to study traditional ceramics. On a side-trip to the famously remote city of Timbuktu, he stumbled upon an old but still active cemetery, where dozens of round, terra-cotta pots, used as grave markers and receptacles for offerings, were scattered throughout the desert landscape. In the photograph he made there, *Cemetery*, 2002, we see a sandy landscape punctuated by little spheres, like miracles hidden in plain sight—a ready-made Orozco.

Like many artists who take photographs but don't think of themselves as photographers, Orozco enjoys an interestingly oblique relationship with the history of the medium. Though he often acknowledges the importance of the Mexican photographic tradition—in particular the artful, black-and-white photojournalism of Lola and Manuel Alvarez Bravo and

Graciela Iturbide, who were part of his parents' social and intellectual milieu in Mexico City—he is also careful to distance himself from it. In an effort to avoid the "anthropological" gaze of photojournalism—the implication that a picture emblematizes something essential about the place where it was taken—Orozco rarely includes place names in the titles of his photographs. The formal qualities that the classic, black-and-white photographic tradition values most—dynamic compositions, elegant tonal description, the drama of action captured at the "decisive moment"—are conspicuously absent from his work.[9] What he values instead is a self-effacing pictorial neutrality, a style in which the picture disappears into the object it describes.

And yet, in spite of their apparent neutrality, Orozco's photographs bear the stamp of a distinctive sensibility; their style-less style is unmistakably his. In fact, one of the striking things about his photographic work is how *unlike* anything else it looks; it's a challenge to come up with images by other photographers that bear more than a fleeting resemblance to his. Those that come closest are often by other artists like Richard Wentworth or the Swiss duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss, who also work at the intersection between sculpture and photography, using the camera to record their own assemblages or interventions in the landscape.[10]

Orozco's photographs also extend the legacy of an earlier generation of conceptual artists, including Robert Smithson, Bruce Nauman, Richard Long, Dennis Oppenheim, and Gordon Matta-Clark, who used photography to document ephemeral actions or modifications to the landscape. The difference, as several critics have pointed out, is one of emphasis. While conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s tended to treat photographs as secondary relics of events that occurred outside of the gallery context, Orozco's actions often seem choreographed for the camera; his photographs stand on equal footing with the objects or situations they record.[11] Also, as an artist who came of age after the first wave of conceptualism, Orozco has less to prove; his actions are less didactic, his photographs less self-consciously scruffy. Compared to the monumental gestures of the 1970s—like Smithson displacing tons of rubble in Utah's Great Salt Lake or Matta-Clark cutting a two-story house in half—Orozco's interventions, such as spilling a few buckets of sand onto a table at the beach (*Sand on Table*, 1992), appear exquisitely understated. Looking at his photographs, we are never entirely sure where the art ends and the world begins.

Not long ago, when I asked Orozco which photographers interest him most, the first names that sprang to mind were Constantin Brancusi and Jacques-Henri Lartigue—two rather marginal figures in the history of the medium, neither of whom considered himself to be a photographer by vocation. Brancusi began photographing his own sculptures around 1905, primarily because he was dissatisfied with the existing reproductions of his work. He borrowed a camera from Man Ray, set up a small darkroom, and photographed the works in his studio—both works-in-progress and finished sculptures—under what he considered

to be ideal viewing conditions. Translating his sculptures from three dimensions to two, Brancusi dissolved the sensual heft of solid marble and bronze into a carefully orchestrated play of gleaming highlights and smoky shadows. In some of his photographs, the shadows cast on the studio's whitewashed walls appear as umbrous extensions of the sculptures themselves, while his *Bird in Space*, 1932-40, with white light bouncing off its polished bronze surface, appears nearly weightless, ready to take flight.

Orozco's interest in Brancusi, a sculptor who used photography to give his objects a feeling of weightlessness, is deeply rooted in his own preoccupations with lightness and buoyancy, and with objects that contain voids. He has explored these ideas in a number of sculptures, such as *Recaptured Nature*, 1990, a large, heavy-looking ball made of reconfigured inner tubes filled with air, and *La DS*, 1993, a vintage Citroën DS that he sliced lengthwise in thirds, removing the middle section and suturing the other two to produce an impossibly streamlined profile. (In one of his notebooks, Orozco described *La DS*, with its weirdly distorted perspective, as "a three dimensional photograph."[12]) His most pointed investigation of sculptural weightlessness, however, was the installation he created for his solo exhibition, "Photogravity", at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1999. Instead of simply presenting his sculptures in the galleries, Orozco made life-size black-and-white photographs of a selection of his work from the past decade, as well as of some pre-Columbian objects from the museum's collection. He then mounted the photographs on board and cut them down to silhouettes; each was held up by a spindly black stand. Seen from the front, the free-standing black-and-white photographs arranged on the floor of a large gallery produced an effect of ghostly *trompe-l'oeil*—a low-tech illusion of three-dimensionality that dissipated with the blink of an eye.

Jacques-Henri Lartigue, the early-twentieth-century *wunderkind* of small-camera photography, was similarly fascinated with photography's capacity to create the illusion of a world without gravity. Born into a fashionable and well-to-do French family, Lartigue began taking pictures as a child. He used a handheld camera with a fast lens to capture the precocious antics of the Lartigue family and their friends—their jumping contests and automobile races, his older brother's experiments with gliders and flying machines, their speeding homemade motorcycles and wheeled bobsleds. He later pursued a lackadaisical career as a painter, but he is best known for his photographs, which were discovered by the art establishment in the early 1960s and hailed as prophetic precursors to the small-camera street photography of Henri Cartier-Bresson and Brassaï.

Orozco's interest in Lartigue began in 1980 when he saw the traveling exhibition, "Bonjour, Monsieur Lartigue," at the Grand Palais in Paris. Although the two artists share a similar boyish playfulness—the critic Peter Schjeldahl once described Orozco as having the charm

of "someone who is good at devising indoor games for clever children on rainy afternoons"—they also make rather strange bedfellows. There is something amusingly off-kilter about Orozco—a politically engaged leftist who regularly attended youth meetings of the Mexican Communist Party, sporting a red bandana in what a friend described as "a funky gesture of Veracruz-Soviet syncretism"—finding common ground with Lartigue, an eccentric, upper-class dandy of the belle epoch who rated each day in his diary on a scale that ranged from *beau* to *très beau* to *très très beau.*

But political consciousness aside, what draws Orozco to Lartigue is a mutual fascination with lightness, speed, and motion. Both are interested in representing the movement of objects through space; the crucial difference is one of timing. Lartigue used the camera to freeze movement, to suspend it in an eternal present; his photographs are full of speeding race cars, swimmers diving into lakes, little dogs suspended in mid-air.

Orozco, on the other hand, is interested in what he calls "the wake of the past"—the trace or displacement that every action leaves behind.[13] "My photographs are not just about the instant of movement that you capture in the camera," he explained in an interview. "It's much more total, about constant movement that became static."[14] Orozco's most explicit representation of the visible wake of an action is *Extension of Reflection,* 1992, his photograph of two puddles connected by a circle of wet tire tracks that he made by riding a bicycle round and round between them. The circle, he says, embodies "total movement but also total stasis." Simple and irreducible, it is a perfect image of motion suspended in form.[15]

Critics often describe Orozco's work, particularly his photographs, as poetic—a term he balks at, perhaps because it sounds too literary, too precious and self-conscious, or perhaps out of an intuitive impulse to save himself from the sad fate of the boy in Kleist's parable, imprisoned by his own resemblance to the Spinario. He is also reluctant to take credit for this aspect of his work. "I think that the poetic happens," he explains. "It happens because of the spectator... it is an act, an act of belief or an act of illusion on the part of the spectator."[16] In other words, the poetic is not something the artist puts into the work, but something the viewer takes out—a quality created through the encounter between the artist and the world, between the viewer and a work of art. Jorge Luis Borges, a writer who has had a profound and wide-ranging influence on Orozco's thinking, said something similar in a lecture in 1977: "The fact is that poetry is not in the books in the library... Poetry is the encounter of the reader with the book, the discovery of the book."[17]

Orozco has both a refined sense of art as a game with a historically determined set of rules and a Duchampian propensity for bending and breaking those rules. At the same time, his work also has an understated ease, a clarity and immediacy that seem to sweep through

your consciousness like an epiphany. This is especially true of his photographs. Here, the deliberate simplicity of his means—a point-and-shoot camera, ordinary objects positioned in the center of the frame—leads paradoxically to a near-magical sense of immanence. By maintaining a careful distance from the tradition of art photography—by treating the camera as a relatively neutral recording device, by not *trying* to produce beautiful, well-composed pictures—Orozco allows the fugitive beauty of the world to enter his photographs unhindered. He allows the poetic to happen.

Many of the encounters that constitute the lifeblood of Orozco's art are the results of chance, or luck, or some combination of the two. "We normally consider stability to be the constant in life and accidents to be the exception," he said recently, "but it's exactly the opposite. In reality, the accident is the rule and stability is the exception."[18] Gabriel Kuri, an old friend from Mexico City, has described Orozco as an "accidentivore"—an artist with "an insatiable appetite for morsels of fortuitousness, of situation."[19] This appetite for accident keeps him constantly on the move; he rarely spends more than a few weeks at a time in any one place. Like most tourists, when he arrives in a new city for the first time, he photographs voraciously, gorging himself on the newness of the visual scene. "But of course," he admits, "most of these pictures are really bad. The question is: How do you raise accident to the level of communication?"[20] Part of Orozco's artistic practice—the part that usually remains invisible to the viewer—involves creating the internal and external conditions that allow accidents to enrich his work without overwhelming it. What this requires is a delicate balance between intention and improvisation, a continual negotiation between the structuring demands of the eye and the inchoate richness of the everyday world.

In 1997, for an exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Orozco made several video films that offer a captivating glimpse of this process of negotiation. Shortly before the exhibition, he acquired a digital video camera and began documenting what he saw in a single day as he wandered the streets of New York City and Amsterdam. He described his process: "Walking down, say, Sixth Avenue, I'll suddenly see something that intrigues me—a plastic bag, a green umbrella, an airplane tracing a line in the sky. That's how I get started.... Sometimes I focus and just wait.... Sometimes I follow a dog, sometimes I follow a backpack."[21] At the end of each day, he was left with a free-wheeling sequence of images, about forty minutes to an hour long, which he left unedited, preserving the clumsiness and experiential immediacy of the actual filming.

As in his photographs, the lens of Orozco's video camera seems magnetically drawn to other circles: the spoked wheels of a bicycle, a blue circle painted on the side of a churning cement mixer, some round paper coasters scattered on a tavern table in Amsterdam. In comparison with the suspended stillness of his photographs, the films—all shot with a

jittery handheld camera—feel raw and frenetic. The soundtrack consists of the incidental background noise from the street: car horns, bits of conversation, the whoosh of wind and traffic. The overall effect is simultaneously banal and revelatory. Watching the films is like seeing the world through the artist's eyes; it is also like seeing the very act of seeing. Each of the films, he explains, represents the distillation of "a day of awareness." What was essential in making the films were not the images themselves, but the state of mind the process elicited—not what he was seeing, but how he was seeing. Ultimately, the films are about paying attention—about cultivating a state of awareness that requires concentration, focus, and a mindful openness to the flux of the everyday.

Although Orozco is not a religious person and wouldn't call himself a Buddhist, when he first came across D. T. Suzuki's writings on Zen, he immediately recognized certain aspects of his own sensibility and way of relating to the world. He continued reading about the subject, and a few years later, in April 1995, he copied a passage into one of his notebooks from Borges's lecture on Buddhism. The passage concerned the concept of *satori*, the sudden, illuminating change in perspective that lies at the center of Zen practice. The most common method for provoking *satori*, Borges explained, is the *koan*, a question whose answer does not correspond to the customary rules of logic: "The classic example has been attributed to several masters. One of them was asked: 'What is the Buddha?' He replied: 'Three pounds of linen.' Commentators note that the answer is not symbolic. Another master was asked: 'Why did the first patriarch come from the West?' The answer was: 'The cypress in the orchard.'"[22]

Like visual koans—or like jokes, or poems, for that matter—Orozco's photographs play with the rules of logic to encourage a way of seeing that circumvents the habits of thought that ordinarily structure our experience. They are documents of intense visual attentiveness that also encourage an attitude of heightened awareness in the viewer. As the artist put it in an interview, "...what is important is not so much what people see in the gallery or the museum, but what people see after looking at these things, how they confront reality again. Really great art regenerates the perception of reality; the reality becomes richer, better or not, just different."[23] Orozco's photographs are beautiful, sometimes in spite of themselves, but even more remarkable are the regenerating effects they have on our perception—how they enrich our subsequent encounters with the real, the ways they open our eyes to what's already there: the sleeping dog, the puddle reflecting the sky, the cypress in the orchard.

1 Conversation with the author, New York City, October 29, 2003.

2 Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Puppet Theater," in *An Abyss Deep Enough: Letters of Heinrich von Kleist with a Selection of Essays and Anecdotes*, ed. and trans. by Phillip B. Miller (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1982), pp.211-16.

3 Ibid., p.213.

4 Quoted in David Joselit, "Gabriel Orozco," *Artforum* (September 2000), p.172.

5 PBS interview with Orozco, *Art:21* (http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/orozco).

6 In his review of Orozco's show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in *Artforum* (see above), David Joselit notes that Orozco cultivates "a dimension of the readymade that is often insufficiently recognized: its nature as an *encounter* between artist and object—'a kind of rendezvous,' in Duchamp's words—and not simply as a gesture of aesthetic validation conferred on ordinary commodities."

7 Orozco's early photographs of Mexico City and Madrid have since been lost.

8 The video, *Before the Sleeping Dog*, and Orozco's supermarket photographs were included in the exhibition "Real Time" at the London Institute of Contemporary Art in 1993.

9 In an interview, Orozco explained that he always shoots in color because he finds black-and-white photography "too expressive," and too closely associated with the tradition of photojournalism. See Robert Storr, "Gabriel Orozco: The Power to Transform," *Art Press* 225 (June 1997), p.27.

10 For more on this comparison, see *Aprendiendo menos: Gabriel Orozco, Fischli & Weiss, Richard Wentworth* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Centro de la Imagen; Guadalajara: Museo de las Artes, Universidad de Guadalajara, 2000).

11 See Tim Griffin, "Gabriel Orozco's Game Gets Real," *Art on Paper* (January-February, 2000), p.52; and Ann Temkin, *Gabriel Orozco: Photogravity*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1999), p.175.

12 Excerpt from Orozco's notebooks in *Photogravity*, p.95.

13 Excerpt from Orozco's notebooks in *Photogravity*, p.163.

14 Buchloh interview, *Clinton is Innocent*, (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998), p.109.

15 Ibid., p.119.

16 *Art:21* interview.

17 Jorge Luis Borges, "Poetry," *Seven Nights*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1984), p.80.

18 Conversation with the author, New York City, March 15, 2004.

19 Gabriel Kuri, "By Way of Introduction," in *Gabriel Orozco*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000), p.48.

20 Conversation with the author, March 15, 2004.

21 Daniel Birnbaum, "A Thousand Words: Gabriel Orozco talks about his recent films," *Artforum* (Summer 1998), p.115.

22 Excerpt from Orozco's notebooks in *Photogravity*, pp.121-31. For a slightly different version of this passage, see Borges, "Buddhism," in *Seven Nights*, pp.58-75.

23 Buchloh interview, *Clinton is Innocent*, pp.59-60.

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Front cover: Empty Shoe Box, 1993

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