OCTOBER FILES

GABRIEL OROZCO

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edited by Yve-Alain Bois

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Crazy about Saturn: Gabriel Orozco Interviewed by Briony Fer (2006)

BRIONY FER: Gabriel, I would like to ask you first to say something about the position or space you wanted to occupy as an artist at the beginning of the 1990s. How would you describe your position around at that time?

GABRIEL OROZCO: When I started to do my work in the early 1990s, my proposition was to deal with production and distribution and perception in a different way. I did not like mainstream '80s art, and I didn't believe in market movements and how they were producing and distributing work. I was skeptical of the '80s. I think it was a generational thing. I thought it was naive the way the media and popular culture were used. I wanted to use the infrastructure, the museums and galleries, in a different way and also to behave as an artist in a different way. I did not want to have a studio. I didn't want to have a big production machine. I wanted to deal with real life, with common things. Some of the results were surprising to people, from yogurt pots or a shoe box, to oranges at MoMA, to *The Yielding Stone*. Imagine them next to more spectacular art and then you can see the position I wanted to take.

FER: And how did this position relate to your own previous work? By this time you had already abandoned painting. Yet you studied as a painter, you started out as a painter. And you have in the last few years taken up painting again, which we shall talk about later. You made paintings up to the point you left to spend a year in Madrid in 1985, and you even made some on your return to Mexico.

OROZCO: I think I really stopped painting in Madrid. I did not like the kind of painting around in the '80s, the big formats, the German school

of neo-expressionistic painting, which was very influential in Mexico. In a way, I was not so much against painting, but against that kind of noisy, sentimental painting. We also had a neo-Mexican tradition in painting that was kitsch and empty.

FER: Even though when you returned to Mexico you carried on making paintings for a while, as well as making actions and interventions out on the street?

OROZCO: I was taking fragments from Russian icons. I loved those paintings. I also like the objects, the thick wood, the abstract shapes, the gold. It is painting but with a readymade, conceptual approach. I didn't feel I was a painter. I was analyzing a painting, like a fragmented readymade and then presenting it. I did a show in Mexico of that work in 1989. Then I stopped completely. Then I started to move and travel, and use photography more and more.

FER: When, then, did you begin to use photography?

OROZCO: When I was in Madrid I didn't have a camera. The first time I used a camera I borrowed a camera from friends. It was here when there was the earthquake in Mexico in 1985. Many of my friends were going out taking photographs. I took some photos of the earthquake and the ruins, many details. But I didn't like photography that much then.

FER: So when did a camera come to seem like a useful tool to you?

OROZCO: When I lived in Brazil for four months in 1991. That was when I did *Crazy Tourist* with the oranges in the market. I was working outside on the street much more consciously and systematically then. I started to use photography at that time, about 1989, when the small automatic cameras came on to the market. Before that the cameras were too big. The portability of the camera was very important to me.

FER: You have spoken before about your exposure to *arte povera* when you were in Madrid, as well as to the more recent work of British sculptors like Tony Cragg. You could see these as sculptural alternatives to a minimalist aesthetic that has clearly never interested you. You have also spoken also about the importance of John Cage to you—a vitally important figure to you still, I think, especially his ideas of chance. But you have not spoken so much about what you were exposed to in Brazil.

OROZCO: I was following my girlfriend, that's why I went down to Brazil. But when I was there I was struck first by the physicality of the whole urban and natural landscape. My perception of my surroundings became much more sculptural than visual (even though I tend to be very visually orientated as a person). It was then that I got very interested in Brazilian art of the 1950s, like [Hélio] Oiticica and Lygia Clark. Before that I didn't know them. And I also got to know the work of contemporary Brazilian artists like Tunga and Cildo Meireles. I found I was in tune with other artists even though I was doing rather different things. I was not so close to Mexican artists then, even earlier conceptual artists. I was interested in sculpture, and in Mexico we don't have a very strong tradition in sculpture since colonial times. Of course, we have fantastic sculpture from the pre-Hispanic period, but less so after that.

FER: Did you see Lygia Clark's work in terms of sculpture, or action, or event?

OROZCO: I was interested in the sculptural aspect of the objects she made, even in the most action-oriented work. What I wanted to see was the final object and what intrigued me was their physicality.

FER: Can you say something about your relation to the material of sculpture? Perhaps you could begin by talking about *The Yielding Stone*, the work you made in New York in 1992.

OROZCO: I was working in plasticine on something else. Trying to make a shape out of plasticine, I always ended up with a dirty ball. I went to the roof of my apartment and rolled it to try to get the imprints. In New York, you have a black material on the roof [so] when you rolled it, it got really dirty. I had to accept the vulnerability of the material in terms of shape and dirtiness. Plasticine never hardens. It's always changing, always dirty, absorbing all the dust and the imprints. Then I did it bigger, and made it my own weight. That was the limit I placed on it, my own weight, my body rolling this other weight. I didn't want to make any kind of performance out of it, only some photographs.

FER: How would you describe the status of the photographs?

OROZCO: This is an important parenthesis. I distrust the documentation of the 1970s, where the documentation was what ended up in the museum. Amazing things that were happening outside the museum ended up as relics, after. I didn't like the way documentation came to look like the

leftovers of a party. I try not to show documentation in that way. Not as an archive. I think the experience has to be a real one, interacting with a phenomenon, not a representation of one. It has to be something concrete and three-dimensional. When I cycle through puddles on my bicycle, I am alone. When I place my breath on a piano, I am alone. I do not have an audience. The photo is a witness of this intimacy. It is very important that I don't carry a lot of things with me, that I am empty handed. So I work in these actions with the materials that I find. I find the oranges on the floor. I find a puddle. This is an important difference for the status of the photograph in my work from that of conceptual artists in the 1970s. The status of the photograph hasn't got to do with scale or the size. The point is more about making something present, that inevitably, the only way to see something is through the photograph. The status of inevitability justifies it.

FER: Perhaps your work points to a contradiction that was always there in conceptual photography from the outset, but repressed. That is to say, you activate the space between the action and object and the photograph. In your work, it is hard to separate them out at a conceptual level, even though they exist in different media. For you, there seems to be no such thing as a single object. It's always already multiple. One event proliferates in time as well as different spatial contexts. Mobility triggers more mobility.

OROZCO: That's the key of my intentions. I always say that the work doesn't end in the museum but keeps going. The problem with the document as a kind of evidence is that it is an end. It is somebody else's leftovers, which creates a kind of intellectual passivity. When you have an object like *The Yielding Stone* it is still "breeding" and "living" that substance. It is something like an animal with an organic presence. My photography, of course, is a document, but it does not pretend to finish there; the event is still happening. You forget the photograph, but see the phenomena, the puddle or the breath. The photograph is like the shoe box. It is a recipient. That is an important idea for me. It is a recipient for the spectator. The status of the document is secondary, the phenomenon is primary.

FER: How does that idea affect the way you have shown your work?

OROZCO: I didn't want to show, for example, forty Schwalbe. The way I showed that work (1995) allowed you to walk along it, like putting a movie frame by frame in a room. It is always the same photo, but at the same time it is not the same. It is not the same street. You can see the differences. Some are inverted and printed so they all point from left to right. There is a straight line so the spectator has to move, in order to activate the photographs. Of course, that doesn't replicate my movements, which were more like a labyrinth and took place over a period of three months. With my yellow Schwalbe, I would find another yellow Schwalbe and park next to it. I also like to see the work as a vehicle, and not only a recipient. A car is a vehicle, an elevator is a vehicle, the yielding stone is a vehicle. Photography is a vehicle, a way of transporting an event from one place to another.

FER: In 1993, you had been involved in a show in Kortrijk in Belgium curated by Catherine de Zegher. Can you say something about your working process for that exhibition? Did you make the work there, or did you also use work that you had already made here in Mexico?

OROZCO: It was a mixture. That was my first solo show outside of Mexico. I took some works, some photographs from actions in New York, like the piece I made with watermelons in the supermarket from 1992 (*Cats and Watermelons*). And I also did something different, something new. Since then I have always done the same thing: I bring some works, I reconstruct some works. I like to displace old works and see them again in a new context. I tend to combine all these different systems.

FER: Do you see making exhibitions as part of how you make your work?

OROZCO: It is true that most of the time, in the 1990s, the place of the exhibition was important for me. It was important to consider the specificity and duration of the work. Again, you can compare it to the 1970s, when a work was just for that space: what was called site-specificity. It couldn't travel. Yes, I want to make a work for a specific place, but also for it to transcend that place and travel. Some travel better than others. The shoe box that I showed in the Aperto in 1993 has gone to many other places. And it maintains an awkwardness whenever it is shown. The yogurt caps from the Marian Goodman Gallery show in New York are more difficult to reactivate when they travel. The *Atomists*, which were originally shown in a gentleman's club in London, behave very differently out of the English context, making connections with a history of art rather than just British sport. It starts from a specific situation and then it starts to travel. It is important that the work gets out into the world and gets exposed to

the erosion of different places. Specificity becomes a temporal development. That is true of all my work. It comes from a center, a cultural center. That doesn't mean a powerful cultural center. Every culture is a center and every culture is very local in many ways. And then it goes out into the world, and starts to travel.

FER: You lay great stress on this idea of beginning at a center in all your work. How does the idea of a center function in your work?

OROZCO: The beginning is the center. When we think of a beginning we often think of a straight line—you start from a point and you go somewhere. But if you think of a center it can go and grow in multiple directions. When I say I always start in the center or nucleus, with the minimal unity, it is of course metaphorical. What is the center in a shoe box? An empty space, surrounded by a cardboard empty skin, emptiness around an inside. And then in between the yogurt caps the center is the body of the spectator. I removed the center of *La DS*. The paintings start from the center and grow to cover the whole surface. When I first made the spitting drawings (which I made while I was in Kortrijk though I did not show them), I was working out from the center. I found that adding elements took something away, obliterated something. This was a way of approaching a piece of paper, which is also to destroy the center. It is the opposite of a vanishing point, which holds the center. It was a radically different way of thinking about the center.

FER: When did this preoccupation with circles, balls, and centers crystallize for you?

OROZCO: I have been fascinated since childhood with the idea of the planets. I was crazy about Saturn because you have the unity of the ball of the planet but also the rings moving around it. So I was fascinated by this idea of permanent movement *and* unity in a spherical body. Second, the tendency I have always had to cover over a surface—right from my earliest drawing and painting—was a way of generating a totality, a texture, a unity. It was as if you could put the left and right sides of the paper together and make a cylinder or something, as if the flat surface of paper could become a potential sphere. The third is very simplistic: I loved football and since I was a child I was playing every kind of ball game—volleyball, basketball, especially football. I loved the different kinds of ball, the bouncing, the permanent movement.

FER: Well, that brings us to the *Atomists*. This was the work you made for Artangel in 1996 in a London club. These have graphic elements superimposed over photographs of sportsmen. Are they closer to drawing? How were they made?

OROZCO: No, they are more like collage. The preparation of the work is based on newspaper photographs that I cut out. Then I imprinted a computer-generated drawing on top and colored it with wash by hand. So first it's a readymade, then a mechanical imprint, then it's hand-colored. I reproduced the image on a computer and made it bigger so the grain is enlarged and you can see the little dots as if they suddenly explode. Like an atom, the dot is the minimal unity of the photo. One dot divides into three colors, and the coloring of the graphic elements is taken from that. Then through those graphic elements, you cancel the movement in order to regenerate movement. Of course, there's a connection with some constructivist collages and sports posters too. It is important that the bodies are life-size.

FER: So that they correspond with the size of the spectator looking at the work? So that the circular motifs not only relate to the movement frozen in the photograph but also to the movement of the spectator in front of it?

OROZCO: Yes, the geometric elements have a strange presence. They exist between image and spectator, relating to both.

FER: I want to ask you about the work you have called the *Penske Project* that you did in 1998. It takes a rather different tack from the *Atomists* but it also says something about the way you like to recycle your work and the radical consequences of that recycling.

OROZCO: Well, I rented a truck from the Penske Company and drove around New York. At every trash can and every dumpster I stopped and collected material. And I did the sculpture, the piece, right there, on the spot. The timing of the making was important, not just the collecting. I was not just collecting garbage. The timing was important for me to be making a piece with this material in the street where I found it. Of course, I don't have a studio and it was a way of thinking about a mobile, portable studio. I was alone with sometimes one assistant and a bunch of tools and worked on the project for a month, making collages with objects. I made them on the spot but stored them in the truck, so the truck was for

storage. It was a portable vehicle of the work. I didn't take photographs of the pieces. I just took polaroids to remember how they were done. I then showed them at the Marian Goodman Gallery. It was a weird show.

FER: Were the black and white game boxes also part of that same project?

OROZCO: They were not made in the street and they were not shown in that exhibition. But I took the boxes and thought I could make with them a kind of sculptural drawing. I did them a bit later.

FER: So they were the leftovers from that project.

OROZCO: They were the leftovers of the leftovers. They were boxes for educational films. I found them in the dumpster of a school. I made plasticine balls and inserted them into the holes that were for holding the film in place, pressing it and playing around with the plasticine balls. The stain of the black plasticine is important. So is the dirtiness and the traces of the action in the box.

FER: In what way are they games?

OROZCO: They are not an institutionalized game, but like a game you invent in a specific situation. When I was a kid, I invented games. Those are my favorite games, the ones you make up. You adapt the games you learn to a different field, like playing volleyball between two cars, or the games I made in these boxes. Also you can see *Black Kites* as a game to explore the grid. At one point I thought of calling my paintings gameboards. They are all games I invent with my own rules.

FER: You have often used natural materials. As early as 1991 you used terracotta to make *My Hands Are My Heart*. But you have also used leaves, bone, and organic materials of all sorts. Your titles often point to nature too. Why invoke nature in your work like this?

OROZCO: I have this tendency, which maybe I should avoid, but it is too late now. Many of my titles are nature-orientated: *Samurai Tree . . . Yielding Stone . . . Spine . . . Spume Tail.* I have always been interested in nature. Right from the start in my early drawings that I did while I was still at art school, fish disappear in mythical confusion in the texture of drawing. If you set nature against architecture, I am always on the side of nature trying to eat architecture, as it does in Mexican ruins. Think of the jungle eating a pyramid. I love abandoned houses, with plants growing through the ruins. I see the tree, or the structure of the tree as a perfect organism, and as an example of sculpture. So too the internal structure of a fruit is very important for my understanding of sculpture. It grows, and in the end you have a skin, growing out from the center. Therefore casting and molding don't interest me because they are just a skin around an empty inside, just a fake volume of something. In my ceramics there is a solid inside, or in the pots I am obviously thinking about a real emptiness, not just a fake emptiness.

FER: Nature is problematic for artists now because it comes with so much baggage. But for you it can obviously be separated from the sort of idealism in which it is usually couched. How?

OROZCO: My first take is to say that I don't know what nature is. I don't know what is natural and what is artificial. Those distinctions between the natural and the artificial, the geometric and the organic—these are the extremes that we navigate. You can say that the drawing on *Black Kites* is a kind of technical drawing. You can see it as clinical. You could say that there is something clinical in the way the moon tree inserted discs into each leaf (fig. 50). Something clinical inserted into the natural body. But nature can also be the moon tree or the DS. I use the car as if it were a fish or a natural body. It is a vehicle but is also the idea of the seed. A vehicle of transportation of movement for the seed. The DS is like a big seed. And so it is not clear what is artificial and what is natural, what is language and what are phenomena.

FER: What about the cultural symbols these things represent?

OROZCO: Cultural symbols are traps. Yes, a skull is Mexican. A DS, French. If you go to the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico, you can find lots of circles. The Aztec calendar is circular. There are many references to ball games in pre-Hispanic culture. But this is not the point. It is there, yes, but it is not the point. *La DS* was a reflection on three-dimensionality, for example, on speed, movement, gravity. When you get inside the car you feel movement. You feel speed. You get compressed by the resistance of the wind. Yes, it is a cultural symbol. *La DS* stood for a kind of design utopia, but that was secondary for me.

FER: What about the material, working on bone, or shell . . . is the material structural or symbolic?

OROZCO: I think they are pure materials. With the shells, it's graphite, which is lead on bone. It's very contrasted: shiny on matte. But the bone

50 *Moon Tree*, 1996.
Wood, paper, and plastic.
100 x 66 x 66 inches.

absorbs the graphite. So does plaster. It has to do with a combination of materials that go well together. There is a tradition of decorating heads or shells in many cultures. I hope it's obvious that when I draw on a shell it is not a kind of decoration or tattoo on the surface, but has to do with the structure—with the topography of the object. Sometimes the lines follow accidents or the grain. I am drawing and looking at the same time, following the shape of the body. In *The Path of Thought* (1997), that's why I took the photograph, to see someone following the shape. I think I was drawing and comprehending the object through drawing. The drawing is a documentation of that.

FER: Materials like bone and shell have a particular resilience. They have particular connotations for thinking about time. Skulls have traditionally signified the fragility of human life. How do other natural materials you have used suggest temporality?

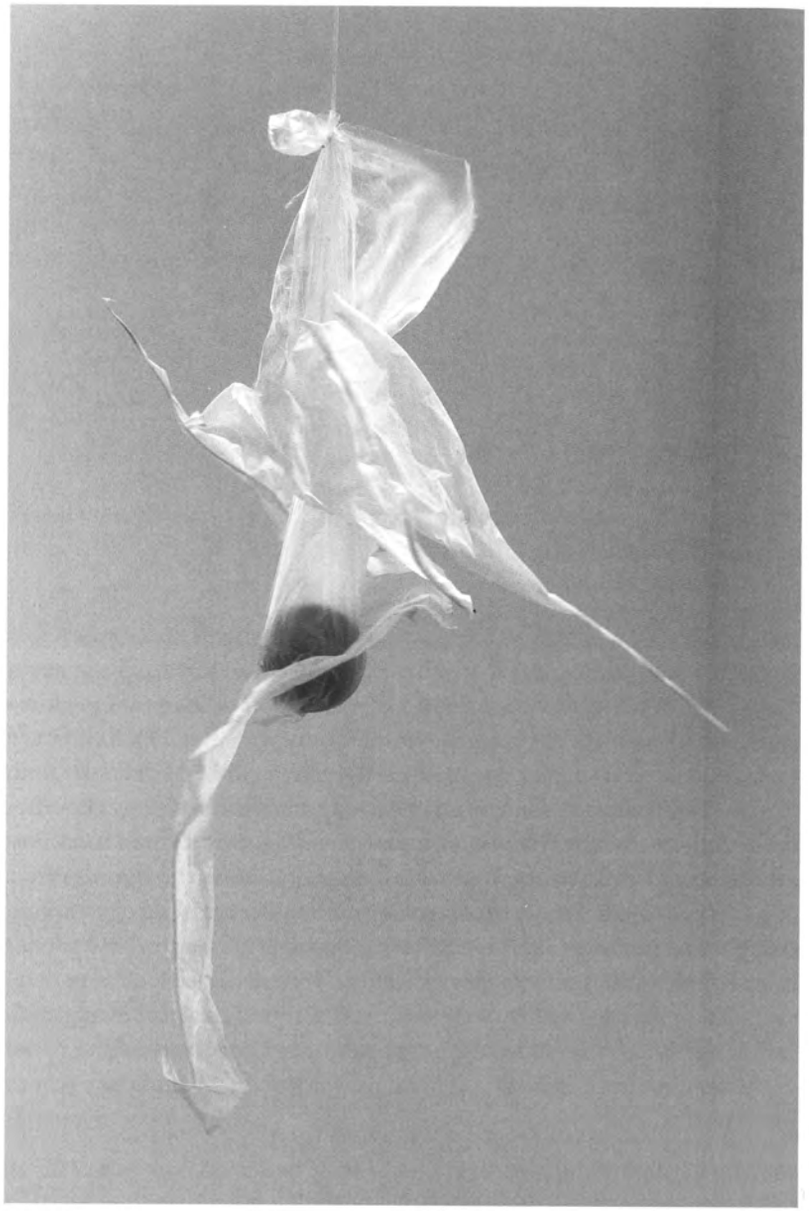
OROZCO: When I made the *Mixiotes* in 1999 (fig. 51), I made them for the *Market* show here in Mexico City. This was the opening exhibition of the gallery I was involved with—and it took place in a fruit market. They are made from cactus leaf with a rubber ball inside. They hang like fruit. They have the structure of a seed or fruit, like the mesh pieces too. *Mixiotes* means a food you prepare with the skin of a cactus around rabbit meat. I liked the word. And it was a very ephemeral material. I made it thinking it would not last more than a day, almost like a floral arrangement using very vulnerable materials. And then people took them home, and I kept some here in my place, and then I showed them in New York. There is something very physical in the making of small objects that I make with my hands with organic materials and shapes. But I also use very artificial materials in the same way—like the expanded styrofoam in the *Spumes*. In every material there is this possibility.

FER: These are hanging works. And you have always stressed the importance of gravity in your work.

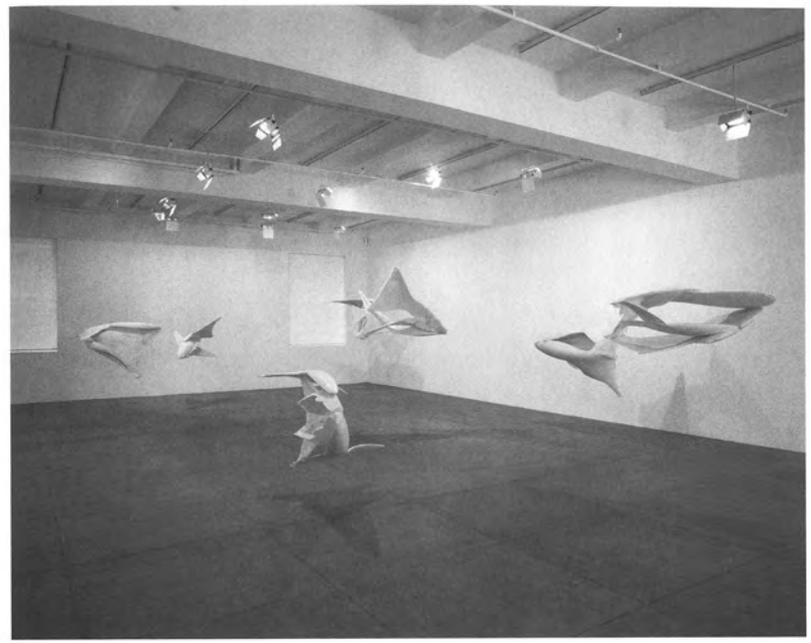
OROZCO: The point of gravity is always important for me. In *The Yielding Stone* you can make a perfect ball, but as soon as you put it on the ground it makes a flat imprint, and through weight it starts to yield, pulling down the weight of the plasticine. I think I have a notion of sculpture in all my work—starting from the center, growing from the center. That center as a spine to the body, a center point of gravity, which connects the body with the Earth. A painter works with the idea of a vanishing point, with something flat and abstract, something in front of you. A sculptural mentality, on the other hand, is associated with the ground, from the floor upward. If you think in spherical terms, you have to mix the two, both a vanishing point and a gravity point. That creates movement too, orbital movement or centrifugal movement, a certain kind of turbulence, which is perhaps also why the sphere or the circle is for me the best way of showing both vanishing and gravity points. So in my paintings I am also thinking of the gravity point, the weight of a vertical axis, not only a vanishing point in the center.

FER: And hanging the pieces?

OROZCO: Hanging a piece always talks about gravity. In the *Spumes* (2002) (figs. 52, 53) I used liquid styrofoam. You cannot touch it with your hands. It is toxic. So I made what you could call recipients, latex sheets that acted as recipients, almost like hammocks, into which we poured the liquid



51 *Mixiotes*, 2001.
Maguey membrane, rubber balls, plastic bags, and cotton string.
Dimensions variable.

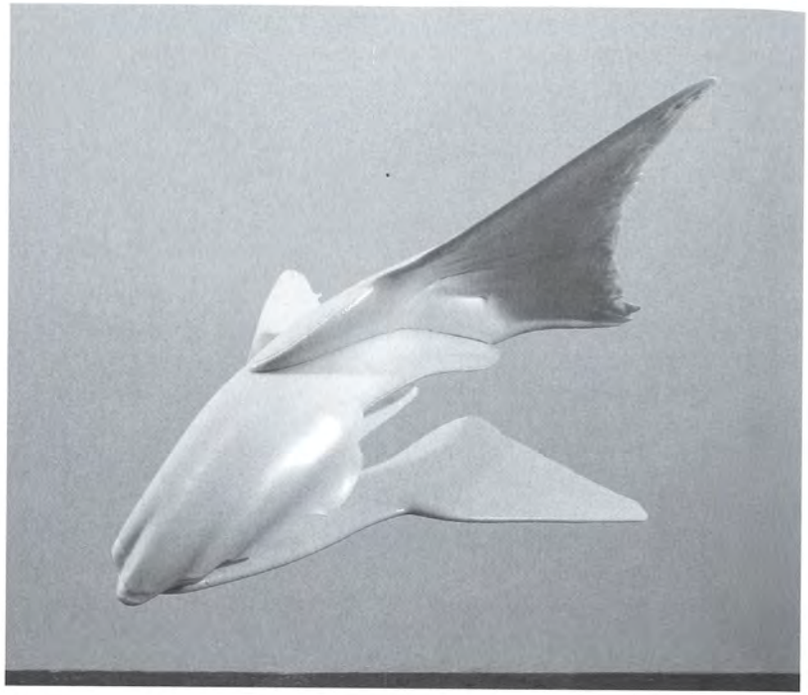


52 *Spumes*, 2003.
Installation view, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.
Polyurethane foam. Dimensions variable.

styrofoam. As it was receiving the rolling liquid latex, I was also controlling it as it moved, like a river flowing. I was playing with the timing. Then I did it again. What happened to the liquid involved a kind of topography. It had a lot to do with time, like lava. You can see the trace of time.

FER: I am interested in the move from something as material as much of your work is, something as material as the kneaded lumps of terracotta that have been likened to amputated limbs or the *Cazuelas*—the move from that to these pieces, the large styrofoam hanging pieces and the small mesh pieces, which are hung from the ceiling and full of air. They could also be seen as yielding in some way, but now to air currents rather than to the pressure of solid ground. I am curious about the way you use air as material.

OROZCO: It is true that in *Mixiotes* and in the *Spumes*, the hanging styrofoam pieces that look like fishes or birds or bones or something, there is



53 *Delta Tail,* 2003.
Polyurethane foam.
34 x 64 x 47 inches.

a lightness about them. They could be floating. It is true that the shape they have suggests wind going through them and shaping the form. It is true they could be eroded by the wind like some rocks. I like the idea of erosion. If you think of my terracottas, they are masses of clay somehow eroded by the pressure of my body. The red ones resemble body parts. The black clay pieces are more about trying to make a kind of geometric movement and less like body parts. In these, I throw the clay so it becomes very compacted, and then roll it around. More like *The Yielding Stone* in the way they are pressed against the ground into almost a diamond shape. Then there is also a work I made back in 1991 called *Recaptured Nature.* It was a rubber ball made from the inner tubes of the tire of a truck, which I cut open like a doughnut, then sealed and inflated. I was trying to recapture the utility of the material. It was a very similar procedure to the one I used in *La DS,* cutting it in half, down the middle, and then the reconfiguration of the body into a new shape. It is also a kind of topological exercise of transforming something, a body or a geometric structure, into a different shape yet which is essentially the same. In terms of mass and air, it is the same.

FER: There's the streamlining of *La DS* too, which you have talked about as almost like a fish in currents of water. I wondered about the idea of the kites, which seems like an airborne equivalent to *The Yielding Stone.* In your photograph of kites in a tree, and in particular in your video *Jaipur Kites,* a kite responds to the merest pressure of wind currents.

OROZCO: I never thought of that connection, but one of the reasons I love those kites in India is that they are square. It is a very basic kite. Contemporary kites are very fancy. This is a basic rhomboid—very basic and made of paper and wood pieces and a thread. To see the sky full of these little squares, all over the sky during the festival—fighting and playing all day long—was like a shoal of fishes, or like stars. You know when I did *The Yielding Stone* another title I was thinking of was a "wandering star," which was the original name given to the planets.

FER: Given how interested you have always been in mobile objects, and mobility and time, I wonder why you have not used video or film more?

OROZCO: One reason that is very important is that I am interested in the mobility of the spectator. That is, the mobility of the one who is activating the work in the museum space. I am not worried about my mobility, or the mobility of the planets. I know that. But what is interesting is how to express the movement and its reception by the spectator. The problem I have with video is that it is very static. You have to stand still. To use video and think you are really expressing movement and time is super-naive, I think. . . . It is not interesting. It's a very linear movement.

FER: You also made a series called *Kelly's Kites.* Do they connect?

OROZCO: That was a joke. The idea of the kite is poetic. It is an instrument, an invention that could be used in science or communication, but basically it is just a toy. I use that idea metaphorically all the time. I looked at some Ellsworth Kelly's paintings, but I could not believe in them. There seemed to be the intention of generating an illusion of flatness or a phenomenological presence that did not work for me. I could see shrinkage in the canvas, some real physical things happening to the pure color on the canvas. Then I received a catalog in the mail of a show he was having, and

I liked the reproductions better than the paintings. And I thought about remaking some three-dimensional movement in the reproduction of the flatness of the painting. So I began by cutting and pasting circular discs and then rotating them, generating shapes and configurations that were impossible in reality. It was a bizarre gesture on works that in reality I did not trust completely. The photographs had another physical status, and when I began to cut and paste, there was something interesting. Maybe the best way I found to express that was not to make a painting on the wall, but to make a kite.

FER: Is there a seed in that series of your own paintings?

OROZCO: Not really, because it is something about the image that I am interested in, in my paintings. I am trying to deal with the rotation of a body inside a flat plane. Not in the illusion of the body, but in the conceptual representation of an image. It is an abstraction, but not one which claims to be just a material phenomenon, but to be dealing with something else at the same time. Three-dimensionality, gravity, movement, light, symmetry, the organic, and so on—that is, all the same issues I am dealing with in sculpture and photography. So it is very different from abstract painting or minimalism. It is not about visuality.

FER: You stress a kind of internal contradiction in your paintings, that they both are and are not paintings. That's also something you could say exists in all your work. In your hanging mesh pieces, for example, it is the (heavier) mesh that looks light and seems to defy gravity and the (lighter) polyurethane foam that obeys the pull of gravity. Maybe that is a bit literal, but what is interesting is that at every level, such things stop behaving as contradictions in your work, I think, and act instead like very mobile and malleable reversals. But the ambivalence you have toward painting is crucial. After all, taking up painting again could seem a contradiction of your whole project up to that time. Can you explain how you came to make them? You showed the paintings for the first time at the Serpentine Gallery in 2002. How long had you been working on them?

OROZCO: For about a year before that. But the circles and the structure were always there somehow. A lot of my drawings had been with circles. I showed them maybe for the first time at the Kwangju Biennale in 1995. People did not know what to say about them. And I made a light box. I wanted to use it as a sign for publicity for nothing. I used the low-tech signage that you find all over Korea. I made several but I just showed one.

FER: What surprised me about your paintings was not the circular motifs or even the paint, but the canvas. It felt like a risk rather than a return to something. It did not feel like a return to painting. An established vocabulary for painting in some ways fails to fit your paintings.

OROZCO: People forget that I want to disappoint. I use that word deliberately. I want to disappoint the expectations of the one who waits to be amazed. When you make a decision someone is going to be disappointed because they think they know you. It is only then that the poetic can happen. It is not about entertaining the spectator, or working for the spectator. I knew they were going to be read as paintings, and I think they are not about painting. They are diagrams. The idea of a diagram has the pretension to explain how things work, how objects behave, and how plants grow. There is a kind of meeting point between the idea of the diagram and the fascination I have with icons. There is something very material about Russian icons. They are very flat, very geometric. Obviously icons played a role in abstraction, in Malevich, for example. But I am not religious. I am interested in their materialism. They are made of wood. In a conceptual way they behave as a geometric organism. It is also a game with certain rules, that I apply to these phenomena and see what happens, generated by chance phenomena.

FER: They invoke the first generation of abstract painting—the abstraction of the 1910s and '20s rather than the later, more expressive model of abstraction that gained ground with abstract expressionism in the middle of the century. Your references are often to the historical avant-garde.

OROZCO: I feel much more connected to the infantile, geometric approach to life you find in European art before the Second World War. I am interested in the way the art of the early avant-garde was based in childhood experience and had more connection with reality. Then art in the second part of the twentieth century, especially American art, got more into teenage experience. American culture is based on the teenager. It is decadent, self-indulgent. So much self-exploration with no connection to reality. Dada is for perverted kids, who shit and pee on the table. I feel much closer to that. In Mexico, the muralist movement was also infantile. I don't mean this pejoratively. It was infantile in that it was utopian, in its ideological energy, its approach to reality. Afterward, with Frida Kahlo, came teenagerhood. Surrealism was the perfect movement for teenagers.

art

OCTOBER FILES

GABRIEL OROZCO

edited by Yve-Alain Bois

Gabriel Orozco's work is sometimes considered uncategorizable; but his sculpture, photography, drawing, collage, and installations are unified by their devotion to the antispectacular, to the everyday, and to the explorations of complexities that are not immediately obvious. Orozco (born in Mexico in 1962) pays meticulous attention to what he calls the "liquidity of things" as seen in mundane and evanescent objects and elements of everyday life—the momentary fog on a polished piano top, a deflated football, tins of cat food balanced on watermelons, light through leaves, the screech of a tire, chess pieces on a chessboard. "People forget that I want to disappoint," he has said. "I use that word deliberately. I want to disappoint the expectations of the one who waits to be amazed. When you make a decision someone is going to be disappointed because they think they know you. It is only then that the poetic can happen."

This collection of critical writings on Orozco includes two interviews with the artist and a lecture by him (this last published here for the first time in English) as well as essays by such prominent critics as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Briony Fer, Molly Nesbit, and the editor of the volume, Yve-Alain Bois. It serves both as the summation of critical thinking on Orozco's work up to now and as a starting point for future consideration.

Yve-Alain Bois is Professor of Art History in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey. An editor of *October*, Bois is the author (with Rosalind E. Krauss) of *Formless: A User's Guide* (Zone Books, 1997), *Painting as Model* (MIT Press, 1991), and other books.

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