Gabriel Orozco

MoMA

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WITH ESSAYS BY
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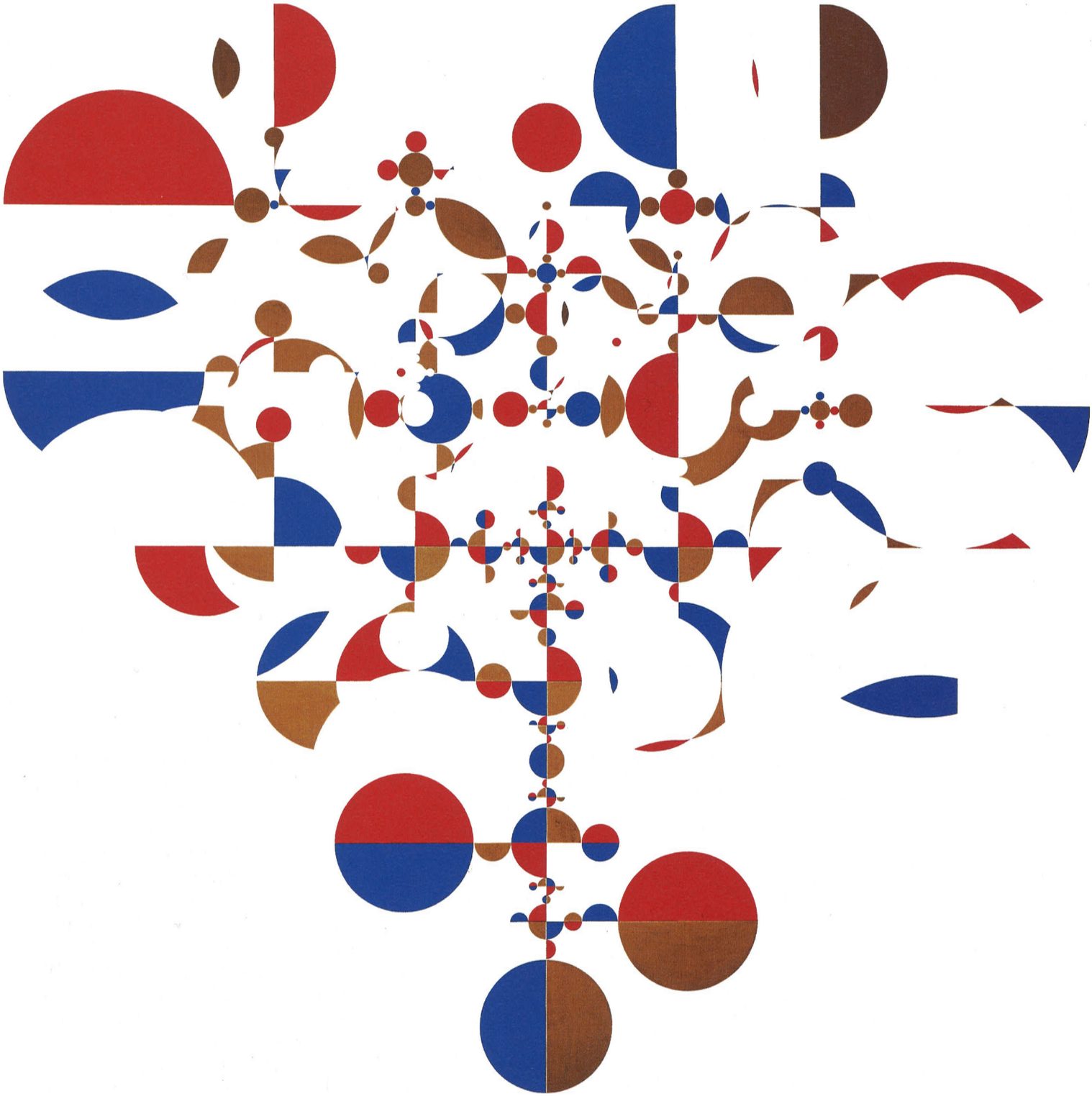
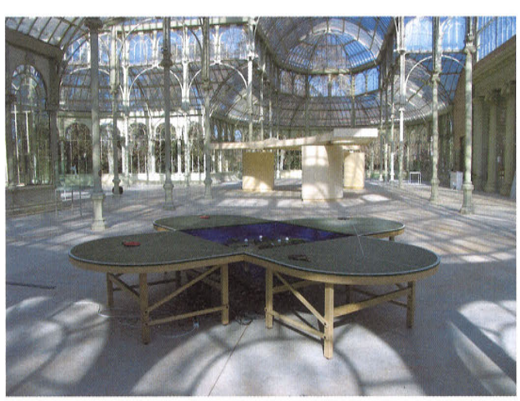
The Museum of Modern Art
New York





OPPOSITE:
Kytes Tree. 2005. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 6′ 6 3/4″ × 6′ 6 3/4″ (200 × 200 cm)

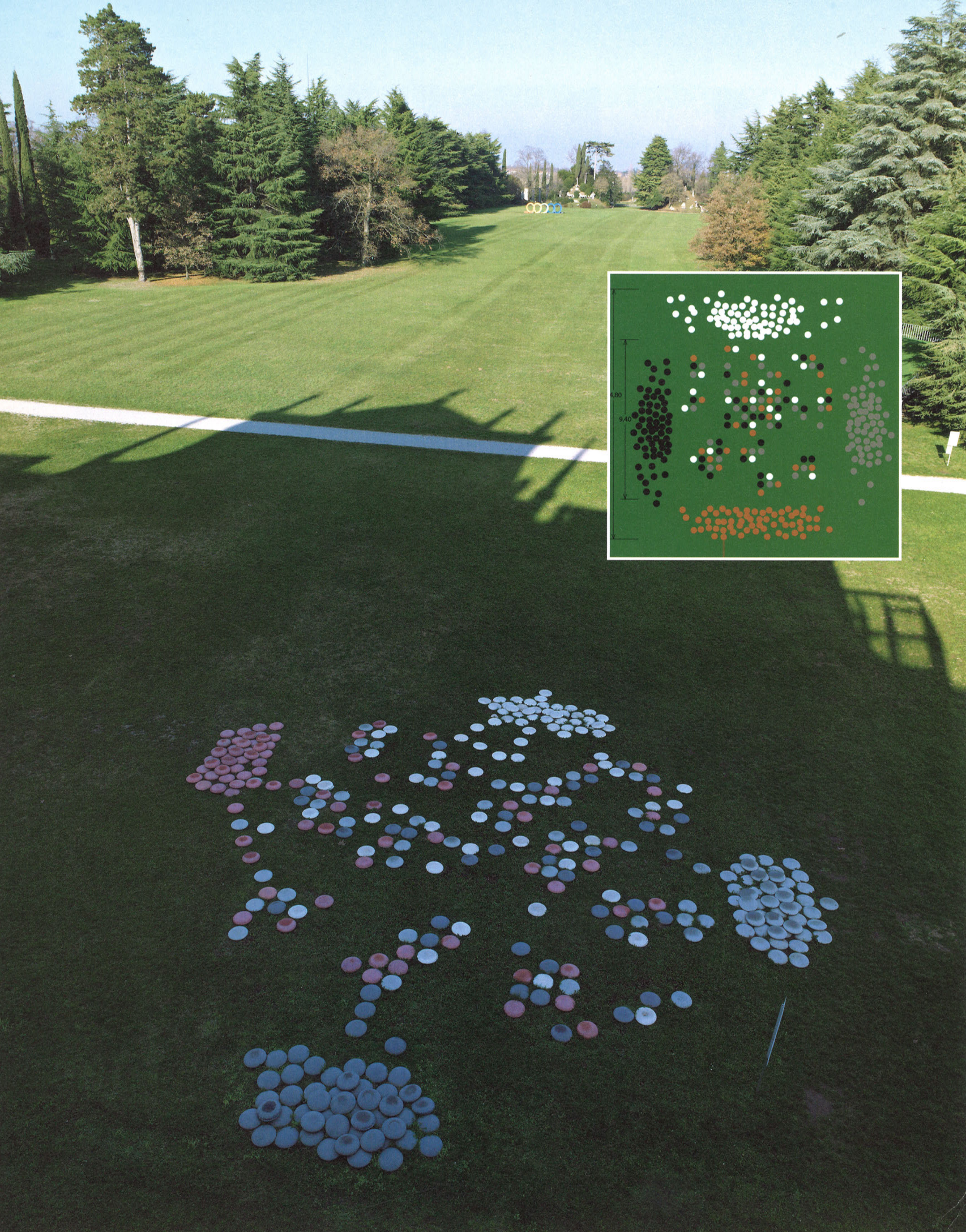
TOP:
Seed. 2003. Galvanized steel mesh and polystyrene foam balls, 16 15/16 × 18 1/8 × 7 7/8″ (43 × 46 × 20 cm)

ABOVE:
Installation view of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Palacio de Cristal, Madrid, 2005

2005: Planting Seeds

In February the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía mounted an exhibition of Orozco's work at the Palacio de Cristal, a nineteenth-century structure repurposed as an exhibition space affiliated with the museum. The show, coordinated by Marta González Orbegozo, included many of the artist's best-known works: *Ping-Pond Table* (1998), *Horses Running Endlessly* (1995), and *Carambole with Pendulum* (1996), as well as *Shade Between Rings of Air* (2003), exhibited for the first time outside of its original context in Venice. The exhibition marked Orozco's first opportunity to show his work in the city that had played such an important role in his artistic education, nearly twenty years earlier.[1]

The Palacio de Cristal, located in the center of Madrid's Retiro Park, is a building made entirely of glass panels held in place by a wrought-iron armature. The structure resembles a greenhouse, though one executed on a spectacular scale. The unassuming materiality of Orozco's work was positioned in stark contrast to the grand scale of the architecture that housed it. The glass walls of the pavilion also encouraged a dialogue between inside and outside, a setting particularly well suited to the display of *Ping-Pond Table*, with its water lilies, and to *Carambole*, whose red pendulum seemed to swing through the trees. Because of the largely unobstructed view of the park, the temporal component was also vital, if subtle: as the gardens changed over the several months the work was on display, they altered the experience of exhibition within. And although Orozco did not create a new sculpture specifically for the site, the careful selection and installation of objects could be considered a new, site-specific work. Reviewing the exhibition for *Art Nexus*, Santiago Olmo noticed precisely this, writing, "That is why we are so far removed from a traditional museum arrangement: what constitutes the backbone of a full-fledged intervention in the space is the very mise-en-scène. The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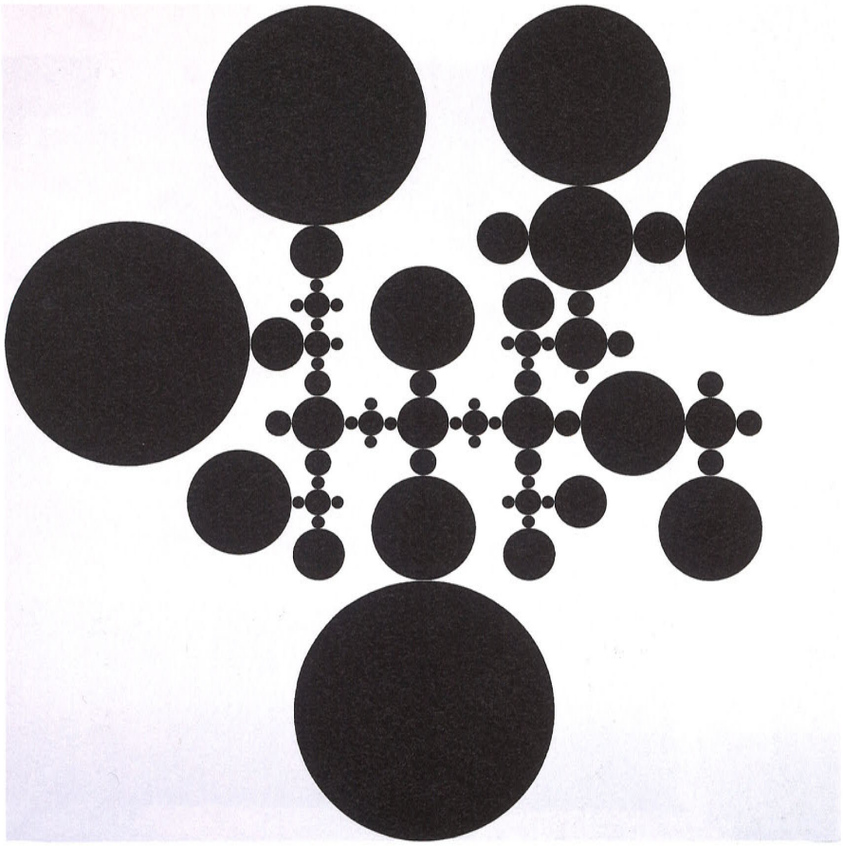


OPPOSITE:
Go 4 No Borders. 2005. Concrete disks, dimensions variable. Installation view at Villa Manin Center of Contemporary Art, Udine, Italy, 2005

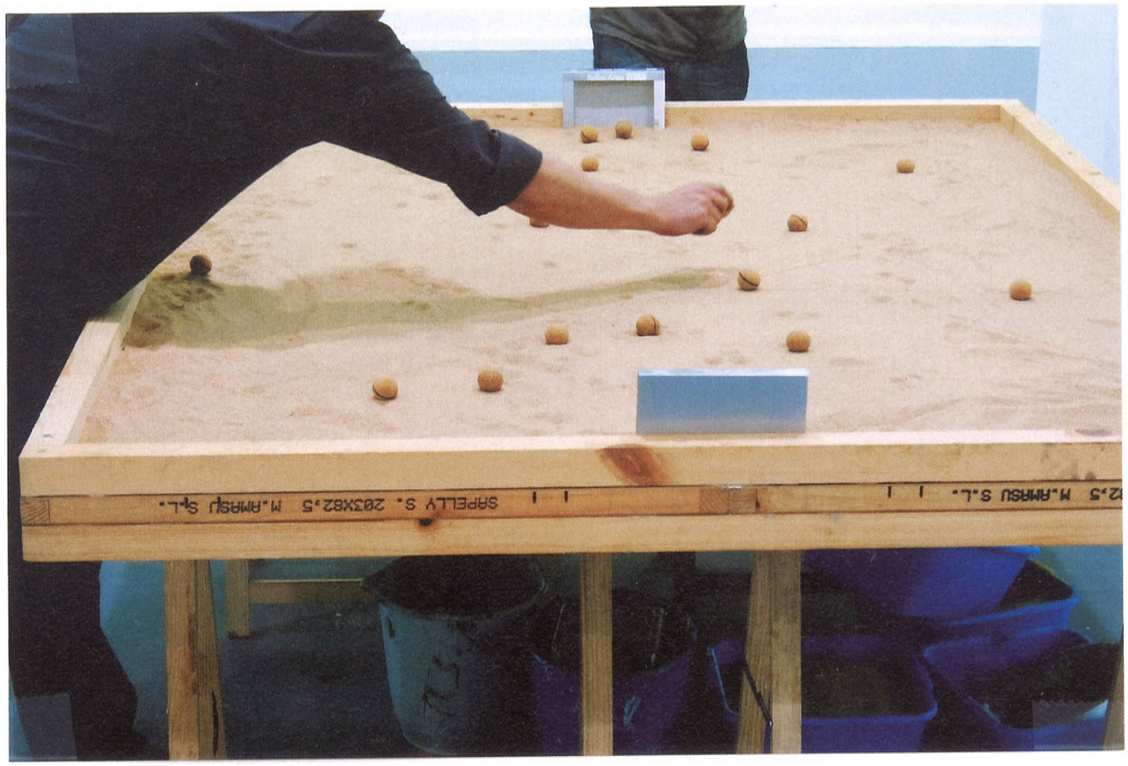
OPPOSITE, INSET:
Study for *Go 4 No Borders*. 2005. Digital rendering, dimensions variable

TOP:
The Eye of Go. 2005. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 47 1/4 × 47 1/4" (120 × 120 cm)

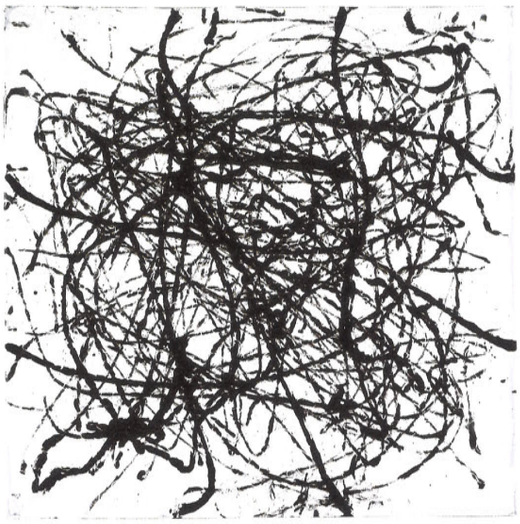
ABOVE:
Galaxy Pot. 2002. Plaster and gouache, 5 1/2 × 10 1/2 × 10 1/2" (14 × 26.7 × 26.7 cm)

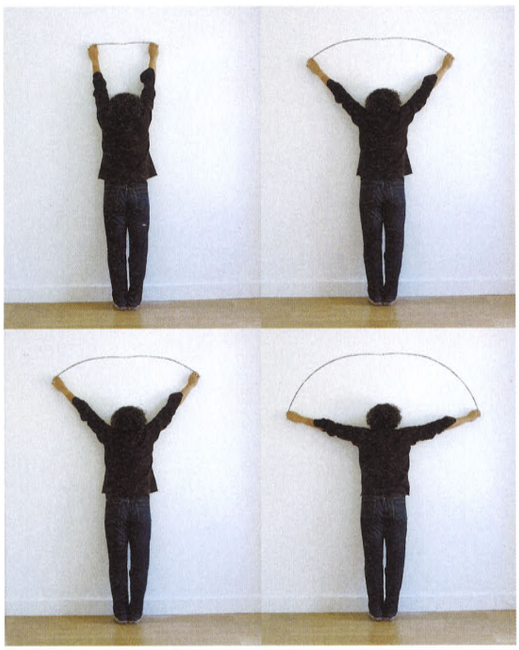
show is, to be exact, an installation, conceived and planned so that the museum, in a location that is not a museum, resembles something else without it being anything other than a strictly orthodox, yet nonetheless different, art exhibit."[2]

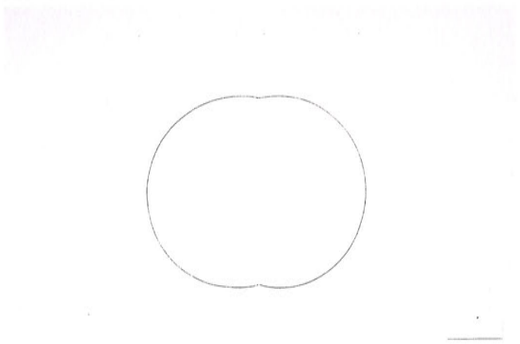
Throughout his career Orozco has consistently annexed the topographical site to his sculptural installations. The space not occupied by sculpture is just as significant to the understanding of Orozco's work as the space that is. *Go 4 No Borders* provides a salient example of this operation. Created for the exhibition *Luna Park*, which opened in June and was organized by Francesco Bonami and Sarah Cosulich Canarutto at the Villa Manin Center of Contemporary Art in Italy, the work consists of three hundred sixty concrete discs dispersed on a grassy lawn. As the title indicates, the work is modeled on the ancient Chinese game of *go*, a strategic two-person game, the basic aim of which is to occupy (with black or white stones) a larger portion of the playing field than that controlled by your opponent. As with Orozco's other modifications of games, the rules as well as the form have been significantly altered. There are now four suits (red and blue playing pieces accompany the standard black and white) and the scale of the game is greatly outsized (the original being a traditional tabletop board game). The most significant alteration is the absence of the board on which the game is typically played. Orozco has moved the field of play to the actual landscape. *Horses Running Endlessly* is the most obvious precursor to *Go 4 No Borders*. Discussing the earlier work, Orozco has said that chess is a war game dependent on conflict and the occupation of territory. The same holds true for *go*. If the board is a diagrammatic representation of land to be occupied, by returning the game to the literal landscape, Orozco makes explicit these preoccupations. Of course, enlarged to an absurdly giant scale, with too many playing pieces and no discernible rules, Orozco's *Go 4 No Borders* undermines any anticipations of territorial control. As with *Horses Running Endlessly, Ping-Pond Table*, or *Carambole with Pendulum*, Orozco removes the game from the system that governs it and leaves the viewer to create his or her own rules of play.

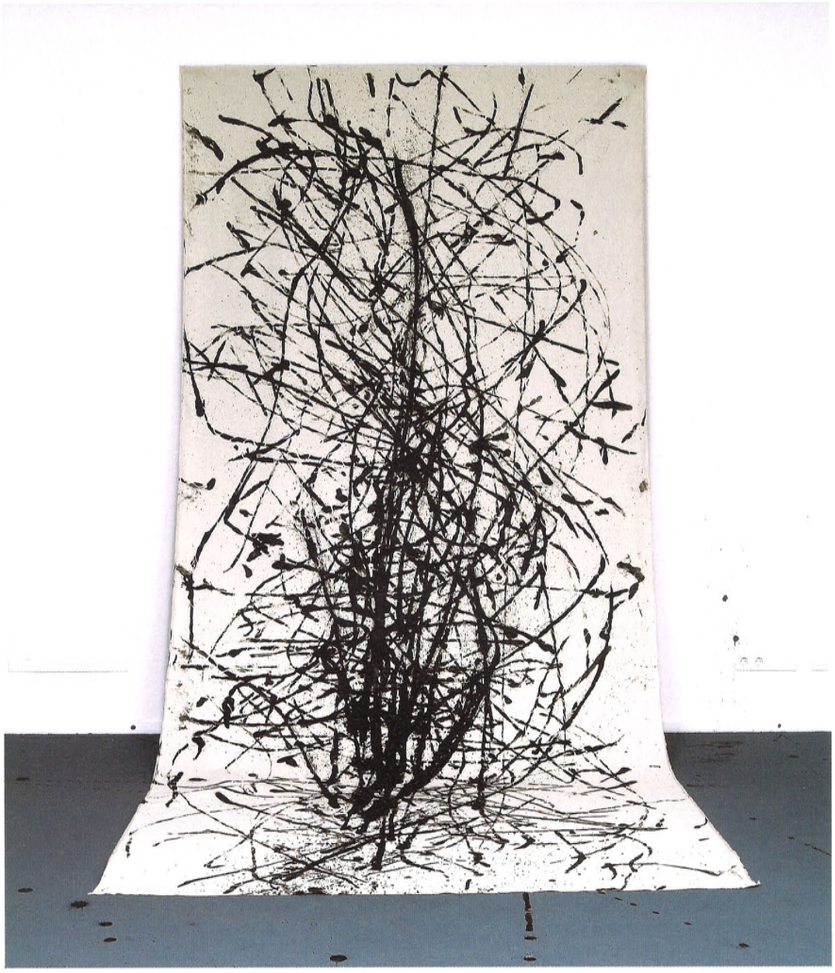


Notebook 14, p. 106.
Graphite and photographs on notebook page, 10 3/4 × 8 1/16" (27.3 × 20.5 cm)









ABOVE, TOP:
Four Points Expanded. 2005. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 6' 10 11/16" × 6' 10 11/16" (210 × 210 cm)

ABOVE, MIDDLE:
Estela in progress at the Fundación Marcelino Botín, Villa Iris, Santander, Spain, 2005

ABOVE:
Estela. 2005. Graphite on wall, 59 1/16 × 66 15/16" (150 × 170 cm)

RIGHT:
Orbit with Six Points of Gravity. 2005. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 14' 11 1/2" × 6' 11 1/16" (456 × 211 cm)

After the Luna Park exhibition opened to the public, a selection of Orozco's paintings was shown at the 51st Venice Biennale. Even to audiences familiar with Orozco's work, these paintings must have seemed like oddities. Gone were the organic materials, the detritus, and the three-dimensionality that had come to characterize much of Orozco's practice. Instead, they had been replaced with the pristine and precise surfaces of *Samurai Trees*. Nonetheless, Orozco's paintings address sculptural concerns. "I try to behave more like a sculptor than a painter," he has said. "The composition of the painting always starts at the center, there is a center point that can function, at the same time, as a gravity point and a vanishing point." The sculptural element stems from Orozco's use of the knight's moves in a chess game as the basis for his color distribution of the painting. "That move is a bizarre invention, unique to chess, that conceptually and physically is a three-dimensional proposition," Orozco has observed. "It is an eccentric behavior on the surface of the bi-dimensional grid. The colors of my paintings are transcurrent between the fields. They are conceptually performing a three-dimensional move." In this way, his paintings acknowledge the vertical axis, traditionally the place for painting, and the horizontal axis, typically occupied by sculpture.

Orozco spent July in Santander, Spain, the city of origin of his wife's family. He had been invited to lead a student workshop at the Fundación Marcelino Botín in Villa Iris. The residency required that an artist spend one month in Santander instructing students and creating new work. After the completion of the workshop, the Fundación Marcelino Botín would mount an exhibition and produce an accompanying catalogue. From start to finish, an artist's involvement could span several months. Orozco accepted the invitation on the condition that the time frame be compressed. Over the course of one month, he would create new

work, plan an exhibition, and produce a catalogue. The new schedule created a sense of urgency and encouraged greater spontaneity, both for Orozco and for his students. It also provided an opportunity for the artist to focus on the temporal component of art-making, or, as he has put it, "finding time for art instead of the space for art." Once again, he arrived empty-handed and over the course of one month created a group of sculptures, paintings, and drawings that were largely improvisational, made with materials lying around the workshop. For instance, Orozco made the black-and-white abstraction *Orbit with Six Points of Gravity* by dipping a tennis ball into acrylic paint and then rolling it on the canvas and created a series of sculptures by simply tying wire mesh with twine. As Orozco wrote in the catalogue documenting the Villa Iris workshop, "A simple gesture can be art or not," and many of the final works were the result of trial and error. Errors, in fact, are a fundamental component of Orozco's process. By allowing his students access to this process, including his "mistakes," Orozco created the room for them to make their own, and along the way to embrace the contingent and accidental aspects of art-making.

Contingency is a crucial factor in *Accelerated Footballs*, which were first shown in September at the reopening of the Museo Experimental El Eco in Mexico City. For this work, Orozco had collected about two hundred fifty soccer balls, both leather and plastic. Each ball was used, weathered, or already deteriorating. These were dispersed on the floor, ready to be kicked, encouraging memories of childhood while calling to mind relics of a now lost civilization. In some cases, Orozco intervened by incising them with the blade of a protractor and removing whole swaths of the skin to created abstract, three-dimensional drawings. Briony Fer, who encountered the work in Orozco's home in Mexico City has described them: "Dirty, warn, frayed and more or less deflated, they lie about the place as if they had grown there. . . . Despite their look of material degradation and abandonment . . . the soccer balls are in fact in the process of being reclaimed. A simple cut can reverse the logic of their decomposition, giving them an uncanny life."[3] The process of reclamation is one that has occupied Orozco throughout his career. It connects *Accelerated Footballs* to works as formally dissimilar as *Recaptured Nature* (also cut and reassembled) and the drawings on devalued banknotes.

The Museo Experimental El Eco was conceived in the early 1950s by artist and architect Mathías Goeritz as an artists' space where painting, sculpture, and performance would commingle to create a complete work of art. As with many utopian spaces, El Eco, which first opened to the public on September 7, 1953, closed one year later and eventually fell into ruin. It was only after an extensive renovation undertaken by Universidad Nacional Autonóma de México's Department of Architecture that the Museo Experimental El Eco opened to the public a second time, in 2005. For the inaugural exhibition, Guillermo Santamarina, an early collaborator of Orozco's, had invited the artist to create a work for the space. Orozco decided to show the *Accelerated Footballs* on the outdoor patio of El Eco, which seemed like a natural home for the sculpture. Single-family homes in Mexico City often contain a courtyard or patio, where a soccer ball can often be found. *Accelerated Footballs* lifted the everyday into the context of art.

RIGHT:
Accelerated Footballs. 2005. One hundred sixty-five modified soccer balls, dimensions variable

P. 206:
Helicopter. 2005. Chromogenic color print, 16 × 20" (40.6 × 50.8 cm). Edition of 6

Comet. 2005. Chromogenic color print, 16 × 20" (40.6 × 50.8 cm). Edition of 6

P. 207:
Mop. 2005. Chromogenic color print, 16 × 20" (40.6 × 50.8 cm). Edition of 5

Stuck Stones. 2005. Chromogenic color print, 16 × 20 (40.6 × 50.8 cm). Edition of 6

Working Tables, 2000–2005. 2005. Mixed mediums, including unfired clay, straw, egg container, bottle caps, wire mesh screen, string, stones, shells, plaster, bark, polystyrene foam, painted wood elements, and pizza dough, dimensions variable

Wanting to foster a sense of collaboration that had been a guiding mandate of the historical Eco, Orozco invited Damián Ortega and Carlos Amorales to take part in the exhibition. Ortega embraced this invitation by exhibiting his large-scale sculpture *A critical state of philosophy. Black Kites* (2004). The work was a creative reimagining of Orozco's by then iconic *Black Kites* (1997). Rather than use an actual human skull, as Orozco had, Ortega created a much larger "skull" out of wood, wire, and paper. The overall effect was that of a colossal and quite elaborate kite. Airy and immaterial rather than dusty and dense, Ortega presented a formal inversion of Orozco's earlier work.

One month later a solo exhibition opened at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. The exhibition was divided into two parts. On view in the north gallery were Orozco's paintings, including examples of the ongoing series *Samurai Tree Invariants* and new, larger-format works like *Kytes Tree* and *Roto Spinal*. Unlike the *Samurai Tree* paintings, all of which feature the same design schema, the compositional structure of the "variants," as Orozco calls them, is unique to each painting. The composition of a work like *Kytes Tree*, for instance, combines two organizing principles. The first of these adheres loosely to that which Orozco developed for the *Samurai Tree Invariants*. The composition began with a circle positioned at the center of the canvas that was then divided into quadrants along its vertical and horizontal axes. Subsequent circles were abutted along the first at the four points where the bisecting lines met the perimeter. Moving out from the center, Orozco repeated the process, varying the size of the circles using a formula based on the size of the first. Small circles positioned along the vertical axis form a barely perceptible "spine," which stabilizes the composition. The second organizing principle disrupts the visual equilibrium created by the first. It consists of a series of concentric circles that originate at several points across the surface of the canvas and grow outward from those points, intersecting with their neighbors. The pattern floating on the white background is formed by applying color to areas where various circles intersect. As a result, the conceptual structure that holds the colors in place becomes difficult to discern. Orozco likens these large canvasses to earlier works: "Like the paper kites on tree branches in *Vitral* or the black diamonds in graphite floating on the skull, gravity and the void seem to conflate and generate this series of dynamic geometric structures."

For the south gallery, Orozco presented a new set of *Working Tables* and, alongside them, exhibited many small-scale sculptures made from materials like plaster, wire mesh, plasticine, and clay. On view were objects like *Containers* (2001), a series of four found pieces of polystyrene packaging that the artist filled with lint, plasticine, butterfly wings, and bottle caps; *Galaxy Pot* (2002), plaster casts of nesting bowls covered with a gouache patina that resembles a night sky filled with celestial bodies; and *Carbonized Torso* (2005), an anthropomorphic solid mass of carbonized clay. In short, this feast of eccentric objects provided a sharp counterpoint to the elegant, clean-lined canvasses. The work on view at Marian Goodman thus represented the complicated trajectory of Orozco's career: moving fluidly between divergent poles while negotiating a treacherous formal and conceptual terrain. As Holland Cotter wrote in his review of the show, it is "an art of paradox, elusive and empty-full."[4]

"Thus the 'collection' of Orozco's work tables records first of all the diversity and heterogeneity of his conception of sculptural procedures and materials, and the inevitable hybridity of sculpture's object status in the present: in fact, the 'work' on the Working Table *in many cases is neither an object nor a work. It might be a sketch, a model, and more often than not it is a model for a sculpture that will never be made. It might be called material in transition toward becoming an object; it might be an object evolving in its becoming a work, stages of an object's sculptural abilities; it is a project of sculpture in production and in simultaneous negation."*

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Gabriel Orozco: Sculpture as Recollection," in *Gabriel Orozco* (2006), p. 163

TOP:
Hand Pressing Five Balls into a Mass, After a Drawing. 2002. Graphite on clay, 3 1/2 × 6 1/2 × 5 1/4" (8.9 × 16.5 × 13.3 cm)

ABOVE:
Chunk. 2005. Plaster, asphalt, concrete, and stones, 8 1/2 × 8 × 4" (21.6 × 20.3 × 10.2 cm)

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Gabriel Orozco*, organized by Ann Temkin, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, with Paulina Pobocha, Curatorial Assistant, Painting and Sculpture, at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, December 13, 2009–March 1, 2010. The exhibition travels to Kunstmuseum Basel, April 18–August 10, 2010; Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, September 15, 2010–January 3, 2011; and Tate Modern, London, January 19–May 2, 2011.

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FRONT COVER: Notebook 6 (July 21, 1994–November 5,1994), p. 184. Cut-and-pasted printed paper (original photographic images by Robb Kendrick and Alberto Garcia) glued into notebook, 9 15/16 × 19" (25.3 × 48.3 cm). Collection of the artist

BACK COVER: *La DS*. 1993. Modified Citroën DS, 55 3/16" × 15' 9 15/16" × 45 5/16" (140.1 × 482.5 × 115.1 cm). Fonds national d'art contemporain (Cnap), Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Paris, Fnac 94003

FRONT ENDPAPERS: Notebook 2 (July 17, 1992–March 23, 1993), pp. 145–46. Ballpoint pen and cut-and-taped printed paper on notebook pages, 10 3/4 × 8 1/16" (27.3 × 20.5 cm). Collection of the artist

OPPOSITE HALF-TITLE PAGE: Notebook 2 (July 17, 1992–March 23, 1993), p. 56. Ballpoint pen, graphite, and sticker on notebook page, 10 3/4 × 8 1/16" (27.3 × 20.5 cm). Collection of the artist

FRONTISPIECE: Notebook 2 (July 17, 1992–March 23, 1993), p. 95. Ballpoint pen, graphite, and photographs on notebook page, 10 3/4 × 8 1/16" (27.3 × 20.5 cm). Collection of the artist

OPPOSITE P. 256: Notebook 3 (March 1–July 24, 1993), p. 43. Cut-and-taped printed paper and graphite on notebook page, 10 3/4 × 8 1/16" (27.3 × 20.5 cm). Collection of the artist

BACK ENDPAPERS: LEFT Notebook 2 (July 17, 1992–March 23, 1993), p. 30. Cut-and-taped printed paper and leaves on notebook page, 10 3/4 × 8 1/16" (27.3 × 20.5 cm). Collection of the artist; RIGHT p. 29. Ballpoint pen, cut-and-taped printed paper, and board on notebook page, 10 3/4 × 8 1/16" (27.3 × 20.5 cm). Collection of the artist

Printed in Singapore

Gabriel Orozco

Ann Temkin

SINCE THE EARLY 1990S, Gabriel Orozco has forged a career marked by constant surprise and innovation. He roams freely and fluently among drawing, photography, sculpture, installation, and painting, creating a heterogeneous body of objects that resists categorization. In works ranging from subtle interventions in the landscape to meticulously executed sculptures and quick snapshots, art intermingles with reality and idea is inseparable from experience. This volume, designed in collaboration with Orozco, offers a comprehensive examination of the artist's career from the late 1980s to the present. Critical essays by Ann Temkin, Briony Fer, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh provide new approaches to grounding Orozco's work in the larger landscape of contemporary art. They are complemented by a richly illustrated chronology that combines biographical information with focused discussions of selected objects. Each entry pays particular attention to Orozco's material practice and introduces the artist's own reflections on the work he has made.

Ann Temkin is The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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