

FOUR SEASONS

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MEXICO CITY

Mining for *hot new stars* in an emerging art capital

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY EDWARD M. GÓMEZ

Move over, Miami. Mexico City, the very heart of Mexico and that other great gateway to all of Latin America, has become one of the art world's most vibrant creative centres, with an ever-expanding art market and a solid base of superb museums, galleries, and year-round cultural attractions. Buoyed by the renaissance of architecturally rich districts like Condesa, an art deco jewel, and the bustling Centro Histórico, the city's landmark-filled downtown—proud symbols of local developers', designers', and artists' entrepreneurial energy—the Mexican capital has launched an international art fair, too: México Arte Contemporáneo (MACO). As Mexico's artistic, economic, and political nerve centre, Mexico City is a place of richly overlapping (some might say constantly colliding) cultures: ancient and modern; indigenous, European, and North American. For art-makers and art lovers alike, this potent mixture of energies and influences—of time rushing forward in *la vida loca* and history surging forth at every turn—has become the intriguing, irresistible essence of Mexico City's 21st-century allure. Read on for an overview of Mexico City's art scene. The time-pressed can focus on the short lists of artists and galleries.

Mexican Art, Then and Now

With roots in a figurative art tradition that stretched back to ancient Mesoamerican carvings, the great social-realist muralists of the early 20th century—Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros—produced some of Mexico's most emblematic art, often centered on political and historical themes. Mexican surrealists, including Remedios Varo, from Spain, and Leonora Carrington, from Britain, produced paintings whose air of fantasy had an affinity with a local sensibility shaped by myth, superstition, and a penchant for melodrama.

Numerous artists in Mexico, aware of what their modernist peers in Europe and North America were up to, chafed at government support of the stylized mural painters. The late-1950s "Rupture generation" movement, led by painter-printmaker José Luis Cuevas, encouraged them to break with the muralists' aesthetics and doctrines and explore more individualistic, expressionistic modes. In the 1990s, artist Gabriel Orozco's international success helped open the floodgates to a tide of conceptualist strategies that still prevail in contemporary Mexican art.

Art dealers Eduardo Mier y Terán (left) of Terreno Baldío Arte and Santiago Toca at the studio of sculptor Javier Marín



Cool galleries

Galleries in Mexico City are more spread out than they are in New York or Paris, but many are located in the northwestern *colonia* of Polanco and, just to the south, in Roma. Among the hottest venues:

ALFREDO GINOCCHIO ARTE INTERNACIONAL Formerly Praxis Arte Internacional, this outpost for emerging and established Mexican contemporary artists offers atmospheric photos of photo-projections by Graciela Fuentes, painter Ofill Echevarría's frozen-moment urban scenes, and Hugo Lugo's paintings of men in suits confronting giant extension cords or Rubik's Cubes (Arquimedes 175, Polanco; 55/5254-8813).

ARRÓNIZ ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO A new gallery specializing in contemporary prints (Plaza Río de Janeiro 53, Roma; 55/5511-7965).

EDS GALERÍA An outlet for cheeky conceptualists like

Renato Garza Cervera, whose *Escape* (2005) is a wall-mounted cross from which a furtive Christ has descended (Lord Byron 53, Polanco; 55/5281-3674).

GALERÍA EL ESTUDIO Work by emerging artists and, for Leonora Carrington fans, works on paper by the legendary artist, now 90, who lives in the neighbourhood (Álvaro Obregón 73, Roma; 55/5525-1339).

GALERÍA ENRIQUE GUERRERO Artemio, a mixed-media artist who works in metal or neon or with found materials, and Jérica López, who paints portraits in acrylic on yellow legal-pad paper, are among the stars of this gallery, which is also a good source for works by well-known Mexican modernists (Horacio 1549, Polanco; 55/5280-2941).

GALERÍA NINA MENOCAL (Zacatecas 93, Roma; 55/5564-7209), with its strong ties to Cuba, and **OMR** (Plaza Río de Janeiro 54, Roma; 55/5511-1179) are mainstays of conceptualist work from Mexico and overseas.

GARASH GALERÍA Rock music, comics, urban life, and con-

sumer culture are some of the big influences on the young artists whose works are shown here, including Humberto Duque's watercolours and goofy mixed-media constructions (Álvaro Obregón 49, Roma; 55/5207-9858).

INTERART Armando Zesatti's hyperrealist landscapes are among this chic gallery's biggest hits (Dickens 33-C, Polanco; 55/5282-2001).

KBK ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO Argentine dealer Ubaldo Kramer shows sculpture by Darío Escobar and drawings and mixed-media installations by Moris, a young Mexican who finds inspiration in street vendors' stalls and do-it-yourself shelters. Escobar, a Guatemalan, covers skateboards and baseball bats in silver, using decorative embossing techniques that evoke the over-the-top stylings of the region's Spanish-baroque past (Petrarca 239-8, Polanco; 55/5250-7147).

KURIMANZUTTO This itinerant gallery has no permanent exhibition space but instead helps artists present their creations in unusual locations—a fresh-food market, an amusement park—and at international art venues. Its stars include Gabriel Orozco, Damián Ortega, and Miguel Calderón, all of whom work in conceptualist modes. The gallery has also worked with "Dr. Lakra" (Jerónimo López Ramírez), a tattoo artist who embellishes pages from 1950s girlie and wrestling magazines. Among his admirers: mega-collector Charles Saatchi, who has bought batches of the "doctor's" works for his London collection (55/5286-3059 or kurimanzutto.com).

PROYECTOS MONCLAVA (Colima 244, Roma; 55/5506-

7319) and **LA REFACCIONARIA** (Bucareli 128 E-40, Centro; 55/5512-0012) are two recently opened spaces showcasing a wide range of conceptualist and sometimes pop-flavoured emerging artists' works. La Refaccionaria is housed in the renovated former stable of a palatial 1922 building that architecture buffs should not miss. Liliana Rames, a maker of wildly coloured paintings and mixed-media installations—like *Cosmic* (2007), consisting of 96 enamel-painted coconuts—is one of the gallery's rising stars.

SANTIAGO TOCA ART CONSULTING A by-appointment gallery with a penchant for new forms of abstraction, like the texture-rich canvases and works on paper of the Spanish-Mexican painter Jordi Boldó (Avenida México 33, Interior F, Condesa; 55/5256-0868).

TERRENO BALDÍO ARTE Javier Marín, one of Mexico's leading contemporary sculptors, shows figurative work in bronze, clay, and resin at this much-watched young gallery, which he co-founded. Also featured: sculptor Héctor Velázquez's eerily beautiful yarn-covered human forms—heads, hands, and mysterious, gaping mouths (Orizaba 87, Roma; 55/5511-6440).

TRAEGER & PINTO Shows by an eclectic mix of local and foreign artists change frequently here. One of dealers Gerardo Traeger and Eduardo Pinto's recent discoveries, whose star is rising fast (he just had a first solo show in Spain): 20-something Fernando Moreno, who is based in Mexico City and makes simple, dreamy pen-and-ink drawings on paper (Colima 179, Roma; 55/5525-4500).

SHORT LIST: ARTISTS

MIGUEL CALDERÓN, multimedia conceptualist, Kurimanzutto.

DARÍO ESCOBAR, mixed-media sculptor, KBK Arte Contemporáneo.

DANIEL LEZAMA, painter of postmodernist, allegorical history paintings, OMR.

JAVIER MARÍN, figurative sculptor, Terreno Baldío Arte.

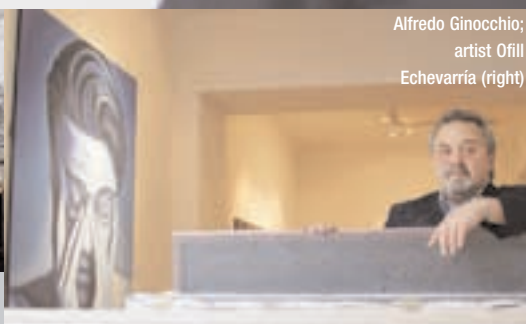
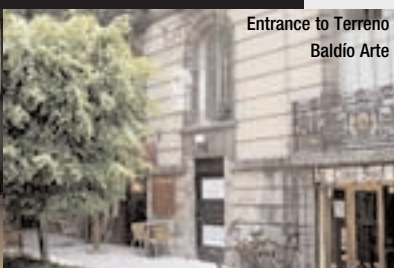
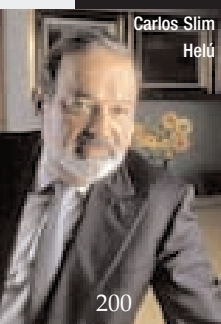
GABRIEL OROZCO, multimedia conceptualist, Kurimanzutto.

HÉCTOR VELÁZQUEZ, mixed-media sculptor, Terreno Baldío Arte.

ARMANDO ZESATTI, hyperrealist painter, Interart.

Gabriel Orozco at Kurimanzutto. Behind him are two of his paintings titled *Samurai Tree*.

ESADORA HASTINGS/KURIMANZUTTO. HELLO KET/DANNEMILLER/ALAMY





They've gotta have it

Mexico City's most active collectors tend to be tight-lipped about their holdings—but not Eugenio López Alonso, scion of the Jumex fruit juice company and founder of the **JUMEX FOUNDATION/COLLECTION**. Based in Mexico City and Los Angeles, López has amassed more than 1,000 works by international art stars and Latin-American contemporary artists. At this year's MACO, his organization scooped up works by such Mexican artists as Laureana Toledo, a photographer, Minerva Cuevas, a multimedia conceptualist, and Daniel Guzmán, a creator of installations consisting of drawings, newspaper clippings, and text scraps. López's corporate collection is housed in a building on the Jumex factory grounds north of the capital and is open by appointment; the Jumex Foundation/Collection plans to build an annexe in Polanco in the near future (Vía Morelos 272, Ecatepec de Morelos, Estado de México; 55/5775-8188).

The Lebanese-Mexican businessman Carlos Slim Helú is also a prominent collector; many of his acquisitions can be seen at the **SOUMAYA MUSEUM**. Located in the southern part of the city, the museum is named after Slim's late wife and houses an in-depth Auguste Rodin collection and European paintings from the 15th through the 18th centuries. Works on view by modern masters include those of Picasso, Dalí, Siqueiros, and Rivera (Plaza Loreto, corner of Avenida Revolución and Río Magdalena, Tizapán, San Ángel; 55/5616-3731). Like Jumex's López, Mexico City-based David Cohen is a young collector who also looks to the region and beyond for what moves him. Although his "Iris Collection," named for his mother, is not on public display, Cohen has certainly become known to local art dealers. His holdings include pieces by Chuck Close, Anselm Kiefer, Andy Warhol, Kendall Geers (South Africa), and Ernesto Neto (Brazil).

Market values

Works by emerging Mexican artists and even those who are well-established in early phases of their careers are affordable. Prices range from less than US\$1,000 to around \$2,500 for many drawings, small paintings, or photographs, and \$4,000 and up for paintings by, for example, the wry surrealist Hugo Lugo. Armando Zesatti's canvases have reached \$50,000 at auction, and pieces by an international star like Gabriel Orozco can sell for much more. Works by Mexican modernist masters like Francisco Toledo may be priced in the hundreds of thousands or fetch millions at auction, as did Frida Kahlo's *Roots*, a 1943 canvas that sold for \$5.6 million last year.

At the Soumaya Museum: Detail of *Still Life* (1954), a mural-sized painting by Rufino Tamayo.

Save the dates

"Tamayo: A Modern Icon Reinterpreted," a career-spanning retrospective, opens at the Rufino Tamayo Museum on October 26 (and runs through January 21, 2008). Since advance publicity for many exhibitions can be limited, look for the latest edition of the bimonthly *Arte al Día* or for the free "Mapa de Galerías" map/calendar (available in hotels and galleries or at arte-mexico.com). **MACO**, only five years old, quickly became the high point of the Mexico City art scene's annual calendar and a new, must-go event for globe-trotting dealers and collectors. Featuring more than 70 galleries from Mexico and the rest of Latin America, Europe, and the U.S., MACO takes place during the first week of May. Still carving out its own identity in comparison to other, longer-running international fairs, MACO has become known as a showcase for fresh talent from Mexico and Latin America (macomexico.com). **FOTOSEPTIEMBRE**, a month-long festival of photography exhibitions in galleries, museums, and offbeat venues throughout the city, takes place during September. For information on the 2008 event, check with the downtown **CENTRO DE LA IMÁGEN** (Plaza de la Ciudadela 2, Centro; 55/9172-4724), which presented a key exhibition in the 2007 event.

SHORT LIST: GALLERIES
GARASH GALERÍA, in the Roma district, for urban-influenced work by early-career artists.
KBK ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO, in Polanco, for emerging and established artists from Mexico and Central America.
LA REFACCIONARIA, in Centro, for edgy mixed media pieces, sculpture, and other work by emerging artists.
OMR, in Roma, a solid source for conceptualist art from Mexico and overseas.
PROYECTOS MONCLOVA, in Roma, for conceptualist and pop-flavoured works.
TERRENO BALDÍO ARTE, in Roma, a much-watched young gallery co-founded by sculptor Javier Marín.

Drawings by Argentine artist José Luis Landet at Arróniz Art Contemporáneo



Painted poodle (artist unknown) on Avenida Alvaro Obregón. Right: Proyectos Monclava exhibition space at México Arte Contemporáneo





UP & COMERS
DR. LAKRA, tattoo artist who makes drawings on old magazine pages, at Kurimanzutto.
JÉSICA LÓPEZ, painter of portraits on legal-pad paper, at Galería Enrique Guerrero.
HUGO LUGO, post-pop painter, at Alfredo Ginocchio Arte Internacional.
FERNANDO MORENO, pen-and-ink drawings artist and painter, at Traeger & Pinto.
MORIS, mixed-media installation artist, at KBK Arte Contemporáneo.
LILIANA RAMALES, painter and mixed-media installation artist, at La Refaccionaria.

Rufino Tamayo Museum. Below: Entrance to the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Opposite: Casa Lamm Cultural Centre; daily specials at Delirio.

Where the Art World Eats

Compared to Americans, *chilangos* (Mexico City residents) eat lunch and dinner late; the midday meal can start around 3:00 p.m., and dinner as late as 10. The following hot spots are art world favourites for lunch or dinner.

Polanco

IZOTE Master chef Patricia Quintana's flagship restaurant lures Mexican-food connoisseurs, including dealers and their clients. Quintana is an innovator who serves mole sauce with duck (instead of the usual chicken) and a tangy ceviche with tangerine juice (Presidente Masaryk 513; 55/5280-1671).
PUJOL Young superchef Enrique Olvera's delicacies

include cocoa-crusted venison with bananas and *esquites* (Petrarca 254; 55/5545-4111).

Condesa

Café La Gloria, a bistro founded by an artist, offers a Mediterranean menu, still a rarity in Mexico City. Its walls provide space for art shows (Vicente Suárez 41; 55/5211-4180).
LA FLOR DE LYS An institution since 1926, this simple eatery offers a full menu of Mexican classics and is famous for its mouth-watering tamales (Huichapan 17; 55/5286-0811).

Roma

CARAVANSERAI MAISON FRANÇAISE DE THE This tearoom run by a young Frenchman, with its retro-chic décor, is a popular hangout for artists and their *amigos* (Orizaba 101-A; 55/5511-2877).

Must-see Museums

For a sense of the broader historical context in which artists in Mexico are working today, don't miss:

FINE ARTS PALACE This luxurious art deco pile of Carrara marble dating from 1904 houses Rivera murals and is a venue for temporary modern art exhibitions (Avenida Juárez and Eje Lázaro Cárdenas, Centro; 55/5512-2593).

FRIDA KAHLO HOUSE For devotees of the Kahlo cult, a pilgrimage to her home in the south of the capital, now a museum, is de rigueur (Londres 247, Coyoacán; 55/5554-5999).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART The repository of a treasure trove of Mexican modernism, it displays works by Rivera, Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, Siqueiros, Carrington, Rufino Tamayo, and Francisco Toledo (Paseo de la Reforma and Gandhi, Chapultepec Park; 55/5211-8331).

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART This renovated palacio houses a definitive collection of paintings and other works from the Spanish-colonial era through the mid-1900s. Of special interest: state-of-the-art galleries for drawings and prints, including engravings by the 19th-century caricaturist José Guadalupe Posada (Tacuba 8, Centro; 55/5130-3400).

NATIONAL PALACE Here are Diego Rivera's spectacular murals depicting Mexico's long, complex history. This landmark building in the downtown historic district faces Plaza de la Constitución, the city's vast central plaza, commonly known as the Zócalo (east side of the Zócalo, Centro; 55/5764-8500).

RUFINO TAMAYO MUSEUM Across the street from the Museum of Modern Art, the Tamayo presents internationally renowned Mexican and foreign artists' works (Paseo de la Reforma and Gandhi, Chapultepec Park; 55/5286-6519).

DELIRIO Chef Mónica Patiño's year-old gourmet food and wine shop and café offers light daily specials for gallery-hoppers (Monterrey 116; 55/5584-0870).

LA ANTIGUA CORTESANA revisits Mexican classics in zesty ways. A main-dish delicacy: fusilli in a dark sauce made from huitlacoche, the corn fungus called the Mexican truffle (Chiapas 173-A; 55/5584-4678).

NON SOLO BAR A great location on a main avenue in the Roma gallery district, European-bistro fare, and, at night, the lounge-groovy sounds of a live DJ have made this small bar-restaurant a favorite haunt of artists, designers, and other purveyors of cool (Avenida

Alvaro Obregón 130, Pasaje El Parián; 55/5574-8577).

RESTAURANTE CASA LAMM The restaurant of the Casa Lamm Cultural Centre is a glass-box pavilion that juts out into the garden courtyard of a century-old European-style mansion and offers such delicacies as coconut-crusted giant shrimp with mango sauce (Avenida Alvaro Obregón 99, Roma; 55/1485-0104).

RESTAURANTE COVADONGA In its upstairs dining room (lunch only), this traditional restaurant's Spanish and Mexican delicacies include La Mancha-style garlic soup, paella, and huachinango (red snapper) in the Veracruz style. Covadonga's first-floor cantina (dinner and evening service only) offers the same menu in a setting that recalls an old Buñuel film (Puebla 121, Roma; 55/5533-2922).

