

ArtReview Asia

Gabriel Orozco

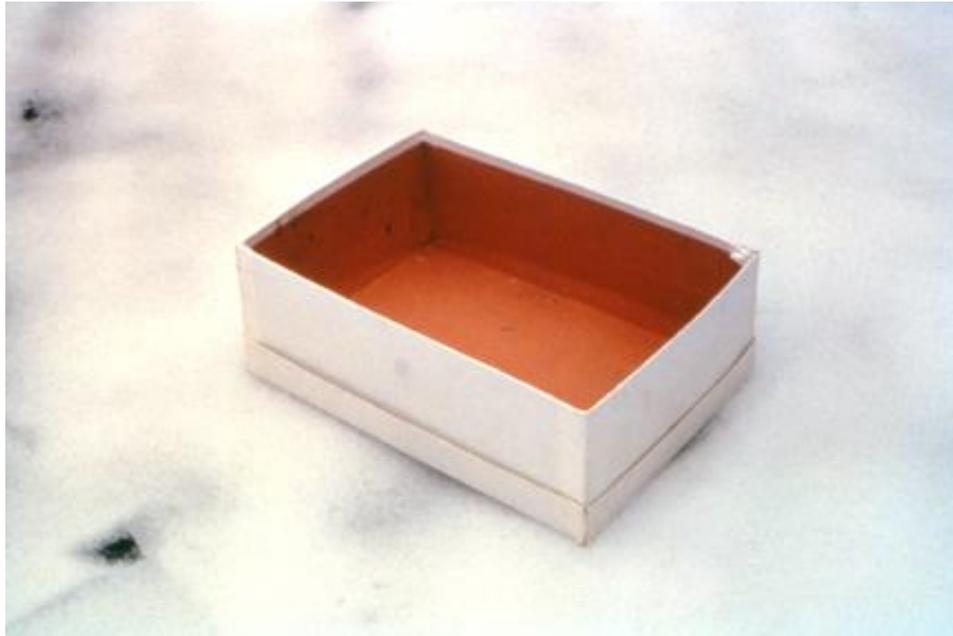
by Christian Viveros-Fauné (March 27, 2015)



Inner Cut, 2014, wood and graphite, dimensions variable (installation view, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2014)

On an unseasonably warm night last November, the creative juggernaut that is the Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco enacted a small part of a larger public comeback at New York's Americas Society, surrounded by his wife, his friends and his dealers. The occasion was the presentation of the Americas Society Cultural Achievement Award, of which he is the first recipient. The ceremony helped publicise a typically circular aspect of the artist's legacy, which has languished somewhat since the heyday of 1990s-style globalisation. During yet another period of sweeping cultural change, Orozco's artistic-philosophical insights have returned – like certain enduring ideas and all great art – razor-sharp as ever.

An artist who regularly pits looking against thinking, Orozco has evolved a deliberately recursive worldview from a set of shifting conceptual binaries. There's craft and the readymade, the organic and the manufactured, the natural and the industrial, the practical and the high-flown. Together, these and other oppositions have illustrated Orozco's way of understanding the world through the steady force of dialectical drift. For a quarter century, the fifty-two-year-old has turned these contraries into a singular approach to artmaking. Some 21 years after he exhibited an empty shoebox at the 1993 Venice Biennale and first showed a cut-up and reassembled Citroën DS at Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris, his finished works continue to toggle between two poles: perfectly crafted objects and highly metaphysical propositions. Increasingly, they do so to reinforce a vision of forward thinking that is both propulsive and circular.



Empty Shoe Box, 1993. Courtesy of the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris & London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

To quote Ann Temkin, the curator of Orozco's celebrated MOMA retrospective in 2009, 'There is no way to identify a work by Orozco in terms of physical product.' Instead, there is a creative through-line that organises his oeuvre contextually, from artwork to artwork, and from exhibition to exhibition. Lately, that line has begun looping back on itself in the imitation of the Greek Ouroboros – the mythical snake that bites its own tail. Starting with his no-frills presentation at the 2012 Havana Biennial, his subsequent survey exhibition *Natural Motion* (it was organised by the Kunsthaus Bregenz and the Moderna Museet) and an expansive 2014 autumn show at Marian Goodman in New York, Orozco's mood can be said to have turned intensely selfreflexive. Like no other contemporary artist of the first rank, he has responded to new cultural and technological shifts with what can justly be called circular innovation. An approach based on profound stocktaking, it's also fundamentally linked to the ideal of variation and repetition in the natural world.

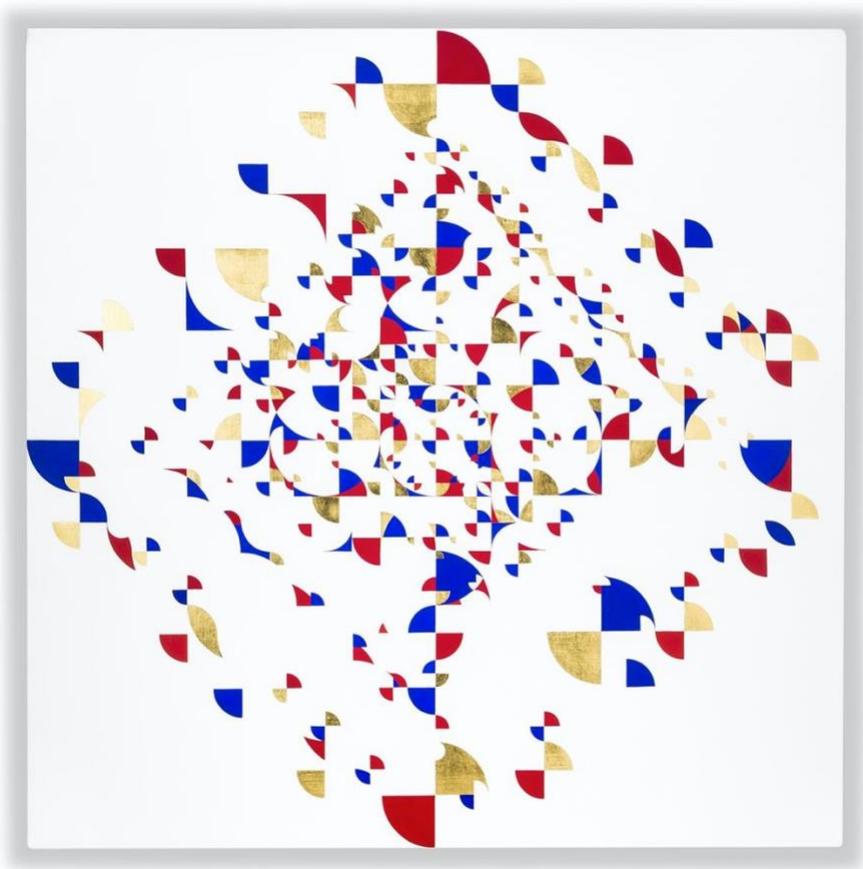


Natural Motion, 2014 (installation view, Moderna Museet, Stockholm). Courtesy of the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris & London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

A sculptor without a medium, Orozco has long used photography, video, drawing, collage, painting and what others call installation (he does not) to make art whose visual forms and motifs act as triggers for seemingly ordinary surprises and deep philosophical reflections. As he once advised his friend and fellow artist Damián Ortega to do in the late 1980s, he often prefers to let ideas mature and percolate, so that they can emerge as fully formed artworks later. Unsurprisingly, Ortega's observations about the work Orozco executed for the Havana Biennial fully document this trend. As transcribed in a 2012 interview they conducted with each other in the pages of *Art in America*, the younger Ortega saw the mostly circular drawings and paintings Orozco executed in mud and debris on the walls and floors of Havana's abandoned Escuela de Ballet building and instantly recalled paintings the older artist had shown him over 20 years earlier, in Mexico City.

History records that for approximately four years starting in 1987 Ortega, along with artists Gabriel Kuri, Abraham Cruzvillegas and Jerónimo López Ramírez, alias Dr Lakra, met weekly at Orozco's house in the Tlalpan neighbourhood of Mexico City to conduct what they informally called the *Taller de los Viernes*. This 'Friday Workshop' – initiated to provide an outlet for a group of young artists who felt alienated from the traditionalist local scene – changed the landscape of Mexican art forever, and eventually helped launch Orozco's career as a pioneer of global conceptualism. Two and a half decades later, his workshop collaboration with Cuban art students recycled the Mexican artist's earlier motifs to create a site-specific intervention. The implications of Orozco's loaded adaptation are not to be underestimated. As Ortega properly put it: 'After all that time, the idea has reached maturity, only now it is transformed into a political, collaborative effort.'

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Inner Sections Alpha, 2014. Courtesy of the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris & London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

What was once a series of early geometrical paintings became, in Orozco's own words, 'a workshop or a seminar about light, dust and architecture'. In turn, the adaptive nature of Orozco's process ensured that the untitled installation – while being very much 'about nature, open air and the body' – also effectively dealt with far-reaching ideas of 'public art and the crisis of public education'. In this way, the artist's signature circular and semicircular shapes were transformed utterly – thanks to his canny use of context and repetition. No doubt, Orozco's experience in Havana also strongly affected his unique decision to undertake another species of remake: namely, a second version of the iconic *La DS* (1993), far and away his most recognisable sculpture. Made for Orozco's 2013–14 Northern European retrospective (the artist has expressed to this critic the idea that he currently prefers exhibiting his work in places where it has not previously travelled), the artist's second cut-up car replicates the making of the original to arrive at a different, bullet-shaped object that, appropriately, triggers an alternate set of fulsome meanings.



La DS (Cornaline), 2013. Courtesy the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris & London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

As the artist explains to curator Yilmaz Dziewior in the catalogue that accompanies *Natural Motion*, the new sculpture, which he titled *La DS (Cornaline)* (2013) after its gemlike red colour, does not share in what he describes as the 'phenomenon of overproduction' – by which Orozco means both the spectacular nature of contemporary art today and the 'materialist dogma that the more expensive a production is the more interesting it will be'. Animated by other interests, like his wish to deliberately problematise existing aspects of artistic originality and allow for greater circulation of his art, this second unique car sculpture launches a new artistic symbol into the world, while invariably modifying the nature of the first. It's a decision the artist says he came to, like many, 'slowly, and then at some point I decided to do it'. For Orozco, the choice is an affirmative creative step taken in the face of an art game played increasingly according to financial calculus. He, of course, prefers less predictable games like chess, or the unstable results garnered by throwing his many boomerangs.

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In their wide-ranging 2012 conversation, Orozco also told Ortega: 'Art-as-spectacle... erodes social consciousness by avoiding critical issues, such as the exploitation of cheap labor, the prioritization of money over creativity and an institutional reverence for all that is technological, as if that were synonymous with vanguard ideas. Some of us are not obsessed with videos, or spectacular photography, or with great factory-type artistic productions.'

Consider, in this light, Orozco's 2014 New York gallery exhibition of handmade boomerangs. A group of crude wooden cutouts based on Orozco's personal collection of Oceanic hunting implements, their friezelike arrangement represented, among other things, both the flight of an ancient manmade tool and its changing nature. An unlikely sculpture rendered in everyday materials, it riffs on a state of play that, like art, is both constant and changing. Which leads one to an inevitable conclusion about the identity of the author of this work and others discussed here: the Gabriel Orozco we see in this and other recent international shows is intimately related to Gabriel Orozco, the justly acclaimed artist of the late 1990s, but he is not at all the same.

Gabriel Orozco: Inner Cycles is on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, through 10 May 2015.