

Nacido en 1978, Moris (Israel Moreno Meza) pertenece a una tercera generación de artistas nacidos y activos en la Ciudad de México cuyo trabajo se plantea la ciudad como un laboratorio y la cultura urbana cotidiana como un inventario de temas a investigar. Inscribiendo su producción en ese umbral desde el que se abordan las estrategias neoconceptuales interdisciplinarias mediante artificios performáticos y aproximaciones antropológicas visuales a la práctica artística, y se contempla la cultura urbana como tema o referencia clave, un umbral establecido muy especialmente por Gabriel Orozco y Francis Alÿs, Moris se dedica, al igual que estos artistas, a escoger el lenguaje formal que mejor expresa su temática y su concepto.

Valiéndose de un estilo franco y directo, su enfoque es de naturaleza etnográfica. Los territorios no cartografiados de ciudades perdidas y barrios marginales son los territorios de su trabajo de campo. Y aunque lo social y lo político componen sus preocupaciones constantes, se plasman siempre en unas escuetas resoluciones formales. En su condición de artista/etnógrafo, a Moris no le interesa juzgar, sino más bien presentar en forma sucinta los problemas que surgen de su investigación en las subculturas urbanas. En ese sentido, sus reflexiones sobre el poder, el conocimiento y la representación son más existenciales que ideológicas, planteando preguntas, más que sugiriendo respuestas, relacionadas con la responsabilidad individual,

los derechos y el uso o el abuso del poder, dejando totalmente abierta la lectura e interpretación sobre su obra.

Su reciente exposición *Un animal muere porque otro tiene hambre* (2008) en el Museo Experimental El Eco, nos permite apreciar y comprender la complejidad y el carácter provocador de su trabajo. La instalación, que mostraba una serie de elementos en dinámica interrelación consistente en dos esculturas, cinco pinturas – o algo parecido – y una obra sobre papel, establecía un claro contraste entre el barroquismo – abundancia de imaginería, capas de textos, contradicción, paradoja y polisemia – y la pureza, pulcra y moderna, de la propuesta de Mathias Goeritz (1915–1990), el artista y arquitecto mexicano de origen alemán que diseñó la *kunsthalle* que en la actualidad gestiona la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) como un espacio al servicio de artistas emergentes. Aglutinada alrededor del tema general de las subculturas del inframundo que habita en los pliegues castigados por la pobreza de la monstruosa expansión urbana del Distrito Federal, la producción de Moris resalta la violencia social y el universo cotidiano de la picaresca contemporánea.

El discurso de la instalación se inspiraba en el vocabulario de la zoología y el comportamiento animal que se utiliza en la literatura y en los programas divulgativos de la televisión, en la jerga de la prensa sensacionalista y en los dialectos de

Moris (Israel Moreno Meza), born in 1978, belongs to the third generation of artists living and working in Mexico City whose oeuvre approaches the city as a laboratory, and its urban everyday culture as an inventory of research topics. Inscribing his work in the threshold, set in place most notably by Gabriel Orozco (1962-) and Francis Alÿs (1959-), that engages interdisciplinary neo-conceptual strategies by means of performative devices, visual anthropological approaches to the practice of art, and urban culture as a key theme or reference, likewise, Moris selects the formal language that best articulates his subject matter and concept.

Working in a frank, direct style, his approach is of an ethnographic nature. The uncharted territories of *ciudades perdidas* ("lost cities") and marginal *barrios* are the zones of his fieldwork. His ongoing concerns are social and political, yet they are always rendered in crisp formal resolutions. As an artist/ethnographer, he is not interested in judgement but rather in the succinct presentation of issues resulting from his research on urban subcultures. In this regard, his reflections on power, knowledge, and representation are more existential than ideological, posing questions rather than suggesting answers regarding individual responsibility, rights, and the use or abuse of power, leaving wide open the reading and interpretation of the work.

His recent exhibition at El Eco Museo Experimental, *Un animal muere porque otro tiene hambre* (*An animal dies because another is hungry*, 2008), allows one to appreciate and understand the complexity and provocative nature of his work. Consisting of two sculptures, five paintings of sorts, and a work on paper, all dynamically interrelated, the installation contrasted baroque-like qualities – saturated with imagery, layered texts, contradiction, paradox and polysemy – with the modernist, sleek purity proposed by the German-born Mexican artist and architect Mathias Goeritz (1915–1990), who designed the *kunsthalle* currently administered by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) as a space for emerging artists. Linked together by its general theme of underworld subcultures that operate in the poverty-stricken folds populating Mexico City's monstrous urban sprawl, Moris' oeuvre underlines social violence and the cotidian universe of the contemporary picaresque.

The discourse of the installation was inspired by the lexicon of zoology and animal behavior used in literature and educational TV programmes; tabloid press jargon; and underworld dialects. Presenting a rogue and vicious world, *Un animal muere porque otro tiene hambre* is a comment on the state of things in which economic and social inequalities, violence, and power relations forge, on the one hand, a culture of fear and survival, but, on the other, critical and

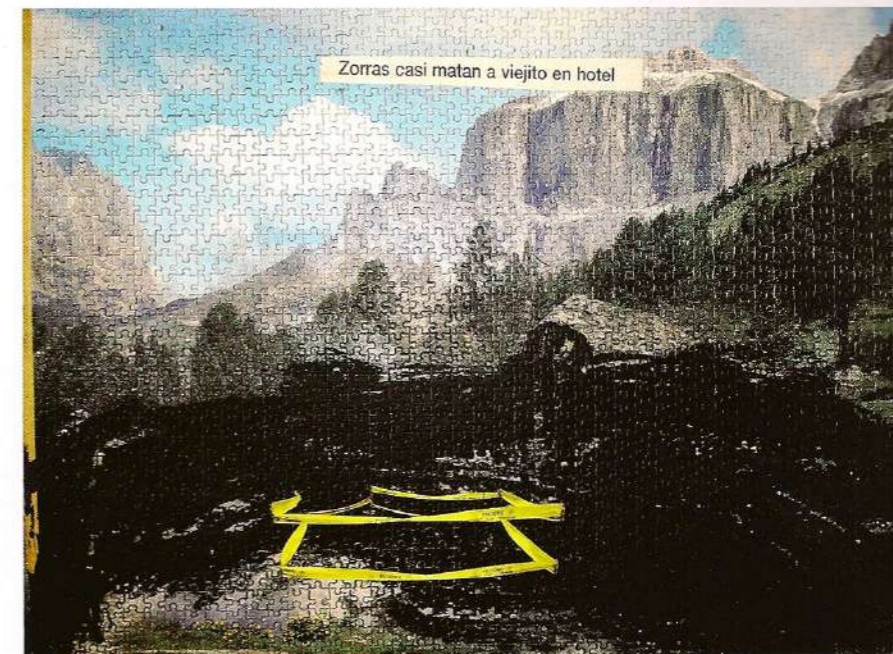
affirmative responses from citizens who refuse defeat and who sustain and encourage hope. Forceful yet elegant, overall, the installation pushes the viewer to the limit by means of an economical yet exuberant use of materials and a bittersweet sense of humour. Brechtian in its distance, Moris's work uses the *Verfremdungseffekt* ("estrangement effect") to present the issues in a detached manner and to avoid dwelling in value judgments. Regarding his audience, he seeks to persuade and generate a "critical conscious" attitude, playing down emotions, passivity, and guilt.

"Materials from Hell" is how the artist defines the objects, and elements he uses – cardboard; newsprint; masking, packing, and electrical tapes; figurines; jewellery; mattresses, blankets and cloth; architectural fragments and furniture; wood; found thriftstore-like paintings; tin cans; weapons, and tools altered for criminal use. Bought and traded in the black markets, his materials are found in his meanderings through the field, in his crisscrossing of urban borders.

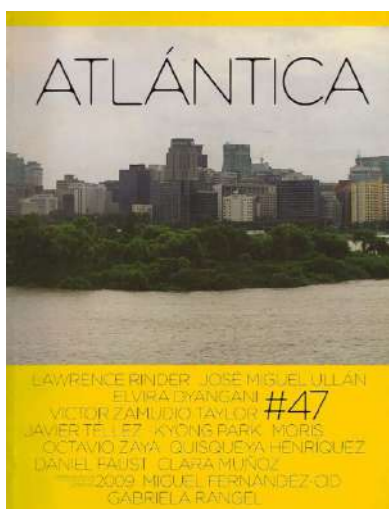
The artist walks and bikes through hellish *barrios* that only the poorest and most disenfranchised citizens frequent. Yet, along with brutal conditions and a never-ending array of problems, the citizens of these underdeveloped and underserved zones within the vast city have a profound sense of pride in their homes and surroundings, though, to more privileged members of society these may seem

ugly and even uninhabitable. With a sense of affirmation, their abodes and contexts are beautified. Moris knows these *barrios*, he grew up in them, and in this regard, his oeuvre engages self-representation from specific cultural locations germane to him, hence the title of the series: *Beautiful Landscape*. In contrast to artists who produce work with content involving the suffering of others, Moris' art is generated from his own experiential parameters. As he strolls and traverses these *barrios*, the artist observes, takes notes, and listens. Like Walter Benjamin's figure of the cultural historian (in his thoughts on the anecdote), Moris listens to every piece of language – from gossip and banalities to fleeting quotations – in order to get a sense of history as a lived experience, an excursion into the thickness of daily life.

Hermoso paisaje #4 (*Beautiful Landscape #4*, 2008) is a key sculpture in the genesis of *An animal dies because another is hungry*, particularly his current text-image works involving found paintings. The sculpture is part of a body of work – *The Beautiful Landscape Series* – dealing with beauty, the urban landscape, and subcultures, topics that may be alluring and devilish, handsome and repulsive. Produced with the support of CIFO, Miami, the sculpture refers to a den inhabited by delinquents who work the streets. Though petty, these smalltime criminals operate with intimidation, fear, and reprisals. The hut's wooden



MORIS
Zorras casi matan a viejito en hotel / Old Man almost killed by foxes in hotel, 2008
Collage sobre lienzo encontrado / Collage on found canvas
Cortesía / Courtesy: el artista / the artist





MORIS, *Aterrador, brutal, cruel... / Frightening, Brutal, Cruel...*, 2008
Verso / Front side. Collage sobre lienzo encontrado / Collage on found canvas
Cortesía / Courtesy: el artista / the artist



MORIS, *Aterrador, brutal, cruel... / Frightening, Brutal, Cruel...*, 2008.
Reverso / Back side. Collage sobre lienzo encontrado / Collage on found canvas
Cortesía / Courtesy: el artista / the artist

los bajos fondos. En su exhibición de un mundo de crimen y de maldad, *Un animal muere porque otro tiene hambre* aborda un estado de cosas en el que las desigualdades económicas y sociales, la violencia y las relaciones de poder generan, por un lado, una cultura del temor y la supervivencia y, por otro, respuestas de crítica y afirmación por parte de ciudadanos que rechazan la derrota y que defienden y alientan la esperanza. Con contundencia, pero también con elegancia, valiéndose de un uso económico y a un tiempo exuberante de los materiales y de un agri dulce sentido del humor, la instalación empuja al espectador hacia el límite. Brechtiana en su distancia, la obra de Moris recurre al *Verfremdungseffekt* ("efecto de alejamiento") para exponer sus contenidos de una manera supuestamente objetiva, evitando detenerse en juicios de valor. Por lo que respecta a su público, lo que Moris busca es convencer y generar una actitud "crítica consciente", minimizando las emociones, la pasividad y la culpa.

"Materiales del infierno" es la expresión que el artista utiliza para definir los objetos y elementos empleados: cartón; papel de periódico; diversos tipos de cinta - de pintor, de embalar o aislante-; figuras; bisutería; colchones, mantas y telas; fragmentos arquitectónicos y mobiliario; madera; los típicos cuadros que se encuentran en las tiendas de segunda mano; latas; armas y herramientas alteradas con fines criminales... Adquiridos en el mercado negro, se trata de materiales encontrados en su expedi-

walls are made from found paintings whose surfaces are altered, on one side, with texts and cut-out letters taken from tabloids, and, on their reverse, with transferred graffiti tags. A roof formed out of a found soiled mattress covers the dwelling. Jutting out, it forms a canopy, protecting the entrance and making it grandiose. A red-dyed leather skin spreads out like tongue from under the structure, recalling the work's controlling animal metaphor. Placed in delicate patterns on a grid and flanking the entrance or mouth of the crib are jewels, weapons, and altered tools that were found, bought, and traded on the black markets. From the mouth, one gazes through the structure at a blanket with a tiger printed on its polyester surface.

Qué tan leal es un perro hambriento 2 (How Loyal a Hungry Dog Is 2, 2008) is a readymade that links *Hermoso Paisaje #4* with an outdoor sculpture in the patio. The readymade hangs in direct dialogue with the two sculptures. The work is a newspaper, *La Ley (The Law)*, affixed directly on the wall that divides the gallery from the courtyard. Its lead story, illustrated with a photo, headlines an itinerant candy and cookie vendor who was murdered when he refused to hand over to his assailants his humble earnings from sales on Mexico City's popular urban buses. He died from a pistol bullet in his head; his faithful pet dog guarded his lifeless cadaver until the arrival of the police.

ciones de campo, en sus continuas incursiones a un lado y otro de las fronteras urbanas.

A pie o en bicicleta, el artista atraviesa barrios infernales frecuentados únicamente por los ciudadanos más pobres y desheredados. Unos habitantes de esas zonas subdesarrolladas y desposeídas de la gran urbe que, a pesar de las brutales condiciones de vida reinantes y del interminable espectro de problemas que les aquejan, se sienten profundamente orgullosos de sus hogares y de su entorno por espantosos o inhabitables que pudieran parecerles a miembros más privilegiados de la sociedad, hermo seando, con sentido de afirmación, sus moradas, sus contextos. Moris conoce esos barrios; creció en ellos y es por eso por lo que su obra se implica en la representación de unos emplazamientos culturales específicos que le son cercanos. De ahí el título de la serie: *Hermosos paisajes*. En contraste con otros artistas, autores de un tipo de obra cuyo contenido se basa en el sufrimiento de otros, la creación de Moris parte de sus propios parámetros vivenciales. Al pasear por esos barrios, al atravesarlos, el artista observa, toma notas, escucha. Como la figura del historiador cultural de Walter Benjamin (en sus reflexiones sobre lo anecdótico), Moris registra cada fragmento de lenguaje - del chisme y la banalidad a la referencia fugaz - para componer una historia que refleje el sentido de la experiencia vivida, una excursión a la espesura de la existencia cotidiana.

The outdoor sculpture—with the same title but numbered 1—deals with the absence of loyalty, the twisted logic and general *modus operandi* of betrayal and treachery amongst the cold-hearted subculture of thieves, swindlers, kidnapers, and murderers. In a most precarious fashion, four sawhorses form its base, upon which are placed four boards to form a square. On this middle tier, piled bricks, concrete slabs, and fragments of pillars are placed on each board, functioning as reinforcing support as well as metaphors. In turn, the boards sustain an unstable platform of layered used plywood. Concrete blocks with shoes embedded in them are placed on the four corners of the rickety platform. In the centre of the platform, four figurines of Saint Jude Thaddeus—the patron of desperate causes—prop up a stylized modern chair cushioned with fabric pillows. Resembling a derelict throne, it represents the ceremonial seat of a powerful figure straight out of a picaresque and grotesque universe. Theatrical and operatic, the sculpture expresses a sense of fragility, as if the brick-and-mortar construction were about to collapse, an allegory for the shifts of power and the continual changing of the guard in the criminal world, which has appropriated Saint Jude Thaddeus as its patron.

Four of the five paintings were found in the street tianguis or informal markets. By and large anonymous,