

con  
tempo  
rary art  
mexico



Editor  
Hossein Amirsadeghi  
Executive Editor  
Catherine Petitgas  
Essays  
Tanya Barson  
Daniel Garza Usabiaga  
María Minera

Thames & Hudson



## Contemporary Art Mexico

Editor: Hossein Amirsadeghi

Executive Editor: Catherine Petitgas

With essays by Tanya Barson, Daniel Garza Usabiaga and María Minera

Mexico has one of the richest cultural traditions in Latin America, with roots extending deep into ancient Mesoamerican culture. It should therefore come as no surprise that the country is at the forefront of the global contemporary-art scene.

The Mexican scene itself has undergone a major revival in the past few years, culminating with the opening, in 2013, of the Fundación Jumex in Mexico City. A showcase for Latin America's largest private contemporary-art collection, Jumex's state-of-the-art building [designed by British architect David Chipperfield] has become a forum for debate and education that is helping to re-energise the country's creativity. Mexico City's contemporary-art fair Zona MACO (in its eleventh edition as of 2014) is thriving, contributing to the increasing visibility of Mexico on the international stage. This in turn has enabled younger galleries to prosper, among them Proyectos Monclova, Labor and Arróniz Arte Contemporáneo, thus providing platforms for young artists from both Mexico and abroad. Several publicly owned institutions are also enjoying a revival, especially the newly expanded Museo Tamayo as well as such smaller institutions as SAPS, El Eco and El Chopo. This renewed focus is turning Mexico into a magnet for international artists, curators and galleries alike. There could not be a better time to assess the main contributors to the dynamism of the Mexican scene.

Extensively illustrated and based on the most up-to-date research, *Contemporary Art Mexico* highlights 115 of the most prominent players, including 72 artists and 43 personalities and institutions. Featured artists, who have been selected for their relevance to local practice, their engagement with their peers and their international profiles, include such older-generation figures as Graciela Iturbide and Eduardo Terrazas; influential figures from the 1990s such as Gabriel Orozco, Francis Alÿs, Damián Ortega and Melanie Smith; and such emerging talents as Edgardo Aragón, Iñaki Bonillas, Adriana Lara and Marco Rountree Cruz. Leading galleries, curators, collectors and other key cultural figures are also featured. Critical essays by María Minera, Daniel Garza Usabiaga and Tanya Barson provide a carefully crafted background against which contemporary developments can be both appreciated and understood.

With over 750 colour illustrations

Other titles of interest:

**Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art; New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century; Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey; Frozen Dreams: Contemporary Art from Russia; Contemporary Art Brazil; Korean Art: The Power of Now; Nordic Contemporary; Sanctuary: Britain's Artists and their Studios and Art Studio America: Contemporary Artist Spaces**

On the jacket:

Front:

**Gabriel Orozco**

*Black Kites Perspective (front horizontal)*, 1997

Printed 2008

Fuji Crystal chromogenic archive C-print

40.6 x 50.8 cm

© Gabriel Orozco

Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City

Back:

**Lourdes Grobet**

*Light Landscape (Mexico)*, 1991

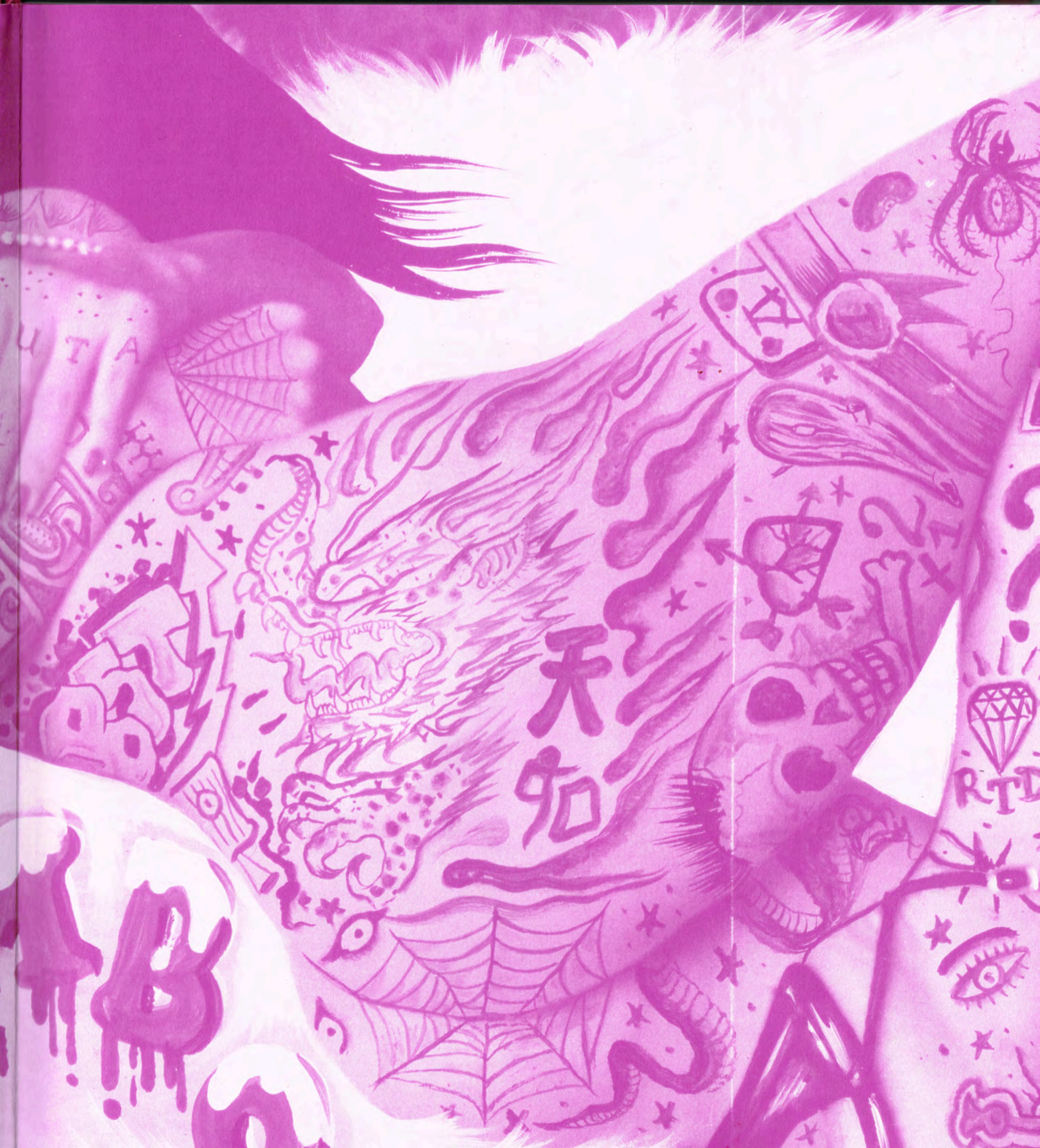
Colour diapositive

51 x 51 cm

Courtesy of the artist







UTA

天知

RTD



**con  
tempo  
rary art  
mexico**





# con tempo rary art mexico

**Editor**

**Hossein Amirsadeghi**

Executive Editor

Catherine Petitgas

Project Director

Ursula Vereá Hernández

Essays

Tanya Barson

Daniel Garza Usabiaga

María Minera



**Thames & Hudson**

First published by TransGlobe Publishing Ltd  
in conjunction with Thames & Hudson Ltd

First published in the United Kingdom in 2014 by  
Thames & Hudson Ltd  
181A High Holborn  
London WC1V 7QX  
[www.thamesandhudson.com](http://www.thamesandhudson.com)

First published in 2014 in hardcover  
in the United States of America by  
Thames & Hudson Inc.  
500 Fifth Avenue, New York  
New York 10110  
[thamesandhudsonusa.com](http://thamesandhudsonusa.com)

Text and photographs  
© 2014 Hossein Amirsadeghi

TransGlobe Publishing Limited  
6 New Street Square  
London EC4A 3LX  
United Kingdom  
[www.tgpublishingltd.com](http://www.tgpublishingltd.com)  
[info@tgpublishingltd.com](mailto:info@tgpublishingltd.com)

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication  
may be reproduced or transmitted in any form  
or by any means, electronic or mechanical,  
including photocopy, recording or any other  
information storage and retrieval system,  
without prior permission in writing from  
the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number  
2014933161

ISBN: 978-0-500-97064-5

Designed by Struktur Design Limited  
Printed and bound in Malaysia

previous page  
**Felipe Ehrenberg**  
*La Niña y el Armadillo*  
(*The Girl and the Armadillo*), 2009  
From the Tenanguitos series  
Acrylic on canvas  
100 cm (diam)  
Courtesy of the artist

- 7 *Mexicanidad, or the Mexican-ness of Contemporary Art*  
*Hossein Amirsadeghi*
- 10 Modern Art in Mexico  
*Daniel Garza Usabiaga*
- 18 Where Do We Come From? Who Are We?  
Where Are We Going?  
*María Minera*
- 26 From Emotional Architecture to Entropic Abstraction:  
Mexico Modern and Contemporary  
*Tanya Barson*
- 34 Artists, Personalities and Organisations**
- 328 Timeline
- 330 Index
- 332 Acknowledgements



مکتب  
کتابخانه

مکتب  
کتابخانه



# Mexicanidad, or the Mexican-ness of Contemporary Art

Contemporary art, in all its extremities and unbounded experimentation, is as good a window onto the cultural ferment of societies, whether at the centre or at the periphery, as any other present-day marker. More so, in my estimation, than the statistical configurations and GDP numerations that are the prevailing measures of a country's progress. Uniquely, the current artistic production of a country offers multiple perspectives onto the vibrancy of its culture, its social cohesion and political stability, and its general wellbeing all at the same time.

A broad claim, one might think, but this type of socio-anthropological modelling is one I have attempted to explore on a global scale during the last six years, investigating the cultural psyches of countries and regions the world over. To my surprise, the books have become benchmark reference works, accessible resource tools catering to all levels of understanding and appreciation. The juxtaposition of social, religious, political and cultural mores set against the currency of an increasingly globalised art world (driven as much by the international market as by anything as straightforward as localised artistic production) permits relatively easy comparisons with issues driving contemporary art. The breadth of artists and art-world personalities featured in each book enables a one-stop approach, something that has (extraordinarily) been lacking in other publishing formats.

*Contemporary Art Mexico* is the eighth book in my series attempting to focus attention on areas of contemporary artistic production which have either slipped outside mainstream attention or not been regarded as being sufficiently important to merit purposeful engagement. Mexico, with a population of 120 million people and despite having one of the richest, most complex cultural traditions in Latin America, is often in the news for the wrong reasons, from Hollywood stereotyping to gruesome headlines featuring headless corpses. Meanwhile it is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, with the largest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Americas and the Academia de San Carlos, the oldest art school on the American continent. It has become the largest economy in Latin America, a veritable powerhouse and massive industrial workshop for both Northern and Southern economies. One of the Americas' most important financial centres, Greater Mexico City is home to some 22 million people confronting enormous (often intractable) problems. The country faces an interminable war with the drug cartels, perennial issues on its borders with the United States, and a toxic mix of corruption (endemic to the region) and recalcitrant nationalism – the last a leftover from Mexico's bitter colonial legacy and the perceived imperial overlordship of its giant northern neighbour. Yet the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto is making bold inroads on some of these daunting problems, problems both burdened with heavy historical baggage and shaped by a heritage of violence. While responsibility for that violence can be laid at the door of history, the Mexican people's sense of self is too readily framed in nationalistic terms. And, where politics goes, so does art.

Despite its rich modernist heritage, Mexico's readily recognised artistic personalities have been few and far between. Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo always come to mind, due as much to their personalities as to their art. Throw in a few other names like Luis Barragán, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, and the pot starts to simmer. But even then, the global public remains serenely ignorant of the country's dynamic artistic scene in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The standard narrative, as Daniel Garza Usabiaga notes in his essay, 'has tended to ... emphasise antagonistic relationships such as political content versus formal experimentation or realistic versus non-figurative representation'. This narrative, he goes on to say, has suppressed an understanding of the diversity of modern art forms in Mexico, as well as of art's productive dialogue with the international arena. The conflict between producing a 'national' art and following international trends is in many ways at the heart of the struggle defining Mexican art today.

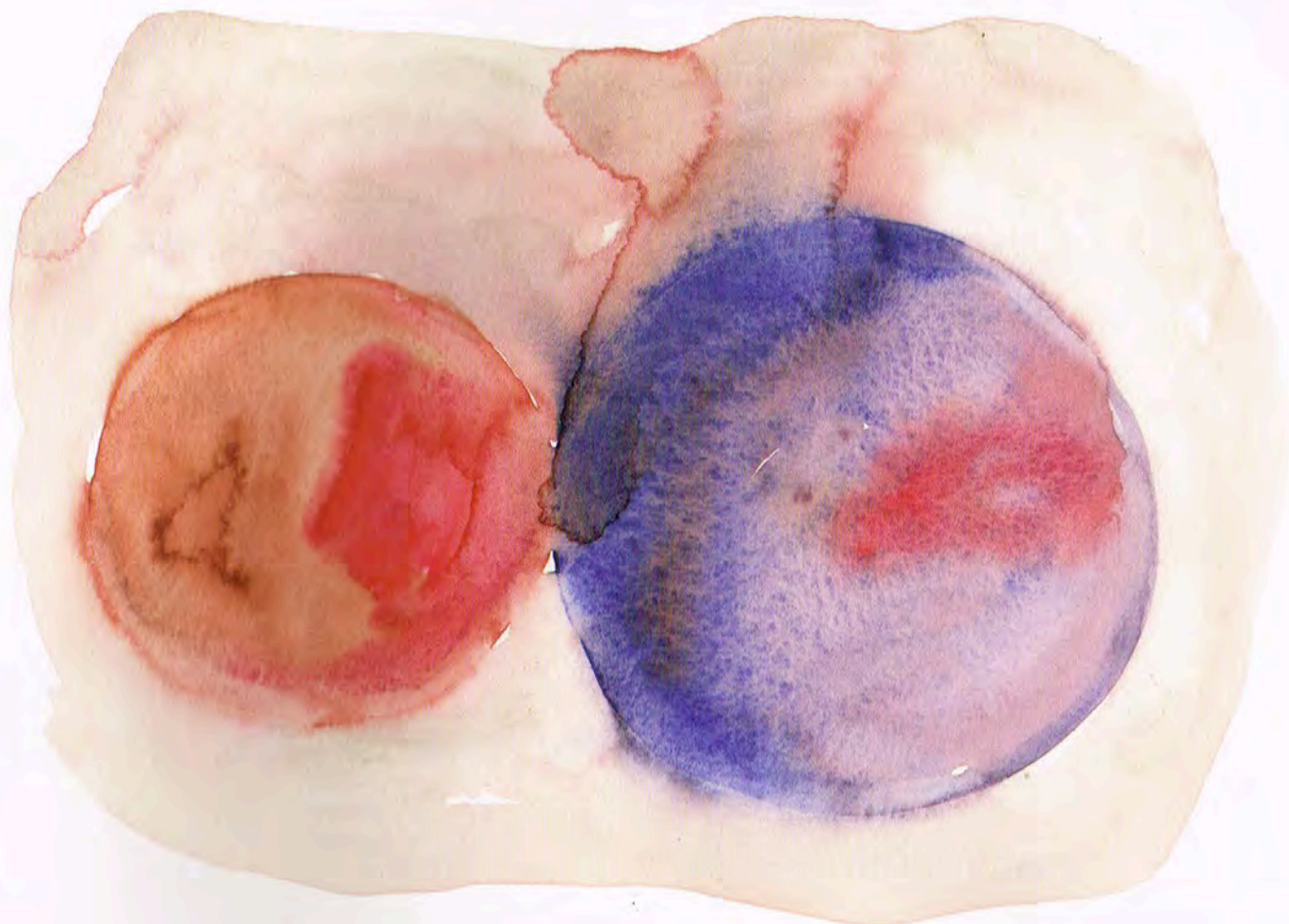
After the Mexican Revolution in 1910, idealisation of the indigenous and the traditional represented attempts to reach back into the past and retrieve what had been lost in the race towards modernisation. This process is well represented as one narrative apparent in the work of some of the artists featured in this book. Olivier Debroise, one of Mexico's fiercest social critics, summarised the contradictory situation facing the country by describing Mexico as 'a southern country that happens to be in the north'. Tanya Barson's essay touches on this conflicted narrative, making reference to Paz's *The Other Mexico* and Roger Bartra's *The Cage of Melancholy* by way of debunking many of the myths surrounding national identity that are pertinent to a discussion of Mexican art today.

Subverting paradigms is, I believe, the contemporary artist's way to seek renewal, challenge existing orders and repurpose social understanding with antidotal, often incomprehensible, interventions through the prism of paradox. The results are often couched in curatorial language not readily accessible to the general public, often ending up confusing ideology and art. The neurosis of national identity set off against wrenching cultural change brought on by massive urbanisation and capitalism has become a valuable tool for contemporary Mexican artists. Slum-born Abraham Cruzvillegas, an internationally recognised artist and forceful critic of his country's contemporary-art movement, centres his own production around just such architectures of social flux. His alternative modelling is based on chaos, accumulation, instability, overcrowding and aesthetic promiscuity. This book is in small measure an attempt at understanding the ways in which these and many other seemingly intractable issues feed into the architecture (and the archaeology) of Mexico's fantastic contemporary-art scene.

facing page  
**Abraham Cruzvillegas**  
*Hasta la Victoria Siempre*  
(*Until Victory, Always*), 2009  
Ink on paper  
32 x 23 cm  
Photo: Estudio Michel Zabé  
Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City

following spread  
**Héctor Zamora**  
*White Noise (part 1)*, 2011  
500 white flags  
Installation view, Auckland,  
New Zealand  
Courtesy of the artist,  
LABOR, Mexico City and  
Luciana Brito, São Paulo





Born in 1956 in Mexico City, Magali Lara lives and works in Cuernavaca, Morelos, where she is a professor of painting at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos. She studied Visual Arts at ENAP and has been a member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte since 1994.

Lara's work evidences a deep relationship between literature and visual art; as she says, 'The idea of visual poetry has been a strong nucleus for a lot of my work.' Her practice includes painting, drawing, artist's books, ceramics, tapestry and, more recently, video animation. She has had several solo shows, including *Mi versión de los hechos* [My Version of the Facts] at MUAC in Mexico City (2004–5); *Alzheimer* at the Museo de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, also in Mexico City (2007); *Glaciares* [Glaciers] at the Visual Arts Center, University of Texas at Austin (2010); and *Animaciones* [Animations] at the Museo Amparo

in Puebla (2012). She has also participated in important group exhibitions in Mexico, the US, Europe and Latin America.

In a 2004 exhibition catalogue, curator and critic José Luis Barrios described Lara's oeuvre as being characterised by a counterpoint between hospitality and hostility. Her early works depicting household utensils – irons, an ironing board, a fridge, baby dummies and bottles – and, later on, her flower paintings speak of a feminine world; however, her images convey a more corporeal and disturbing vision of female identity. 'The meaning of Magali Lara's flower motives is seen from the boundary between beauty and horror,' Barrios explained.

Lara is particularly well known for her artist's books. She recalls that before studying art she imagined herself as a writer and confesses to being a compulsive reader. '[Artists' books] are one of the first forms I used,' she says. 'I found them to be the perfect device to express my

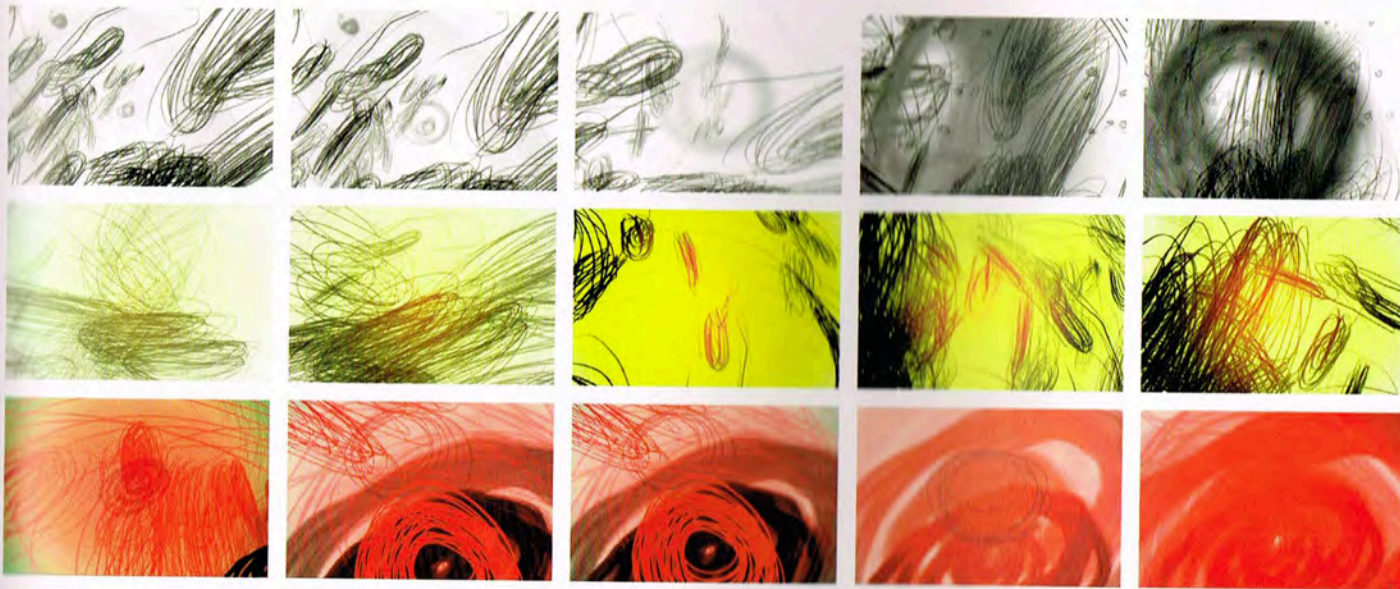
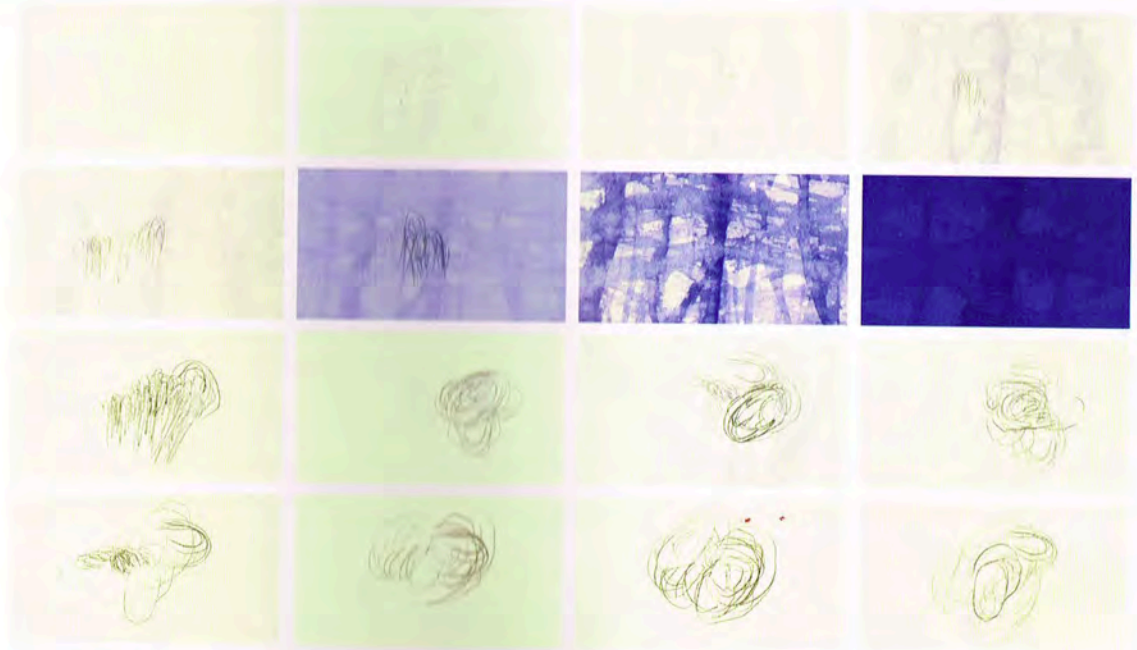
double vocation ... With them I could narrate with images, use the text as a visual medium ... It also allowed me to experiment with graphic processes, serigraphy, press, etching.'

In her series of engravings entitled *Alzheimer* (2007), it is obvious how Lara works with profound emotion through pure, expressionistic gestures. 'My mother had Alzheimer's; the disease was a way to access her memories, to understand the way we are built. Our minds are constructed in a very arbitrary way. People with this disease are left with just a few memories, and they are usually not the ones you would deem most important; they don't remember the day they were married, they remember a moment when their mother gave them ice cream. However simple, the ones that remain are powerful memories. You get to see what are someone's last remembrances.' The main motif in this series is a spiral, a ravelling and unravelling of lines. *Alzheimer* later became

one of the artist's animations, entitled *No me acuerdo* [I Don't Remember] (2008), in which she created a video of the process of drawing.

About her work today Lara says, 'I drew flowers from my thirties to my fifties. At the time, I did work a lot with the theme of reproduction, not only in the sense of procreation but in that of repetition, the repetition of attitudes, of reconstructing old situations, some from the family structure ... However, today I find myself to be closer to those drawings I used to make when I was younger. It has to do with this flexibility and difficulty of trying to know who you really are, and also how in my particular case literature and art co-exist. Maybe today there is still a feminine voice in the way that I organise space, but today that is the least important to me.' Her latest series, *The End of the World* (2012), was inspired by the ancient Mayan belief that the world would end in December 2012.



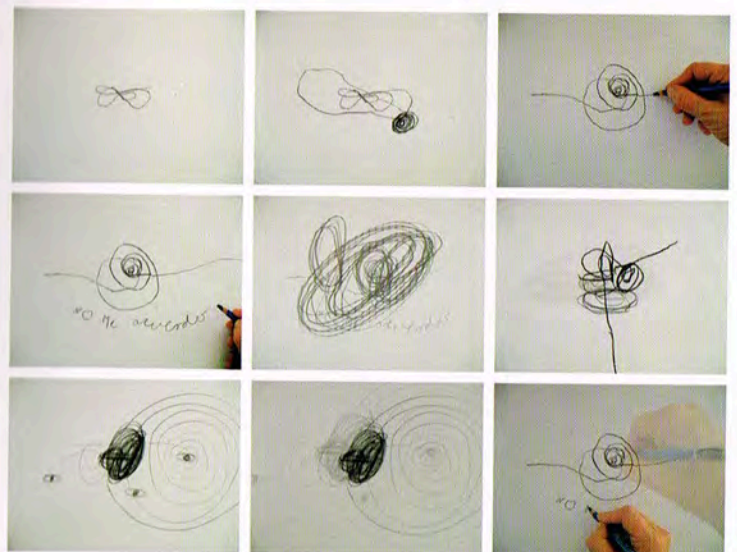


above  
**One Possible Day**, 2011  
 Radio drama for soprano, actor, musical ensemble, electroacoustic device and video with French voice-over  
 Digital animation  
 Duration: 10 minutes 11 seconds [excerpt]  
 Direction: Magali Lara | Luis Ordóñez  
 Animation: Luis Ordóñez  
 Music: Javier Torres Maldonado  
 Soprano: Maja Pavlovska  
 Musicians: Ensemble 2e2m  
 Programming and technical support: Javier Torres Maldonado  
 Electro-acoustics: Javier Torres Maldonado  
 For La Muse en Circuit, Paris  
 Courtesy of the artist

facing page  
**The End of The World**, 2012  
 From the series Melancholy  
 Watercolour on paper  
 21 x 30 cm  
 Courtesy of the artist

top  
**Glaciers**, 2008-9  
 From the series Glaciers  
 Digital animation  
 Duration: 7 minutes 49 seconds  
 Production: Magali Lara  
 Direction and animation: Luis Ordóñez  
 Music: Ana Lara  
 Courtesy of the artist

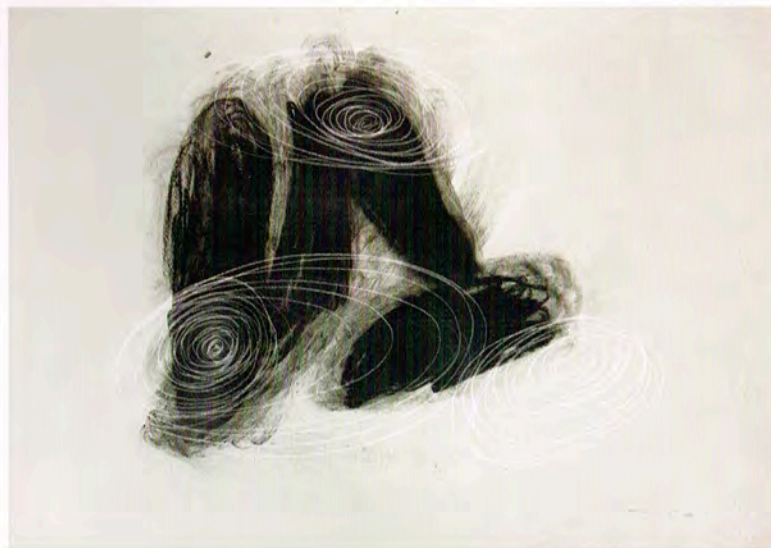
right  
**I Don't Remember**, 2008  
 From the series Alzheimer  
 Digital animation  
 Duration: 2 minutes 18 seconds  
 Direction and animation: Magali Lara  
 Post-production: Luis Ordóñez  
 Music: Satisfaction of Oscillation by Yao Dajuin  
 Courtesy of the artist







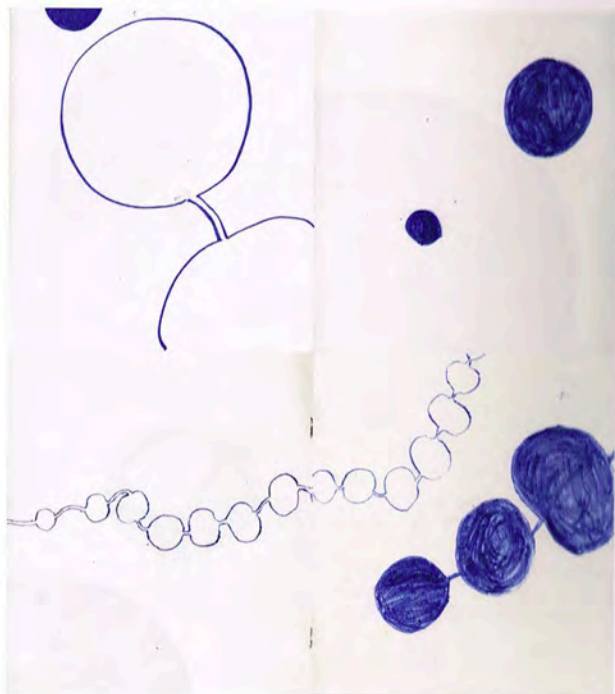
above  
**The Crying, The Rain**, 2007  
From the series *Glaciers*  
Oil stick and pencil on paper  
76 x 112 cm  
Courtesy of the artist



top  
**Composition in Red**, 2007  
Oil on canvas  
146 x 175 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

left  
**Black Eyes**, 2007  
Pastel and pencil on paper  
57 x 79 cm  
Courtesy of the artist





top left  
**Untitled**, 2013  
From the series What I Already Knew  
Colour pencil and graphite on paper  
18 x 13 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

above  
**The Other Eyes**, 2004  
From the series Alzheimer  
Etching on metal  
62 x 48 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

left  
**Past, Future**, 2014  
From the series Melancholy  
Marker on paper  
24 x 21 cm  
Courtesy of the artist





**Hossein Amirsadeghi** is a long-time publisher, writer, editor and creative entrepreneur with a recent focus on the world of contemporary art. A Middle East specialist, he has written, edited and published many books on a wide range of subjects relating to the region. More recent art books include *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art*, *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, *Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey*, *Frozen Dreams: Contemporary Art from Russia*, *Contemporary Art Brazil*, *Korean Art: The Power of Now*, *Nordic Contemporary: Art from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*, *Sanctuary: Britain's Artists and their Studios* and *Art Studio America: Contemporary Artist Spaces*, all published by Thames & Hudson. He is currently working on *London Burning*, as well as surveys of contemporary art in Japan and Africa.

**Tanya Barson** has been Curator of International Art at Tate Modern in London since 2007, having previously been Exhibitions and Collections Curator at Tate Liverpool. Most recently, she curated the acclaimed exhibition *Mira Schendel* (2013). Her other exhibitions have included *Frida Kahlo* (Tate Modern, 2005); *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* (Tate Liverpool, 2010) and *The Peripatetic School: Itinerant Drawing from Latin America* (Drawing Room, London, 2011).

**Daniel Garza Usabiaga** holds a PhD in Art History and Theory from the University of Essex. Having pursued postdoctoral studies at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, he is the author of *Mathias Goeritz and Emotional Architecture: A Critical Review, 1952–1968* (2012). Previously Curator at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, he is currently a curator at the Museo Universitario del Chopo.

**María Minera**, an independent scholar and critic based in Mexico City, currently teaches at SOMA. Since 1998 she has published in numerous cultural magazines and journals including *El País*, *Letras libres*, *La Tempestad* and *Galleta China*. She has also contributed to publications including *Gabriel Orozco: Natural Motion* (Moderna Museet Stockholm); *Les Enfants terribles* (Fundación Jumex); *Pulsión y método: Gabriel de la Mora* (Turner); and *La revolución de la mirada* (Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City).

**Catherine Petitgas** (MA, History of Modern Art, Courtauld Institute, London) is a lecturer in modern and contemporary art, as well as a collector, patron and benefactor of institutions in the UK and France. A trustee of the Whitechapel Gallery in London and of Gasworks/Triangle Network, she has been a member of the Tate Latin American Acquisitions Committee and the Council of the Serpentine Gallery since 2004, as well as a member of the Centre Pompidou Foundation.

### **Thames & Hudson**

Please visit [www.thamesandhudson.com](http://www.thamesandhudson.com) to find out about all our publications, including our latest releases.



**Contemporary Art Mexico:**  
An essential read for anyone who wants to  
understand Mexico's formidable art world



**Thames & Hudson**

[www.thamesandhudson.com](http://www.thamesandhudson.com) £55.00

ISBN 978-0-500-97064-5



9 780500 970645