

Yoshua Okón

Piovra

opening september 15, h 19

kaufmann repetto is glad to announce *Piovra*, Yoshua Okón's new solo show at the gallery.

The research path that Yoshua Okón (Mexico City, 1970) has been following throughout his whole career could be compared to an incessant socio-anthropological experimentation. An investigation that has been translated into works (mostly videoinstallations, but also photographs and sculptures) that, while often maintaining apparent documentary features, are meant to transcend any specific context in order to cover much wider matters, such as the grotesque, surreal and contradictory aspects characterizing our civilization.

In Yoshua Okón's videos, unpredictability, together with the involvement of non-actors, plays a fundamental role in demonstrating how reality can be a much stronger and more vibrant means of representation than fiction.

For example, in *Orillese a la Orilla*, Mexican policemen are asked to perform their best poses in front of the camera, unintentionally creating a macho show that speaks of bullying and power relations. In a more recent work, entitled *Bocanegra*, Okón worked with a group of Mexican third reich aficionados that, during their usual weekly meeting, engage in surreal conversations alternating between political statements and trivial observations regarding everyday life, while wearing original Third Reich uniforms.

Piovra, the work that gives the name to the show (contemporaneously exhibited at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles) re-enacts the battles of the Guatemalan civil war, staged within the parking lot of a Los Angeles Home Depot, during a regular opening day.

Yoshua Okón spotlights a war that everyone, especially the US, have tried to forget, partly because of the proven involvement of the CIA in the political upheavals that, forty years ago, led to a bloody civil war. A conflict that aimed at preventing US companies from losing a significant control over the Guatemalan economy.

The people performing in the video are members of the Los Angeles Mayan community: all undocumented immigrants escaping from many years of a war in which they've been personally fighting. The combatants stage their past experience of the war by transposing it in the place where they currently spend entire days waiting to be temporarily hired as day laborers.

The alienating effect created by the apparently unhealable distance between a battlefield and the parking lot of a mall, tails off to the point that it reveals the political and moral responsibilities of a country addicted to consumerism, that has turned profit into the excuse for conquering and subduing entire nations.

As a sort of counterpoint, the other main space of the gallery will be hosting *Hipnostasis*, a video installation resulting from the collaboration between Yoshua Okón and Raymond Pettibon. Through a fragmented narrative, the two artists portrayed a group of old beach bums from Venice Beach, all voluntary devoting their existence to the disregard of social rules, conventions and private property. The condition of stasis characterizing these istic figures, almost memorials for a failed utopia, reveals the revolutionary and profoundly mystic approach that has been inspiring these hippy philosophy veterans. Furthermore, this work can be read as a deeper existential investigation, aimed at questioning assumptions such as the authenticity of our life choices, or the common notion of space and time.

Yoshua Okón's approach blends together comical and tragic tones, the real and the absurd, therefore offering two manifestations, apparently antithetical, of a research that aims at revealing the critical aspects of reality. The same reality that, being mostly perceived through a system of conventions and cultural conditioning, we're often unable to see.