

Many of these figures, as in *Santiago y Soco*, remind us of classical sculpture but are devoid of faces, given instead cartoonlike faces. Why?

I have developed two different approaches to the figure through which I am using form and material. On the one hand, you can see the formal training I had in sculpture—I was trained as a classical sculptor in college. I play with historical references as **Gian Lorenzo Bernini** and **Jean Baptiste Carpeaux**. I have been studying their preparatory sketches out of clay for a while.

On the other hand, there are figures that are way more casual, less realistic. I also use photographs of my family that I then intertwine with other things, so my images, whether two- or three-dimensional, are never exact replicas of these people. In fact, they represent a whimsical approach to the human body. They are not references, but made-up images freed from classical references.

For the past few series I have been working with surrealist imagery, which results in a quite unrealistic imagery; the faces of these characters are not complete, or they are missing limbs. I am still continuing that exploration in which I want the viewer to finish the idea, to fill the blanks. I am giving the viewer the starting point, the basis on what these figures and memories are to me, but then I think that in many cases, the viewer can relate to a few of them in their own way, establish their personal connection to their own memories, and finish the narratives that I started.

About the Artist:

Rodrigo Lara Zendejas (b.1981, Mexico) is a sculptor and painter connecting political issues and historical moments and merging them with personal experiences and memories to draw connections between the past and present. He earned a BFA from Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico, and a MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He also completed the Center Program at Hyde Park Art Center in 2014. Rodrigo has received a several awards for his work including “Jóvenes Creadores,” FONCA (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes), and the National Award for Visual Arts (2010) from Querétaro, Mexico. Lara’s work has been exhibited primarily in Mexico in addition to the US, Canada, Czech Republic, and China. Lara currently lives and works in Chicago and teaches sculpture at Hyde Park Art Center.

Artist Talk:

Wednesday, May 25

6:00 - 7:00 pm

The artist will give a talk about his most recent installation and developments in his practice in the Kanter McCormick Gallery

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Rodrigo Lara Zendejas

La Paz

April 3 - July 17, 2016
Kanter McCormick Gallery



Reminiscencias, 2014-2016, Video projection, found objects, porcelain, wood, cymbals. Dimensions variable.

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Memories belonging to artist **Rodrigo Lara Zendejas**’ not-so-distant past fill the Kanter McCormick Gallery in sculpture, video, painting, and sound. Lara’s art work blends elements from classical sculpture with personal images staged in an immersive and playful installation that mocks time and altered remembrance. **Natalia de Orellana**, Curatorial Fellow, sat with Lara to talk about the narratives contained in this show and the development of his artistic practice, from Center Program participant and Teaching Artist at Hyde Park Art Center, to a recent solo exhibition at the National Museum of Mexican Art.

This show stages an array of memories from your youth. Can talk about that moment?

At the age of ten, my parents sent me to spend the summer in this town called La Paz, San Luis Potosi, Mexico, which is where my grandparents lived and where my father was born. That moment of my life represented my first studio, so to speak. I used to play with Plasticine (a oily modeling clay for children) all the time, but I was not allowed to bring it inside the house, as it is so messy and greasy. Instead, I had the whole backyard at my disposition. During that month, I played every single day in the backyard. It was a natural moment. The arrangement of plants and soil I made were casual, childish, and natural. I wanted to go back to that space and make these memories come back.

In this show, I am playing with and intertwining my own memories, sometimes using elements like family photos, sometimes using my memories as references, and then I spice them up. For the sound piece in *Reminiscencias*, I went back to La Paz with a high-definition microphone, and I sat at the same spot where I used to sit and I recorded that moment. What I wanted was to hear what I heard when I was playing as a child. La Paz is a mining town and some of them are still active, so you can hear the industrial noise. I recorded that sound, which is present day and night, mixed with the sound of the plants shaken by the wind. I also reproduced some noises to add them to the track, such as the cat’s meowing and the voice of my grandmother singing ‘quiero frijolitos,’ which is based on an old childhood superstition. So the soundtrack is, in fact, the result of a combination of the ‘ready-made’ background that I recorded, and then, departing from my memories, I added other elements, including the sound of a lion.



Nerón, 2016, drum set hardware, cymbal, porcelain, and metal, 73 x 36 x 24 inches

A lion?

Yes! The family that owns all those mines was quite eccentric, and bought lions as pets. Sometimes during the day you could hear them growling, as they must have been hungry. It was so surreal to hear all of these elements together; the cats, the birds, the machines, my grandma, and then the lions. It seems almost a joke. I wanted to bring them to this space.

When I first encountered your work, I was faced with a number of densely sculpted pieces. In La Paz, however, you have built an entire multimedia stage where sculpture is a component among paintings, sound, and projection. How does this work fit into the work you’ve made over the past five years since finishing graduate school?

For many years I’ve considered myself a sculptor, and yet, in grad school I started investigating different mediums. See, what I love about Hyde Park Art Center is how artists come to investigate deeper into a variety of media and/or push themselves towards paths with which they are not so familiar. In this case, I wanted to play with memory through



Panteon Municipal, 2014, porcelain, oil painting, metal, wood, canvas, dimensions variable

grad school I have been trying to reunite those two aspects of my life that represent individual pieces as much as parts of a bigger whole.

The exhibition stages an environment that belongs to your past, yet it goes further to include a number of oneiric, even surreal elements. How did this installation develop, and what role does memory play in the work?

When you leave a place, your memories get encapsulated. As years pass by, that capsule changes and evolves so that the original memory ceases to exist. I was interested in the idea that every time you remember something, your brain changes details. In a way these pieces freeze these memories and, by making them, I am already changing them. I am very interested in the sculptures of contemporary Dutch artist **Mark Manders** and the way he uses furniture and found objects that remind him of his childhood and mixes them with figures. I see a connection with my work in that many of Manders’ pieces seem unfinished or in-process: you see chunks of clay, the traces of the fingers witnessing the manipulation of the material. This is completely contradictory to the classical training I received, and I find this of extreme interest. Why not leave these unpolished traces as part of the final work?

The first piece I made for this installation was *The Burghers of El Rayo*, referencing **Rodin’s** public sculpture memorial *The Burghers of Calais* (1889). It is an instance of this frozen memory. El Rayo is the church where my friends and I were altar boys, and I decided to insert these characters —either my siblings, friends, or myself—as action figures. The angle from which you are looking at those pieces is from above. Growing up in a Catholic environment, we were told that God sees everything from up above, from Heaven. So this bird’s-eye/eagle perspective represents precisely this idea, where the viewer becomes this timeless “watching” presence.

There is a sense of intimate nostalgia in your installation; would you refer to this as a personal element or as something larger?

I definitely use a number of personal elements that refer to my past. At the same time they are also open to interpretation to anybody. There are animals, houses, gardens that could in fact refer to many places. To me it is important to acknowledge that yes, I am Mexican, but many times I feel that many artists are expected to produce a cliché-based and folklore type of art. My point is not to explore the stereotypical aspects of Mexico. This is my Mexico. This is my experience of it one that aims to be open to many interpretations.

a variety of media and go back to that moment in which, as an artist, I believe everything started.

In *La Paz*, there is a connection between the sound, paintings, sculptures and ready-made elements, such as the drums. In this show I set myself to push through new boundaries that are more personal. Can you see the different sets of drums throughout the installation? As a drummer, these are elements that have always been present in my life; they have always been wandering in my studios, whether in Mexico or here in Chicago. I see a connection between my practice as a sculptor and as a drummer; how in both cases I sit on a chair, use my hands and execute body actions activated by sticks; how I use specific bodily gestures, sometimes rapid, sometimes slow. The difference is that playing drums happens in the moment, whilst clay leaves a perennial trace resulting in the sculpture. Since

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