

**Jorge Méndez Blake**  
*Apollinaire's Misspell and Other Calligrams*  
30 March – 13 May 2017

*It's raining women's voices as if they had died even in memory.* This is the first sentence of the poem *Il pleut (It's Raining)* by Apollinaire. One of the famous *Calligrams* which dynamited the form and typography of poetry at the beginning of the 20th century. This poem has always intrigued **Jorge Méndez Blake**, who explores the intimacy of world literature in his work. The Mexican artist questions both the language and the structure of a work, from its foundations to its rafters. The exhibition *Apollinaire's Misspell and Other Calligrams* pays tribute to the singularity of the poems written by Apollinaire right in the middle of the First World War.

Visitors will discover in the left-hand room a large pencil drawing with an identical reproduction - but on a completely different scale - of the original cover of Apollinaire's collection of poetry published by Gallimard. By deleting the date of 1916 and replacing it with 2016, Méndez Blake creates a time shift which assumes meaning once you read that the sub-title of the *Calligrams* is *Poems of Peace and War*. What could be more topical? The large drawing of the architectural labyrinth shows a complexity of form which adopts the structure of the calligram *Lettre-océan*. In this poem dedicated to his brother who was living in Mexico, Apollinaire makes two spelling mistakes in (Mexican) Spanish, which Méndez Blake picks up on. He omitted an h in "cingada" and writes a c instead of a j in "pendeco". These mistakes - in two vulgar, insulting words - are the starting point for several works. The artist is playing mischievously, as we can see in the minimalist work lying on the floor *Word/Window II*, consisting of turned-over Scrabble letters or in this very subtle drawing of a cave in Yucatan, a nod to certain passages in *Lettre-océan*.

The exhibition is arranged in such a way that the works echo each other, as if bouncing off the walls of a cave. The highlighting of the sonority of the poems is clear in the large painting in the right-hand room where the word *chingada* is stretched out in a languorous sh-sound while a burst of works on paper covers two walls. These works with exploded words - with a playful page layout - are comparisons with occurrences of the word *war* and other words such as *love, peace, book or Paris* which appear in Apollinaire's collection. It is literally raining words. A minimalist black sculpture heralds the large installation in the rear space consisting of hundreds of titles of poems by different authors all connected with rain. *Il pleut (It's raining)* by Apollinaire is probably one of the most beautiful visual poems, and its occupation of the space here assumes a different scale. Méndez Blake conveys Apollinaire's visual approach to literature, and enjoys giving a new visual dimension to the written word.

Besides the fact that this exhibition is a reflection of an intellectual proximity between two artists a century apart (the centenary of Apollinaire's death will be commemorated in 2018), it also expresses the complexity of two eras, their ambiguity, and the relevance - or otherwise - of thinking about aesthetic progress in a world embroiled in profound turmoil. Are the umbrellas bearing the monogram G.A. metaphors reminding us that creative work affords protection from storms?

---

Jorge Méndez Blake was born in Mexico in 1974. He lives and works in Guadalajara (Mexico). Solo exhibitions of his work have taken place at the MUAC and the Museo Tamayo, both in Mexico City (Mexico), at the Kunsthalle Mulhouse (France), the MCA Denver (USA) and the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Villa Croce in Genoa (Italy). In 2017 a solo exhibition will be organised at Marfa contemporary, Marfa (USA). Several books have been dedicated to his work, of which the last, *Otra literatura/Other Literature*, was published in 2016 by Ediciones MP + RM.