

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

For Immediate Release

GABRIEL OROZCO

September 12 – October 27, 2018

Opening reception, Wednesday, September 12, 6-8pm

Marian Goodman Gallery is excited to announce an exhibition of new work by artist Gabriel Orozco. This will be Orozco's first show at the New York gallery since moving away to Asia a few years ago.

The turn to carving in Gabriel Orozco's recent sculpture could be likened to his turn to painting on canvas in the early 2000s. Rather than assume that sculptural order has been restored by returning some fundamental property of sculpture that had seemed antithetical to his work up to this point, it hardly needs saying that sculpture has not looked like this for a good long while; and not since Adrian Stokes has the essence of modern sculpture been seen to be direct carving into stone. Rather, the hard to have predicted incorporation of carving into his longstanding engagement with sculpture shows how expansive any contemporary notion of sculpture must necessarily be.

Orozco made the first of his stone sculptures in Bali, Indonesia, where he has been living for the past two years and where carving, as in cutting into stone by hand, continues to be an important form of skilled artisanal labor. The works in this group are all made of limestone, a local material traditionally used in Balinese temple and domestic sculptural decoration. Working daily at a stonemason's yard near his home near Ubud in the uplands of the island, he has drawn on traditional skills to combine local techniques with his own method of using circles to cut away at a solid form. While each sculpture is very different—some more crystalline, some more organic—each begins as a 30 x 30 centimeter cube of limestone. Orozco draws out the same arrangement of circles with a compass on each face of the block, providing the basic schema for the slow process of cutting away that ensues.

Limestone is extremely soft, and as the artist has said "inside this stone is just more stone, which is dust, which is particles of all kinds of minerals, which is sediment..." The stone is simply, in his eyes, "compressed dust." From this point of view, the concepts behind his sculptures begin to sound more like Orozco's other preoccupations with stone—or more precisely with *stones*. Evident in his notebooks from as early as 1992, he constantly registers thoughts like "point to a stone and call it art" as if a stone could stand in as a kind of natural readymade. The ubiquity of stones—or stone as compressed dust—puts them on a par with any ordinary thing, natural or synthetic, made or found. The name given to one group called *Dés*, in reference to the six-sided shape of a dice, also evokes the possibility of a rolling action and of a game of chance. Such unpredictable movements also trigger connections with works, from the plasticine *Yielding Stone* (1992) to the recent found and machine-carved river stones (2013).

The sculptures here can be seen as a series in a fluid, relational sense, but they are absolutely not serial or part of a serial progression. On the contrary, they are singular objects that relate to one

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another through scale and material, but deviate at the level of their architectonic structure, often drastically so. Other groups have followed in a variety of other harder materials such as red tezontle, grey recinto and black marble. These groups were made in Mexico, again carved by hand, but now using mechanical tools. The introduction of material variation allows different qualities to enter and transform the series. Tezontle and recinto are both volcanic stone and used in construction. The cutting away of volume creates ever more voids, exposing the tiny air holes in the highly porous rock.

There's a meeting of geometry and geology in an architectonic construction of volcanic rock that was once lava and flowing. If the writer Roger Caillois, whom Marguerite Yourcenar called "the man who loved stones," saw in his stone collection "a universal syntax," then Orozco's sculpture suggests otherwise. Rather, materials are not universal but subject to contingency and culture. Materials are local and geographic but also planetary: much ancient art, including Mayan as well as Indian sculpture, is obviously made of limestone. Different artistic geographies pile up in so many layers. At the same time, the forms the sculptures take tap into earlier episodes within modernist sculpture in Paris, from Brancusi, through to Laurens or Lipshitz and their late Cubist experiments. The fundamental meaning of the word architectonic takes on a new vividness as a consequence, pressing us to think again about the basic units of building and making. Rather than a universal, what we even mean by nature—after all one of Orozco's most insistent preoccupations—becomes factitious and opaque.

In some of the recent paintings, different pictorial economies are grafted upon one another and create fairly unexpected movements and frictions. A geometric lexicon has become highly decorative as well as chromatically charged with allusions to the exotic. Neither completely abstract nor entirely figurative, a geometric order succumbs or yields in some irresistible way to the look of nature—the light and dark greens of vegetation, the blue patches cut in, a part-reference to a parrot. On the other hand, just as irresistibly, the schematic organization of circles and verticals makes it impossible to see through.

A hieratic column intersected with gold leaf suggests an ancient pattern or portal, or herald or spine, or any number of metonymic associations. Orozco's recent series of chromatic and schematic "translations" of some paintings by Matisse from the 1920s can be seen as an earlier foray into this terrain. Now embedded in the painted surface are hints of Le Douanier Rousseau, who famously fabricated the story of his part in the French military expedition of the 1860s to the "jungles" of Mexico and based his paintings on what he found in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. One place transplanted to another place in the imagination; both the what and the where uncertain.

Orozco's relation to place is elusive: if not universalizing, then nor does the work present us with a localized aesthetic, or plural version of one, given the multiple sites of the work's production. Series bifurcate—touching on the specific conditions of their making—but also share a formal geometric language. It's hard to pin down where they belong. It's not only a matter of the artist's decision to split his time, living mainly over the last four years in Asia as well as Mexico. It's the work itself that touches on what the great writer on exoticism Victor Segalen called the exot's "ability to conceive otherwise." While the poet-ethnographer Segalen was one of the first to problematize Eurocentric narratives (distinguishing the exot from the stereotypical exoticism of

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the tourist) he was still thinking within their terms. Orozco's work, on the other hand, charts a very different set of territorial and imaginary relations (Tokyo, Ubud, Mexico, New York, Paris). Its subsequent trajectories, while they will inevitably lead elsewhere, are not possible to predict.

- Briony Fer

Gabriel Orozco was born in Veracruz, Mexico in 1962. Following his first exhibition in 1983, Orozco has had numerous international solo exhibitions at institutions such as The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California (2000), the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico (2006), and a major retrospective which traveled from the Museum of Modern Art, New York to the Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, the Centre Pompidou, Paris and the Tate Modern, London (2009-2011). More recently his work has been presented at the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2016), the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT), Tokyo, Japan (2015) and the Moderna Museet, Sweden (2014).

Please join us at the opening reception for the artist on Wednesday, September 12, from 6-8 pm.

A talk between the artist and Paul Holdengräber will take place on Friday, September 14 at 7 pm, at the New York Public Library.

For further information, please contact Linda Pellegrini, Director of Communications, at linda@mariangoodman.com, or (212) 977-7160, or visit our website at mariangoodman.com.