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“The Lulennial” by Daniel Garza-Usabiaga
August 19, 2015

Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico



'The Lulennial: A Slight
Gestuary Pt. 1', left:
Jifi Kovanda, *Untitled*,
2004, right: Zarouhie
Abdalian, *Buoy*, 2014,
installation view

Lulu is an independent project space in Mexico City run by curator Chris Sharp and artist Martín Soto Climent. The Lulennial, devised by Sharp and Fabiola Iza, is specifically designed for Lulu's small exhibition space, which measures only nine m². This 'micro-biennial', as Sharp described it, explored an interest in 'radical economy', ranging 'from the pithy to the physical to the gestural to even the monetary'. The works exhibited as part of the Lulennial conform to a logic of small gestures, hence the exhibition's subtitle: 'A Slight Gestuary'.

In order to show the work of more than 20 international artists, the Lulennial had three separate phases between early February and mid-May, as well as two platforms for exhibiting work: the gallery and an online space. Each physical show was expanded in the form of a virtual exhibition, which featured information on related art-historical examples and works that were impossible to include due to the physical restrictions of the gallery space and Lulu's economic considerations. The Lulennial also featured a performance programme curated by Sophie Goltz.

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The first of the exhibitions included works by, amongst others, Jiří Kovanda, Gabriel Orozco, Chantal Peñalosa, Tania Pérez Córdova and Goran Trbuljak. Since the 1970s, Kovanda has performed actions or made objects that involve slight or minimal physical gestures. *Untitled* (2004), for example, comprises a pair of shoes, the laces of which have been replaced by cooked spaghetti. Orozco's photograph, *Breath on Piano* (1993), was also in the show, presented here as a precise representation of a momentary action: the disappearing imprint of warm breath on the polished surface of a piano.

The theme of sound ran through this first installation, despite all of the works being soundless: the silent piano in Orozco's work or the whistle submerged in a glass of water in Zarouhie Abdalian's *Buoy* (2014), for instance. The same is true of Peñalosa's soundless video *Catching a Fly* (2014), in which the artist follows, with her camera, a fly in the restaurant where she works in Tecate, Baja California – a tourist city on the border with the US. Peñalosa performs minor tasks in order to kill time between serving the restaurant's dwindling number of customers. The artist's minimal gestures redirect a more common focus on the rampant violence in this border zone and its ongoing 'war on drugs'.

Phase two of the Lulennial presented works by artists including Francis Alÿs, Paola de Anda, Wilfredo Prieto and B. Wurtz. The exhibition established distinctive connections between the pieces, most of which were square or circular in form. Another feature of the show was the use of food in a number of works: a mango, an egg shell, the skin of an avocado. Pieces that didn't use perishable materials nevertheless responded to the domestic scale of the Lulu enterprise. Kirsten Pieroth's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2014), for instance – a jar containing liquid in which the artist had boiled a paperback copy of Michel de Certeau's classic eponymous 1984 book. This episode of the Lulennial had two site-specific works: a piece by Darren Bader, in which a tortilla was hung in a different part of the gallery each day, and an ephemeral intervention by Alÿs: a barrier-like green line on the floor created using peas.

The final installment featured easy-to-overlook works by Robert Barry, Matt Hinkley, Roman Ondák and Ana Roldán, among others, which gave the initial impression that the gallery was empty. In this, the installation perfectly demonstrated the curators' intention to create a group of works made coherent by their shared focus on economy of resources. Perhaps the work that best epitomized this was Goran Petercal's *Sjene (24)* (1990), in which the shadows cast by two thin tubes of brass are used as prime 'materials' in an artwork that oscillates between drawing and sculpture.

Sharp and Iza devised a successful biennial without excessive expenditure. The artworks' impact was not a result of grand scale or lavishness. With this project, Lulu reaffirmed its mission to address, in the local context, new models for thinking about contemporary art and its display.