

KENSINGTON & CHELSEA REVIEW

Gonzalo Lebrija

Gonzalo Lebrija is an acclaimed Mexican artist who has been exhibited extensively in Latin America. His recent London exhibition *Who knows where the times goes* – named after the Nina Simone song - featured photography, video and installation. Here he tells us about his best shot



'Who Knows' Film Still

THE SETTING

This collection of work, *Who knows where the time goes*, was created in Tapalpa, a town in the mountains of Jalisco in central-western Mexico. It's the town where I grew up. Many of my family grew up there, but mostly all have died. My great-grandfather is buried in the church in the centre of the town, so there is much family history in the area.

The landscape itself is on the outskirts of the town and faces San Gabriel, which is the lowest part of the frontier with Colima, a region which itself eventually goes out to the sea. San Gabriel is famous because it was the town where the famous Mexican writer Juan Rulfo lived. He of course, as other writers have been important to this project – has been an inspiration to me both through reading him as a child and now in my artistic projects.

I spent all my life there, in that landscape. I like to create works in places where I have grown up or lived... in a way it gives more sense to what I am doing. All this past experience does have a play on the action, and an impact on the performance.

THE PHOTOGRAPH

This image is a still from the video work that is central to the collection and the exhibition *Who knows where the time goes*. The song which lends the exhibition its title was always an inspiration for the work, but all of my work is very closely related to that theme of timelessness, so I thought it an apt title in terms of this overall project...

In the collection, the works are all essentially the recordings of actions. The video piece and various photographs capture the tiny fractions of seconds in which books, thrown in the air by myself, are then shot, also by me. Originally, I tried having others throw the books up, but this didn't work either conceptually or visually. Most of my works – not just in this collection – are recordings of personal actions, or performances. I normally appear in them. For example, I did a project called 'The Distance Between You and Me',

in which I set the camera, and then I run into the landscape, sometimes out of sight completely... But essentially the idea is that I get stopped by the timing of the camera.

And so in a way it is harmonious because you shoot at the same time as you run – so you establish a distance which becomes a sort of language. In this project I again enjoy the idea of establishing a distance – at the same time as you throw the book, and you are pushing it away from you, you are shooting it, stopping its distance. The shoot is not to get rid of it, but to establish a deeper contact to the object, and understanding more of its meaning.

This particular frame was incredibly important. When travelling around the town, this landscape is where we do all our horseback riding... but at this particular point it is like the limit of the land for us. Beyond that point at which I stand in the video there is a sort of disconnected area. It becomes like the limit of time and known factors – like the end of the land... before you reach nothing. Outside of that line there was nonexistence... So these books, shot at the end of the land and at the end of the recognisable, become timeless, suspended.

I shot around 60 books in total. I have been shooting all my life, so that was not the difficult part... I have a good shot, as you can see! When moving from conception to action, you don't turn mechanical suddenly. We used two cameras to shoot the video and four to shoot the photographs. So once I had the idea the project was very organic... building the team was quick and I knew the site I wanted to use straight away, so we went there. The actual action was done in one day, over about 3 or 4 hours. It is the recording of an action, so there are no special effects. I'm not really into special effects... my work always records an action, it is as simple as that. I use technology to capture the tiny fraction of the second which I am looking for, but not any more than is needed for that. For me it's about the physicality, not the special effects.

THE BOOKS

The books were those which have inspired me in some way in my life and in my art. So the books shot in the project range from philosophy to poetry, to literature... one for example is Heidegger's 'Being and Time'.

I didn't shoot my own books, although I had planned to. They were the inspiration, but when I started to

do some proofs it was a very sad image – the image of the books destroyed – because this is not a project about destruction or violence, and in fact it tends to be conceptually the opposite. So I thought I should not shoot my own books and bought them instead from old second hand shops. Once I got to this stage I was able to work more closely with the physicality... I was able to look at

the consistency, how they would break apart. And then through this I found it was not important, once I saw the image, wasn't important that it be my own books I exploded. In a way you can throw a book once you've read it, but I thought I would probably like to keep the books and let my children read them also.

<http://www.faggionato.com/exhibitions/gonzalo-lebrija>