

## “Yoshua Okón: In the Land of Ownership”

Part I: 12 – 14 May 2016 at Art Fair Tokyo (Booth: S01-9)

Part II: 19 May - 19 June 2016 at Asakusa

Curated by ASAKUSA in collaboration with SCAI THE BATHHOUSE

Asakusa is delighted to introduce the work of **Yoshua Okón** (b.1970, Mexico City) for his first presentation in Tokyo. Taking the specificity of each geo-political event, Okón creates situations through which fiction and reality intersect in a series of actions by amateur participants. As a convergence of staged situations, documentation, and improvisation, his work is akin to sociological experiments executed for the camera, and explores issues of labor, authority and its legitimacy, often on the boundary of a marginalised community. Based on rigorous research and close intersession with the people in question, Okón's work attempts to turn the spectator into an active agent, and makes uncensored commentary on our social realities today.

The exhibition, titled “Yoshua Okon: In the Land of Ownership”, will be presented in two parts. Part I at Art Fair Tokyo will showcase Okón's collaborative practice that questions capital and anti-capital movements, and how both conjure politics at opposite ends of the art-world spectrum. Previously at Zona Maco art fair, Okón worked with **Santiago Sierra** (b.1966, Madrid) to mock a Mexican telecom billionaire and the Soumaya Museum that houses a vast collection of European Old Masters. The Toilet (2016) is a satirical photographic collage of a luxury toilet in the shape of the museum and a rendition of The Thinker by Auguste Rodin. This undisguised critique is juxtaposed with another work projecting the resigned contemplation of a surviving group of hippies. Hipnostasis (2009), by Okón and **Raymond Pettibon** (b.1957, Tuscan), is a six-channel video installation, featuring men who have been living in Venice Beach for more than 30 years and remaining faithful to their non-materialistic ideology.

Part II of the exhibition at Asakusa, sites Okón's recent productions drawing direct reference from Guatemalan immigrants who crossed the U.S. border. Octopus (2011) is a re-enactment of the Guatemalan Civil War performed by actual guerrilla and military combatants in a remote, but yet charged, setting in California. Once opposition fighters, they are now members of the Los Angeles Mayan community, undocumented migrants gathered to seek for day labor in a Home Depot parking lot where the shoot takes place. In the second work, Oracle (2015), Okón works with an ultra-nationalist group in Arizona who protest against the entrance of unaccompanied children to the U.S. Against this backdrop, the children sing a modified version of the US Marine's Hymn implicating American invasion to their home economy. Both works are named after specific transnational corporations and, beyond tracing root causes for immigration in the U.S. invasion to Guatemala, they describe how state structures are increasingly at the service of private interests and how land dictates neoliberal politics.

From light jokes to a black satire, humor in Okón's work has been a constructive mechanism for both a political attack and an ethical provocation. Through his strategy, the subject is decentred, suspended and deterred while performing a hollow cycle of guided actions. “My generation was preceded by the troubled paradigm, a result of Modernist culture, which, by taking itself too rigorously, loses any self-critical capacity,” says Okón. Humor at once provides an uncharted ground in which the liberty of our indecisive and drifting moments are recouped in the social dilemmas<sup>1</sup>. Through the lens of Okón's camera, the spectator is prompted to shift his perspective in a constant flux - reflecting the contemporary conditions of the here-and-now.

With a growing voice for political conservatism in defiance of historical complexities, the exhibition poses, amongst other questions: How does the sense of ownership plays in a game of these political events? In an age of segmentation and the polyphony of market centres, what would be the task for private collectors to mitigate regional discrepancies for intercultural evaluation? What is territory and what does it stand for?

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Yoshua Okón: Oracle (2015), lightjet C print, 150 x 97.8 cm.



Yoshua Okón: Oracle (2015), single channel video (color, stereo), 15'09".

## Artists:

**Yoshua Okón** (b.1970, Mexico City) is known for his near-sociological experiments executed for the camera, which blur the distinctions of staged situations, documentation, and improvisation. His practice explores communal and national boundaries, and questions the issues of labor, as well as authority and its legitimacy in a geo-political event. He received a MFA from University of California, Los Angeles in 2002. Okón's work has been shown internationally and his past exhibitions include "Mexico City: an exhibition about the exchange rates between bodies and values," curated by Klaus Biesenbach, PS1, MoMA, NY, and Kunstwerke, Berlin, 2002; "Adaptive Behavior," curated by Trevor Smith, Dan Cameron and Yukie Kamiya, New Museum, NY, 2004; "Laughing in a Foreign Language," curated by Simon Critchley and Mami Kataoka, Hayward Gallery, London, 2008; "Burning Down the House," the 10th Gwangju Biennale curated by Jessica Morgan, Gwangju, 2014. This year, Okón's is participating "What People Do For Money," Manifesta 11 curated by Christian Jankowski, Zurich. His work is placed in the permanent collection of Tate Modern, LACMA, Colección Jumex and MUAC, among others.

**Santiago Sierra** (b.1966, Madrid) addresses structures of power that operate in our everyday existence. His work intervenes into theoretical structures exposing situations of exploitation and marginalization, famously hiring underprivileged individuals who, in exchange for money, are willing to undertake pointless or unpleasant tasks. Recent solo exhibitions include Laboratory, Mexico City, 2015; Kunsthalle Tübingen, Germany, 2013; Reykjavik Art Museum, 2012; CAC Malaga 2006. His work is included in the collection of Tate Britain, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Daimler Contemporary amongst others. Sierra studied at the Academy of San Carlos, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City.

**Raymond Pettibon** (b.1957, Tuscan) covers a wide spectrum of American high and low culture, from the deviations of marginal youth to art history, religion, politics, and sexuality. Since his early career in the 1970's Southern California punk-rock culture with his brother's band "Blag Flag," Pettibon has forged his own genre of artistic commentary through the distribution of album covers, comics, concert flyers, t-shirts and fanzines. His work has been exhibited at the Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 1998; Whitney Museum of American Art, N.Y., 2005; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 2006; and is in the collection of Centre Pompidou, MoMA New York, SFMOMA, Tate Gallery, amongst others. Pettibon received a degree in economics from University of California, Los Angeles in 1977.

## Curators:

**ASAKUSA** is a 40-square-meter exhibition venue for contemporary art programmes committed to advancing curatorial collaborations and practices. Since its inauguration in October 2015, the gallery has worked with Mikhail Karikis, Héctor Zamora, and Oliver Beer. As part of its annual exhibition series, Asakusa held the archival exhibition "1923" tracing the footsteps of early Japanese avant-garde in the 1920s, with a particular focus on the influence of Dada in Tokyo, which paved way to the Proletariat Art in the 1930s. The exhibition with Yoshua Okón marks its fourth exhibition.

## Exhibition Facts:

Title: "Yoshua Okón: In the Land of Ownership"

Part I:

Dates: 12 - 14 May, 2016

Venue: At Fair Tokyo, Booth: S09

Location: Tokyo International Forum  
3-5-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda, Tokyo

Opening hours: 5/12 14:00-21:00, 5/13 12:00-21:00,  
5/14 10:30-17:00 \*Ticket required for entry.

Part II:

Dates: 19 May - 19 June, 2016

Venue: Asakusa

Location: 1-6-16 Nishi-Asakusa, Taito, Tokyo

Opening hours:

Thur. 19:00 - 22:00, Sat.&Sun. 12:00 - 19:00

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