

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

DARA BIRNBAUM AND CORY ARCANGEL
IN CONVERSATION

MUSIC VIDEO

JACQUES VILLEGLÉ

\$10.00



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Daniel Guzmán

HARRIS LIEBERMAN

Since the 1990s, Daniel Guzmán has made drawings that borrow imagery from a wide range of sources—from punk rock to the daily news, heavy metal to Mexican mural painting—and his first exhibition at this gallery charted similarly dense terrain. Guzmán's latest sculptures share certain motifs with his drawing series "*La Búsqueda del Ombligo*" (The Search of the Navel), 2005–2007, in which he explored his cultural roots; but they focus on darker subjects, namely the New Fire, an Aztec bloodletting ceremony, the artist channeling aggression and disenchantment into metaphor.

The rectangular structures constituting the series "Everything Is Temporary," 2008–, have been constructed with *carrizo*, a "ubiquitous, determined weed," according to the *Journal of Homeland Security*, that "chokes waterways, erodes banks and canals . . . and affords potentially dangerous illegal aliens the cover they need to slip into the United States across the Rio Grande." Fastened together with strips of black leather, the *carrizo* is adorned with thrift-store bric-a-brac and found objects, including records, flowers, blue bandanas, and a Kiss mask that, hung by its ponytail, resembles a decapitated head. With their makeshift simplicity, the objects suggest various uses, from ritualistic to monumental.

Installed in a corner, *Day One. "Smoking Mirror,"* 2008, consists of a stack of bound *carrizo* fitted snugly between two large perpen-

dicular mirrors that reflect each other through a Smithsonian-like refraction. On top of the stack rest pieces of a ceramic skull covered with pesos—perhaps blood money or a blessing. Too ambiguous to be heavy-handed, the work echoes the large drawings, lining the gallery walls, from "*El Grafico*," 2008, Guzmán's series depicting graphic crime scenes shown on the cover of the eponymous daily tabloid. Causing further disorientation, the video *El Secreto del Mal* (The Secret of Evil), 2007, based on a posthumously published collection of writings by Roberto Bolaño, could be heard throughout the main gallery. Projected in a side room, Guzmán's zombie flick is smarter than most B movies but not quite a spoof, nor is it an homage. The video shows two men engaged in idiosyncratic political, poetic, and philosophical conversations in Mexico City ("I haven't lost my hope, it just has AIDS," says one) as they flee from an undead mob chasing them, *Night of the Living Dead* style.

And like George Romero's classic film, Guzmán's new work operates as an allegory for contemporary violence, raising questions regarding voyeurism, satire, and symbolism. The title of the show, "*El Sol de México*," was displayed as a large black vinyl sign that spanned the gallery's street-facing window, alluding to the Mexican newspaper as well as to Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of sun and war. That Guzmán created such a strikingly cohesive installation, uniting past and present cultural references, is indeed impressive. Having distanced himself from previous sources of inspiration (Bukowski, Burroughs, and Pasolini, to name a few) and having tethered his practice more securely to Mexico's particular history and culture, the artist has produced his most pressing and important work to date.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler

Daniel Guzmán, *Day One. "Smoking Mirror,"* 2008, mixed media. 67 x 24 x 24". From the series "Everything Is Temporary," 2008–.

