



Julio Galán

Timeline

LUHRING AUGUSTINE

kurimanzutto

1958

Julio Galán is born on December 5 in the small mining and ranching town of Melchor Múzquiz in the border state of Coahuila, Mexico.

Galán is the third of five siblings. His parents are Julio Galán de la Peña, a miner, ranchero, and municipal president of Melchor Múzquiz for two terms, and María Elisa Romo de Galán, with whom he is close. As a child, he is passionate about painting: “The vocation was born with me. I cannot remember now the first painting. I always painted, my parents framed them. I felt [...] the need to discover something new.”¹



Galán with his father, Julio Galán de la Peña, n.d.

1962–69

Studies at Colegio Guadalupe Victoria in Melchor Múzquiz, Coahuila, until 5th grade, in a school run by nuns and founded by his

grandfather Adolfo Romo. From him, he inherits a passion for collecting rare objects and antiques, such as dolls and furniture, which he will later incorporate into his work. At around age ten, he leaves Melchor Múzquiz to join his older siblings at Colegio Montessori in Monterrey, Nuevo León. His parents divide their time between Melchor Múzquiz and Monterrey, where they maintain a home so their children can study in private school.



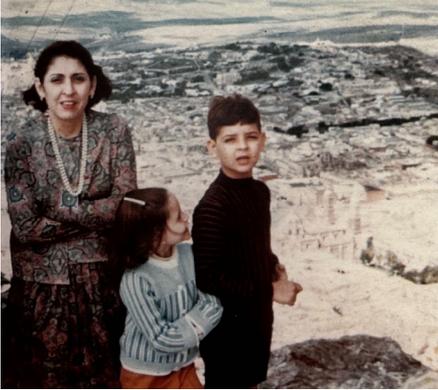
Galán (right) as an altar boy, Parroquia Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro, Melchor Múzquiz, Coahuila, Mexico, 1967

1970–76

Between 1970 and 1972, Galán frequently visits Guillermo Sepúlveda’s gallery, Galería Miró (later renamed Galería Arte Actual Mexicano), in Monterrey. There, he enjoys viewing the paintings of Mexican artists Gunther Gerzo

and Rafael Calzada. He recalls, “I wanted to express myself in color, but back then, I didn’t understand that I could paint for a living.”²

Galán attends high school at Colegio Irlandés in Monterrey, a Catholic school run by the Legionarios de Cristo Order. He spends a year in Canada on an exchange program before graduating in 1976. References to his childhood later appear in his work, interwoven with allusions to Catholicism and the Mexican Baroque.



Galán with his mother, María Elisa Romo de Galán, and his sister, Sofía, n.d.

1977

After graduating high school, Galán tells his parents he wants to paint professionally; however, his father disapproves of his artistic inclinations. He demands that Galán study art formally if he insists on becoming an artist, but Galán refuses.

Galán will continue to consider himself a self-taught artist and consistently denies having received any artistic instruction. “Life is the school, no?” he quips. “Because in the schools one cannot learn much... I never regretted not having attended a single art school or taken painting classes because in truth, it did not compel me.”³

1978

Between 1978 and 1982, Galán studies architecture at Universidad de Monterrey. He is never truly interested in becoming an architect and confesses to cheating in every class, including his thesis.



Galán drawing in García, Nuevo León, Mexico, n.d.

1979

Submits *No me dejes dormir Lissi* (You don't let me sleep Lissi, 1979), an oil painting depicting a naked, mutilated doll figure, to the local II Salón de Pintura Artistas Premiados del Centro de Arte FIC competition. He wins second place in painting, which includes a fifteen-day trip to Barcelona and Paris, allowing him to visit his older sister Lissi, who is married and living in Spain.

During this time, he revisits Guillermo Sepúlveda's gallery in Monterrey, now called Galería Arte Actual Mexicano, bringing one painting to show him and seek his opinion. This encounter marks the beginning of one of his most significant relationships with a gallerist throughout his career.

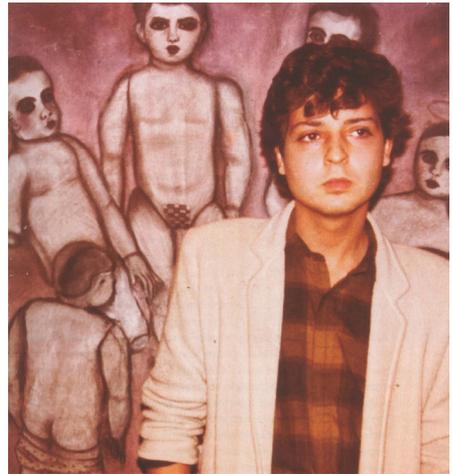


No me dejes dormir Lissi, 1979, oil on canvas, 70 7/8 × 55 1/8 in. (180 × 140 cm)

1980–81

Galán has his first solo exhibition at Sepúlveda's Galería Arte Actual Mexicano in Monterrey. His early work features emotionally intense compositions that include fragmented dolls and figures with blank stares, surrounded by symbolic iconography, as seen in *El encantamiento (Lissi, Lissi)* (The Enchantment, 1981).

With this painting, Galán wins 1st Place Acquisition Prize at the Salón Anual de la Plástica at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City. This prize is part of an initiative where winning artworks are purchased by Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) to help create public museum collections in Mexico. *El encantamiento (Lissi, Lissi)* joins the collection of Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City.



Galán with *Muñecos blancos poniéndose de acuerdo sobre cómo no sufrir* (1981)



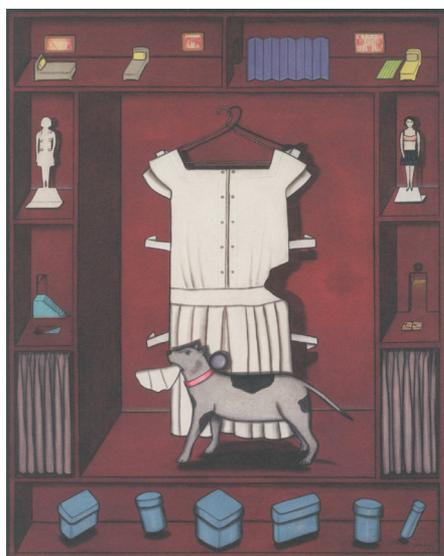
El encantamiento (Lissi, Lissi), 1981,
acrylic and collage on canvas,
43 5/16 × 27 9/16 in. (110 × 70 cm)

1982–83

In 1982, Galán completes his architecture degree at Universidad de Monterrey, enabling him to dedicate himself fully to painting. He presents solo exhibitions at Galería Arte Actual Mexicano (1982, 1983) and Galería Arvil in Mexico City (1982), marking his first solo show outside Monterrey. The following year, he participates in the Bienal de Cuba, Havana (1983).



Sketch for El ropero de Sofia,
early 1980s, pencil on paper,
12 5/8 × 9 13/16 in. (32 × 25 cm)



El ropero de Sofia, 1983, oil on canvas,
68 1/2 × 54 3/4 in. (174 × 139 cm)

1984

Galán's second exhibition outside Monterrey takes place at Galería Uno in Puerto Vallarta. The show is a huge success, attracting over a thousand attendees and helping expand his recognition beyond Monterrey, including in Guadalajara, where he exhibits at Galería Claave later that year.

Lowery S. Sims, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, visits Galán's studio in Monterrey and, struck by his work, urges him to move to New York. In the summer, Galán packs all his savings—two thousand dollars—"a perfume, an awesome pair of shoes, a crucifix and some clothes,"⁴ and moves to New York with his friend Juan "Johnny" de Dios Ramírez, where he lives until 1990. They initially live near 14th Street and Union Square before settling in a Hell's Kitchen apartment on 45 Street and 10th Avenue.

Galán meets American fashion designer Nicole Miller and shows her a picture of *El ropero de Sofía* (Sofía's Wardrobe, 1983). The dress depicted at the center of the work is one of Miller's designs, given to Galán's sister Sofía as a gift from their mother. Miller likes the painting, and Galán promises her the first work he creates in New York.

That same year, Miller hangs *Paseo por Nueva York con dolor de cabeza y barajas de lotería* (Stroll Through New York with a Headache and Lottery Cards, 1984) at the entrance of her Tribeca loft and throws a party that kickstarts the young artist's visibility, introducing him to Paige Powell, the advertising manager of *Interview*, Andy Warhol's avant-garde magazine.



Paseo por Nueva York con dolor de cabeza y barajas de lotería, 1984, oil and acrylic on canvas, 77 15/16 × 59 13/16 in. (198 × 152 cm)

1985

In May, *Interview* magazine's advertising manager, Paige Powell, organizes Galán's first solo exhibition in New York at an Upper East Side apartment, but the building's board cancels the show at the last minute. Mexican ambassador Joaquín Bernal offers Powell the Consul General Gallery in Midtown, where the exhibition opens on September 19—the same day a devastating earthquake strikes Mexico City.



Galán with *Sí puedes pero no debes* (1985) on the rooftop of his apartment building in Hell's Kitchen, New York, c. 1985

In October, Galán exhibits at Art Mart Gallery in Manhattan's East Village, presenting a series of recent paintings named after medicines he invents, such as *Adovenad* (1985) and *Niño elefante tomando Ele-rat 7* (Elephant boy taking Ele-rat 7, 1985), which is purchased by the actor Sylvester Stallone. His work often features dreamlike settings with a young man or boy who closely resembles the artist.



Adovenad, 1985, oil on canvas, 40 × 74 in. (101.6 × 188 cm)

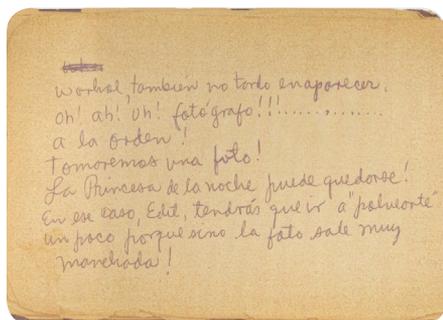
1986

Barbara Farber, who attended Galán's show at the Art Mart Gallery in New York, gives him his first solo exhibition in Europe at Galerie Barbara Farber in Amsterdam. She continues to represent him throughout the 1990s, helping secure his 1992 solo show at the Stedelijk Museum.

In the fall, Powell organizes a solo show for Galán at the 3,500-square-foot apartment of Hungarian American art critic and writer Edit deAk in SoHo. Galán documents the opening night and later creates a photo album featuring images from the event, including one of Warhol arriving with a camera in hand.

Warhol occasionally visits Galán's Hell's Kitchen studio, and the two go to flea markets together. Warhol barter for one of Galán's paintings, *El Hermano / Niño berenjena y niña Santa Claus* (The Brother / Eggplant Boy and Santa Claus Girl, 1985), offering to paint a portrait of Galán in exchange. However, Warhol passes away unexpectedly in February

1987 before completing the trade.
Galán later recovers the painting.



Spread from the photo album featuring Warhol attending Galán's 1986 exhibition at Edit deAk's SoHo apartment. Collection of Mauricio Jasso.

1987

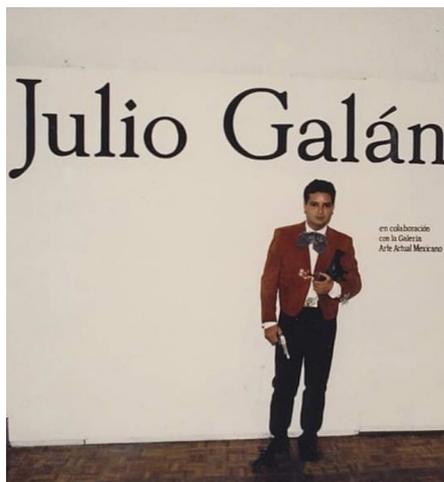
In September, Museo de Monterrey presents Galán's first major exhibition, featuring twenty-three paintings. The following year, the show travels to the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City. While in New York, Galán admires the work of leading contemporary artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente, Anselm Kiefer, Sigmar Polke, and Julian Schnabel: "I liked their work but

I was very clear that I didn't want to paint like them, nor in the technique nor in the contents."⁵

Reaffirming his own style, and influenced by his nostalgia for Mexico, he embraces his Mexican identity by incorporating traditional figures such as *charros*—skilled horsemen distinguished by their embroidered suits and wide-brimmed sombreros.



Los cómplices, 1987, oil on canvas, 74 3/4 × 90 1/2 in. (189.9 × 229.9 cm)



Documentation from Galán's exhibition opening at Museo de Monterrey, 1987



Documentation from Galán's exhibition opening at Museo de Monterrey, 1987

1988

On March 15, at the inauguration of his exhibition at Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Galán arrives late, disguised in a dark suit with a fake mustache and carrying a baby doll dressed as a sailor. He quietly observes the event from among the attendees.

Galán meets prominent New York gallerist Annina Nosei, who at the time represents Jean-Michel Basquiat, Barbara Kruger, and Guillermo Kuitca, among others.



Relámpagos naranjas, 1988, oil and mixed media on canvas, 52 x 84 1/4 in. (132 x 214 cm)

Around this time, Galán begins experimenting with sculpture and ceramics in particular, producing works at Roberta Brittingham Sada's ceramic workshop, Taller de Arte y Diseño, and the ceramic tile manufacturing company, Cerámica Regiomontana, both in Monterrey.



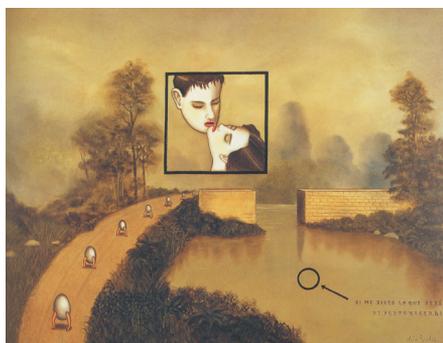
M. Posewhite, 1989, ceramic and metal, 42 x 20 x 20 in. (106.7 x 50.8 x 50.8 cm)

1989

He participates in the group exhibition *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Galán is the only Mexican artist selected for the exhibition, presenting seven paintings, including *La primera comunión / Antes y después* (First communion /

Before and after, c. 1986) and *Niños con muchos huevos* (Kids with a lot of eggs, c.1989). As seen in these works, Galán often combines text with image, using wordplay and fragments to add layers of meaning.

In the spring, Galán holds the first of several solo exhibitions at Annina Nosei Gallery in SoHo. Their professional relationship continues through 1998, when Galán shifts his New York representation to Robert Miller Gallery and Ramis Barquet Gallery.



Niños con muchos huevos, c. 1989, oil on canvas, 71 5/8 × 90 1/8 in. (182 × 229 cm)



La primera comunión / Antes y después, c. 1987, oil on canvas, 102 3/8 × 117 3/8 in. (260 × 298 cm)

1990

Julio Galán and Guillermo Kuitca opens at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The exhibition highlights their shared exploration of psychological space, with Galán's uncanny, dreamlike imagery contrasting Kuitca's desolate interiors. That same year, Galán presents solo exhibitions at Annina Nosei Gallery, New York, and at Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone, Rome.

Galán participates in *Aspects of Contemporary Mexican Painting*, organized by the Americas Society in New York and curated by Edward J. Sullivan. After its debut at the Americas Society Art Gallery in fall 1990, the exhibition travels the following year to the Blue Star Art Space in San Antonio, Texas; the Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas; and the Santa Mónica Art Museum in California.

Galán plays with labels surrounding his sexuality, a theme that subtly runs through his work. In one instance, he poses for photographer Juan Rodrigo Llaguno, dressed as a Zulu warrior and standing in front of his painting *El amor contigo nunca entró en mis planes* (Love with you never entered my plans, 1991), with the Mexican slang “JOTO” (“fag”) boldly painted in black ink across his bare chest. He embraces ambiguity

over directness in the painting *Los siete climas* (The Seven Climates, 1991), based on the photograph, omitting the “J” from the word.



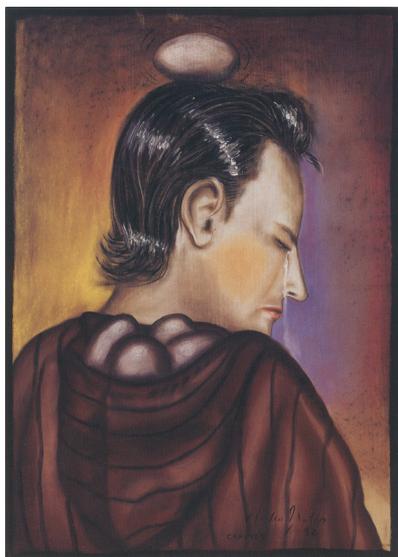
Los siete climas, 1991, oil on canvas, 90 1/2 x 59 in. (230 x 150 cm)



Galán photographed by Juan Rodrigo Llaguno, 1991

1992

Curator Jurrie Poot of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam invites Galán to exhibit his work in the Netherlands, resulting in the 1992 exhibition and catalogue *Julio Galán: Pastels*, featuring his pastel works on paper, including *Huevos en Careyes* (Eggs in Careyes, 1992).



Huevos en Careyes, 1992, pastel on paper, 39 3/8 x 27 9/16 in (100 x 70 cm)

That same year, Galán participates in the group exhibition *Aktuelle Kunst aus México* (Fine Art from Mexico) at the Frankfurter Kunstverein in Germany. The show presents eleven Mexican artists between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five, selected by the Kunstverein's director, Peter Weiermair, including Silvia Gruner, Nestor Quiñones, and Nahum Zenil, among others.

1993

In a pivotal year for Galán's career, he opens the solo exhibition *Julio Galán: Dark Music* at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, and his work is exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as part of the group exhibition *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*. Among the artists represented in the exhibition are Tarsila de Amaral, Fernando Botero, Frida Kahlo, Wifredo Lam, Ana Mendieta, Diego Rivera, Jesús Rafael Soto, and Joaquín Torres-García.

He also has a major mid-career survey organized by the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, which publishes a catalogue of his work featuring essays by Eleanor Heartney, Jaime Moreno Villareal, Sergio Pitol, Jurrie Poot, and Jerry Saltz. This retrospective includes 138 works and travels in early 1994 to the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City.

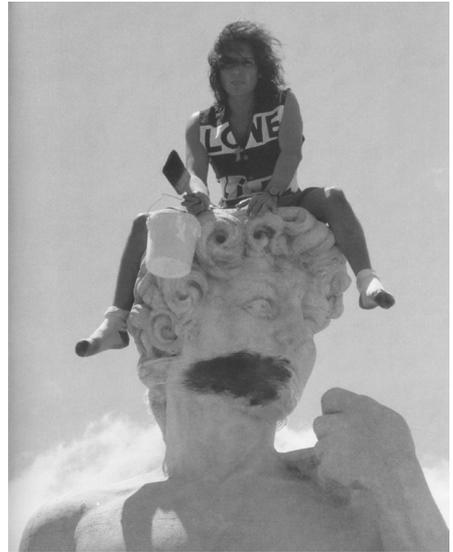
Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide travels to Monterrey for several days, where she collaborates with Galán on a series of performative portraits. Iturbide recalls, "I did not know him prior to the session but we became good friends. I even gave him an antique doll... Galán had a penchant for performativity, which he approached both with forethought and spontaneity."⁶

Galán collaborates on a photoshoot with fashion photographer Francisco

Barragán in Monterrey. During the session, he spontaneously climbs to the top of a public sculpture of Michelangelo's *David* located in San Pedro Garza García in Nuevo León, covering sections with plastic and painting David's mouth black.



Installation view of *Sí y no* (1990) in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1993; photo: digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY



Untitled, 1995, photograph by Francisco Barragán

1994

Galán receives the Premio MARCO from the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey.

He presents solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, and the Center for the Fine Arts in Miami.



Galán at the ceremony for the Premio MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, 1994

1995–96

Galán participates in the 67th Whitney Biennial in New York, curated by Klaus Kertess, with *El gran corte de pelo* (The Great Haircut, 1992–93) and *One Week* (1993). Gabriel

Orozco is the only other Mexican artist included, alongside Matthew Barney, Nan Goldin, Agnes Martin, Catherine Opie, Robert Ryman, Richard Serra, Cindy Sherman, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, among others.

Holds his first solo exhibition at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris.

In 1996, Galán presents solo exhibitions at Galerie Barbara Farber, Amsterdam, and Annina Nosei Gallery, New York, which by then has relocated from SoHo to Chelsea.



Installation view of the seven-part work *One Week* (1993) at the 67th Whitney Biennial, New York, 1995. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements

1997–98

Galán's solo exhibition *El Oro Poderoso* (The Powerful Gold) opens at Galería Ramis Barquet in New York. That same year, Fundación Proa in Buenos Aires presents a mid-career survey of his work.

The following year, Galán exhibits for the second time at Galerie

Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris. After the opening, he remains in Paris, drawn to the glamorous atmosphere of Hôtel Costes: “I was going to stay for a week in the Costes Hotel, but I liked it so much that I stayed for a year. It is an incredible place, you have to wait 3 months to have a reservation for dinner, and celebrities from entertainment, fashion and the jet set world get together there: Robert de Niro, Uma Thurman, Naomi Campbell.”⁷

During his stay, he refuses to swap rooms with actor Johnny Depp but later accepts and becomes good friends with him.

1999–2001

Galán’s mother dies on May 16, leaving him deeply affected and in profound sorrow for some time. He reflects, “I wanted to look for her but instead I obsessively kept finding myself. I have discovered a strong man, with a lot of inner firmness and an absolute need to survive and continue.”⁸

In 2000, he presents solo exhibitions at Galería Arte Actual Mexicano in Monterrey and Galería Enrique Guerrero in Mexico City.

In 2001, he holds his final solo exhibition in New York, *My Mirrors*, at Robert Miller Gallery, where he explores themes of self-reflection and

resilience. From that point until his death, he exhibits only sporadically.



Galán and his mother, María Elisa Romo de Galán, n.d.

2002–03

Carne de gallina (Goosebumps) is Galán’s final retrospective exhibition in Mexico during his lifetime, opening in July 2002 at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca (MACO). The exhibition later travels to the Museo Amparo, Puebla, and concludes at the Museo de las Artes at the University of Guadalajara, Jalisco. The retrospective features more than forty works and is accompanied by an exhibition catalogue.

Galán attends each opening to personally thank the organizers and friends who come to support him. The

day after the opening in Oaxaca, they gather at Francisco Toledo's home for an unforgettable evening, where Galán and Toledo praise each other, saying, "You are the most important living artist in Mexico." Galán always regards Toledo as a timeless master.

Galán's father dies in August 2002.

In 2003, Galán presents *Es Media Noche* (It's Midnight) his final solo exhibition at Galería Arte Actual Mexicano, Monterrey. He does not attend the opening reception.



Francisco Toledo and Galán at Toledo's house in Oaxaca, 2002

2004-05

Galán participates in the group exhibition *Eco - Arte contemporáneo mexicano* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, curated by Osvaldo Sánchez and Kevin Power.

In the years leading up to his death, friends and acquaintances describe him as increasingly shy, anxious, and reclusive. He avoids phone calls, gains significant weight, and sleeps excessively. In his final year, he is believed to have stopped painting due to ongoing melancholy and depression.



Luminosa, 2004, oil and collage on canvas, 74 13/16 x 51 3/16 in. (190 x 130 cm)

2006

Galán has a deep fear of airplanes, as the fortune tellers he consults often predict he will die on a flight. In a tragic twist of fate, he dies on August 4 at the age of 47 from what is believed to be either a brain aneurysm or hemorrhage while traveling from Zacatecas to Monterrey.

Local newspapers in Monterrey and Saltillo, Mexico, along with an obituary written by Roberta Smith in the *New York Times*, report news of his passing—an untimely death that remains surrounded by mystery.

2007

In the year following Galán's death, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey presents *Julio Galán. Pensando en ti*, a major retrospective of approximately 130 works dating from the late 1970s to 2004, curated by Guillermo Sepúlveda. The exhibition includes his ceramic sculptures, as well as a sixteen-minute video compiled by Sepúlveda from Galán's short films—recordings that range from performative scenes staged in his home to outdoor footage captured between the early 1990s and his death in 2006.

The exhibition travels to Museo Amparo, Puebla, and the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City. It is accompanied by an extensive catalogue featuring texts by Sepúlveda, Carlos Monsiváis,

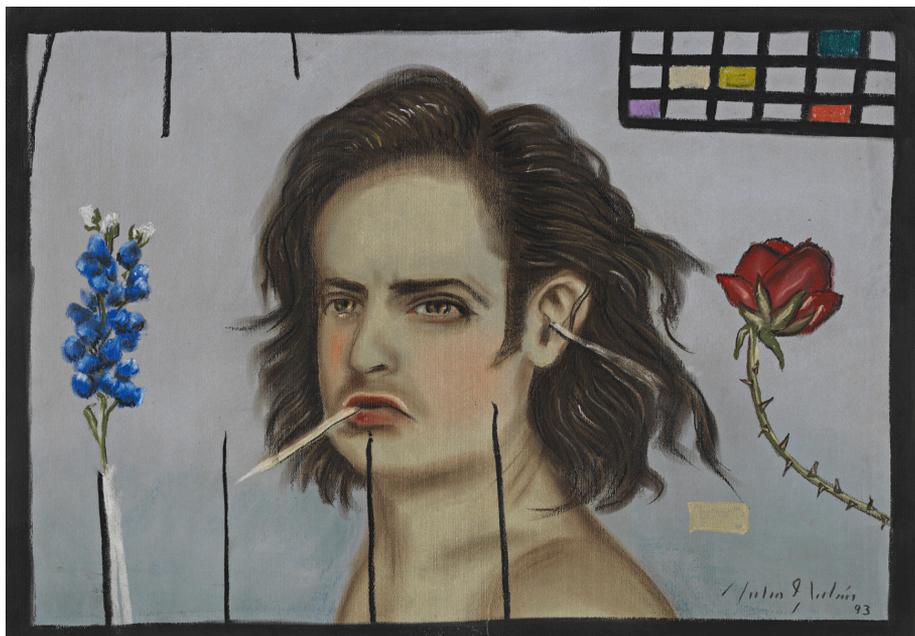
Francesco Pellizzi, and an interview with Silvia Cherem.

2022–23

The Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, in collaboration with Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, hold Galán's retrospective, *Julio Galán: A Rabbit Cut in Half*, curated by Magalí Arriola. The exhibition marks the first time a museum revisits his pictorial practice since 2007, focusing on archival material as well as his less explored relationship with photography, film, and performance. An exhibition catalogue is published with essays by Arriola, Pablo Soler Frost, and scholar Teresa Eckmann, author of the monograph *Julio Galán: The Art of Performative Transgression* (2024).



Cover of Teresa Eckmann, *Julio Galán: The Art of Performative Transgression*, 2024



Untitled, 1993, watercolor and pastel on paper, 21 × 28 1/2 in. (53.3 × 72.4 cm)

2025

kurimanzutto and Lühring Augustine open a major two-part exhibition of works by Galán, marking his first significant solo presentation in New York in more than two decades. The show is held simultaneously at both galleries' Chelsea locations.

Endnotes

This timeline is largely based on the research conducted by Teresa Eckmann published in *Julio Galán: The Art of Performative Transgression* (2024).

[1] Galán, quoted in “Julio Galán in the enchantment of his universe,” *Julio Galán* (Mexico City: Grupo Financiero Serfin, 1993), 326.

[2] Galán, quoted in “The Secrets of Pain: Interview with Julio Galán,” *Pensando en ti* (Monterrey: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, 2007), 343.

[3] Galán, quoted in Teresa Eckmann, *Julio Galán: The Art of Performative Transgression* (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2024), 18.

[4] Galán, “The Secrets of Pain: Interview with Julio Galán,” 343.

[5] Galán, “The Secrets of Pain: Interview with Julio Galán,” 344.

[6] Graciela Iturbide, interview with Teresa Eckmann, September 9, 2016, published in *Julio Galán: The Art of Performative Transgression* (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2024), 61.

[7] Galán, “The Secrets of Pain: Interview with Julio Galán,” 345.

[8] Galán, “The Secrets of Pain: Interview with Julio Galán,” 346.

[9] Guillermo Sepúlveda, “Julio Galán, Forever in My Memory. A Collection of Stories,” *Pensando en ti* (Monterrey: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, 2007), 335.

Cover: Portrait of Julio Galán by Graciela Iturbide, 1993

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