

kurimanzutto

an unlikely inventory: dialogues with surrealism

november 27, 2024 – april 5, 2025

kurimanzutto | viewing room

manuel álvarez bravo
carlos amorales
felipe baeza
iñaki bonillas
miguel calderón
jimmie durham
julio galán
roberto gil de montes
kati horna
gabriel kuri
dr. lakra
sarah lucas
wolfgang paalen
bárbara sánchez-kane







An Unlikely Inventory: Dialogues with Surrealism

French poet André Breton first wrote about Surrealism in 1924, conceiving it as an artistic and political movement where artists, inspired by Freudian psychoanalytic theories, sought to release the imaginative capacity of the unconscious. By rejecting rational perceptions of the world through art and literature, artists embraced unlikely realities often reserved for dreams. By the time Breton visited Mexico in 1938, he recognized that the movement transcended European borders, controversially declaring Mexico “the utmost surrealist place par excellence [...] Never before have I felt how reality so splendidly fulfills the promises of dreams.” Despite this oversimplification and often misrepresentation of art from Mexico as inherently surreal, the reverberations of the movement continue to influence the art produced today.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, kurimanzutto mines the gallery’s inventory to locate a selection of works created over the past three decades that either draw directly from Surrealist practices or echo its legacy. These artists are positioned alongside historical precursors, including Manuel Álvarez Bravo and Wolfgang Paalen, two artists who participated in the 1940 *International Surrealism Exhibition* at Galería de Arte Mexicano, the first exhibition devoted to Surrealism in Mexico. Whether the artists featured in this *unlikely inventory* embrace, reject, or remain indifferent to the movement, the works on view evoke themes and techniques championed by Surrealists, inviting viewers to consider the enduring impact of Surrealism in Mexico and beyond.

Un inventario insólito: Diálogos con el surrealismo

El poeta francés André Breton escribió por primera vez sobre el surrealismo en 1924, definiéndolo como un movimiento artístico y político en el que artistas, inspirados por las teorías psicoanalíticas de Freud, buscaban liberar la capacidad creativa del inconsciente. A través del arte y la literatura, los surrealistas rechazaban las percepciones racionales del mundo para abrazar realidades insólitas, generalmente basadas en los sueños. Durante su visita a México en 1939, Breton reconoció que el movimiento trascendía las fronteras europeas y, de manera polémica, declaró que México era "el lugar surrealista por excelencia [...] Nunca antes se sentía cómo la realidad cumple tan espléndidamente las promesas de los sueños." Aunque esta afirmación simplificaba la complejidad del arte en México y fomentaba una visión errónea de su relación con el surrealismo, el movimiento sigue reserberando en el arte que se produce hoy en día.

En el marco del centenario del primer *Manifiesto Surrealista*, el museo y la revista el inventario de la galería para presentar una selección de obras creadas en las últimas tres décadas que se inspiran directamente en las prácticas surrealistas o evocan su legado. Estas piezas dialogan con los trabajos de precursores históricos como Manuel Álvarez Bravo y Wolfgang Paalen, quienes participaron en la *Exposición Internacional de Surrealismo* de 1940 en la Galería de Arte Mexicano, la primera muestra dedicada al movimiento en el país. Ya sea que los artistas contemporáneos reunidos en este *inventario insólito* adopten, cuestionen o permitan indiferentes al surrealismo, las obras expuestas reflejan temas y técnicas vinculados a sus principios, invitando al público a reflexionar sobre el impacto perdurable de este movimiento en México y más allá.







Manuel Álvarez Bravo (1902–2002, Mexico City)

La buena fama durmiendo [The Good Reputation, Sleeping], 1938

Gelatin silver print

27.9 x 35.6 cm (11 x 14 in.)

One of Álvarez Bravo's most iconic photographs captures a model reclining with her eyes closed on the rooftop of the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. Gauze wraps around her feet, thighs, and wrists, leaving her pubic hair exposed. Nearby, spiky cacti create a tense atmosphere; their sharp edges both guard and threaten her exposed skin. Despite this potential danger, she remains peacefully at rest, reflecting the proverb-inspired title: "Earn a good reputation, then rest on your laurels."

André Breton commissioned this photograph for the catalogue cover of the 1940 *International Surrealism Exhibition* in Mexico, but it was ultimately censored for being too explicit. Though Álvarez Bravo contributed four additional photographs to the exhibition, he maintained a nuanced position regarding Surrealism and distanced himself from any formal association with the movement. He grounded his overall practice in reality, sustained by an interest in documenting the visual poetry found within the ordinary.







Sarah Lucas (1962, London)
Untitled from the *Tit Teddy* series, 2012

Natural cotton, lycra stockings
87 x 51 x 9 cm (34 1/4 x 20 1/8 x 3 1/2 in.)

Lucas's *Tit Teddy* series eroticizes the tenderness of a teddy bear, transforming it into an ambiguous form with sagging breasts. This fragile object, crafted from sheer tights and stuffed with cotton, is meant to be lived with, whether cuddled or lounging on a couch or bed. This piece and Lucas's broader series of works made of cotton and tights engage with the legacy of Surrealism and Freudian psychoanalytic theories. The bulbous forms echo the fetishized, dismembered dolls that populate Surrealist imagery, such as the *Die Puppe* (The Doll, 1934–1938) photographs by German artist Hans Bellmer (1902–1975). The violence imposed on Bellmer's dolls makes the sexual fantasies of the male unconscious disturbingly tangible. In contrast, Lucas's *Tit Teddy*, as a source of physical comfort and companionship within a domestic setting, can be read as a feminist reclaiming of the objectified female body so prevalent in early 20th-century Surrealist art.







Handwritten text on a piece of paper, likely a letter or a note, written in cursive script. The text is dense and covers most of the page. The paper is aged and slightly yellowed. The handwriting is in dark ink and is difficult to read due to its cursive nature and the angle of the paper. The text appears to be a personal communication, possibly a letter or a note, written in the late 18th or early 19th century. The paper is placed on a white surface next to the red object.

An Open Letter to the Public to Whom it may Concern

I intended to tie this piece to a hammer and a sickle and call it a 'Red Herring', which means a non-sequitur. But I could not find a sickle in New York City, and ~~anyway~~ anyway it does not look very much like a herring. (Gabriel, a herring is a kind of fish.)

No, anyway, there is a problem with the concept of representation. Suppose I wanted to make a real-looking fish: if I made it of wood or stone or canvas and paint it could not look real because fish are not made of those things. To truly represent a fish I would have to use living fish flesh. But I could not sign my name to it because realistic-looking fish do not have people's names on them.

Well, anyway, the truth is, if you have a nice glass fish-eye you must do something with it, mustn't you? So then I was walking in the woods and saw this piece of wood which did not remind me of a fish, and it had dog feces on it. But because I did not 'make' it I could not sign it, so who would buy it? I thought if I wrote a letter of introduction I could sign that, at least.

Jimmie Durham

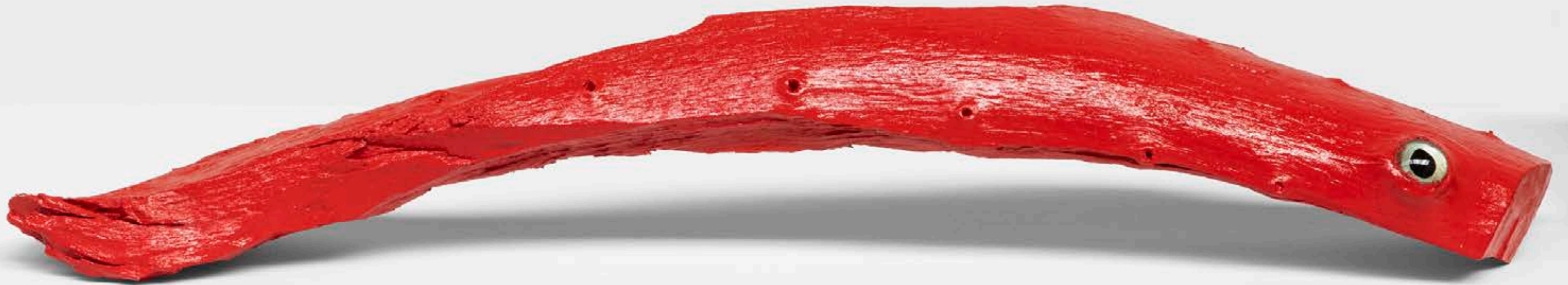
Jimmie Durham (1940, Houston, Texas-2021, Berlin)

Red Herring, 1992

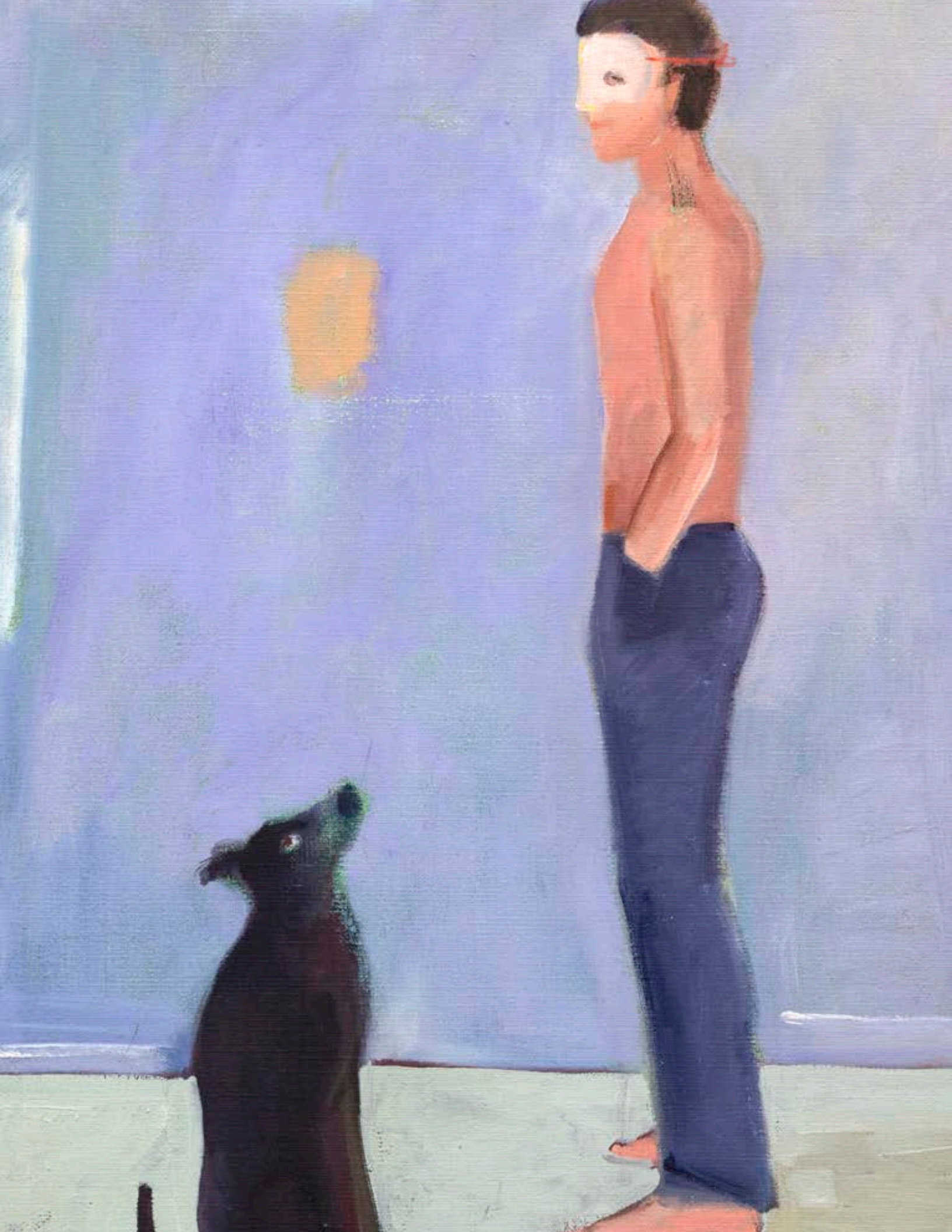
Wood, paint, glass eye, and paper

68.6 x 43.2 x 12.7 cm (27 x 17 x 5 in.)

Drawing on strategies associated with Surrealism—such as assemblage, chance, and humor—Durham employs found materials that carry their own histories and associations. This piece combines a piece of wood from his walks in the woods, a glass fish-eye, and a letter in which he muses on the absurdity of representation. In a Surrealist vein, he confronts the viewer with a paradox: presenting a "real" fish would require living flesh, but that level of realism would be undone by the inclusion of the artist's signature. Much like the painting *The Treachery of Images* (1929) by Belgian artist René Magritte (1898-1967), which famously depicts a pipe next to the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe), Durham's work employs language to destabilize the familiar, turning common objects into carriers of ambiguity and estrangement. This Surrealist technique renders the perceived world as eerily foreign to introduce a new perspective.







Roberto Gil de Montes (1950, Guadalajara, Mexico)

Theatre, 2013

Oil on canvas

80 x 80 x 2 cm (31 1/2 x 31 1/2 x 13/16 in.)

The emotional distance palpable in the composition conveys the dual motifs of life and death, love and heartache. Gil de Montes's work is often associated with Surrealism because of its dreamlike imagery and references to death. Initially hesitant to embrace the label, he now acknowledges the surreal in his art: "With Surrealism, you can have a heart floating in space; you can do things that don't make sense." He connects the emotional narrative and the symbolism of skulls and masks in *Theatre* to both Surrealism and Chicano ex-voto paintings—Mexican devotional artworks adapted by Mexican-Americans as expressions of cultural and religious identity—which Gil de Montes regards as surreal in their own right.



Francis Bacon
Two Figures
1969



Francis Bacon
Bed
1969



Francis Bacon
Red Shoes
1969





Kati Horna (1912, Budapest, Hungary–2000, Mexico City)
Oda a la Necrofilia [Ode to Necrophilia], 1962

Gelatin silver print
39.4 x 34.3 x 2.5 cm (15 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 in.)

Horna's photograph depicts a woman—her close friend and Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington (1917–2011)—shrouded in a black veil and bent over an unmade bed, her hand clutching her head in a gesture of despair. Beside her lie a white mask and a lit candle, conjuring a sense of ritualistic mourning and the palpable presence of another. Although she never considered herself part of the Surrealist movement, the rich symbolism and themes of death in some of her photographs contribute to her association with Surrealist photography.

This photograph first appeared in the experimental magazine *S. Nob*, which aimed “to open the doors of the unusual” for its readers. Horna contributed three photographic series to the “Fetiches” section, including this one, where she examines themes of erotic attraction intertwined with death. “Fetiches” provided a distinct space to reclaim and reimagine the female body beyond the Surrealist fetish that often objectified or idealized women.





Bárbara Sánchez-Kane (1987, Mérida, Mexico)
Zapatos Silla Monoblock [Monoblock Chair Shoes], 2022

Vinyl leather fabric and bronze
28 x 8.5 x 13 cm (11 1/3 x 3 3/8 x 5 15/16 in.)



Sánchez-Kane merges high and low, mobile and sedentary, in a work featuring synthetic leather red shoes sitting in bronze chairs. The sculpture embraces the Surrealist interest in unexpected juxtapositions, seen in the work of Swiss artist Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985). Oppenheim is known—like Sánchez-Kane—for her assemblages of everyday objects that often evoke eroticism. For instance, Oppenheim's *My Nurse* (1936) comprises a pair of white, high-heeled shoes, sole-side up and tied together, presented on a silver platter.

Moving beyond the *readymade*—a mass-produced object as art, as coined by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968)—Sánchez-Kane's sculpture blurs the line between visual art and fashion. First worn by a model in her 2022 performance *Sanchezkaneismo* at kurimanzutto in Mexico City, the heels reference the ubiquitous Coca-Cola red plastic chairs the audience sat in during the performance, which are commonly found in street-side shops across the city. Addressing the role fashion plays in shaping identity, Sánchez-Kane deconstructs and rebuilds everyday objects, imbuing them with new meanings.







Iñaki Bonillas (1981, Mexico City)

Fork, 2024

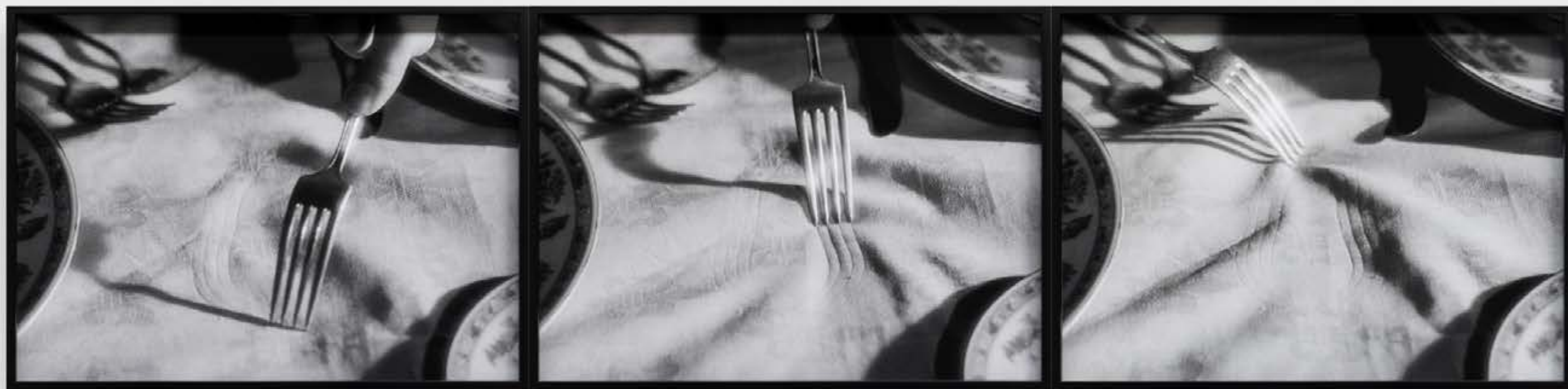
Inkjet print on cotton paper

Print: 32 x 44 cm (12 5/8 x 17 5/16 in.) each

Frame: 33.6 x 45.6 cm (13 1/4 x 18 in.) each

Overall: 33.6 x 136.8 cm (13 1/4 x 54 in.)

Bonillas's practice often focuses on isolating small, seemingly inconsequential gestures and reframing them to shed light on larger, implicit narratives. By selecting a pivotal yet understated moment in Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945)—a film featuring a dream sequence conceived and designed by Salvador Dalí (1904–1989)—Bonillas captures cinema's ability to invite viewers into hidden psychological landscapes. The sequence in *Fork* stems from the moment where Gregory Peck's character, unknowingly gripped by hidden traumas, sees his colleague using a fork to trace an oblong shape on a tablecloth, unlocking some of his suppressed memories. Bonillas invites us to view the mundane as a portal to concealed emotions and histories, echoing the Surrealist fascination with the unconscious. Sigmund Freud's work in this regard was foundational to André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, providing a psychoanalytical framework for interpreting the mysterious undercurrents of the human mind.







Wolfgang Paalen (1905, Vienna, Austria–1959, Taxco, Mexico)
Sin título (Composición cromática) [Untitled (Chromatic
Composition)], 1947

Gouache on amate paper mounted on wood
47 x 26.5 cm (18 1/2 x 10 3/8 in.)

Active within Parisian avant-garde circles, Paalen joined André Breton's Surrealist movement in the 1930s. In 1939, he sought refuge from World War II and traveled through North America before settling in Mexico, where he immersed himself in the country's cultural and artistic traditions and founded the influential art journal *DYN* (1942–1944).

In *Sin título (Composición cromática)*—dedicated to his friend Florence Arquin, an American artist, anthropologist, and archeologist—abstract shapes shift between the mystical and scientific, reflecting Paalen's fascination with ancient cosmologies and modern physics. The work is one of several he made during the 1940s composed of amate paper, a material historically tied to pre-Hispanic codices. The bark-based paper, with its irregular textures and fibrous patterns, is mounted on a smoothly sanded, oval piece of wood, providing an evocative surface for his Surrealist explorations. Its visible veins and fibers inspired suggestive, automatic forms that guided the composition, revealing his commitment to bridging ancient traditions and modern art.







Bárbara Sánchez-Kane (1987, Mérida, Mexico)

Solrac Bárbara Zodiaco - Madera [Solrac Bárbara Zodiac - Wood], 2019

Wood and stainless steel

135 x 67 x 13 cm (53 1/8 x 26 3/8 x 5 1/8 in.)

Sánchez-Kane repurposes wooden handles from kitchen knives to create the segmented, eight-legged body of a scorpion, using two cleaver blades as pincers. This mounted sculpture echoes ideas explored by Surrealists in the early 20th century, particularly their rejection of categorical, fixed identities and fascination with mimicry in nature, such as insects camouflaging themselves within their surroundings. In this piece, Sánchez-Kane arranges the inanimate knives to mimic a scorpion in order to redirect their function toward new meanings. *Solrac Bárbara Zodiaco* can also be seen as a self-portrait. The scorpion represents the artist's zodiac sign, while the inclusion of her first name, "Bárbara," alongside "Solrac," her father's first name spelled backward, highlights the duality of her gender and sexual identity. Sánchez-Kane describes Solrac as her alter ego, a pseudonym and signature found in many of her paintings and one of the identities through which she performs her creative practice.









Gabriel Kuri (1970, Mexico City)

Left of center and right of center alternatives, top to bottom and bottom to top, 2014

Volcanic rock, metallic bin, spray painted acrylic, mixed media and wood, painted fiberglass and resin, concrete
100 x 187 x 50 cm (39 3/8 x 73 5/8 x 19 11/16 in.) aprox. installed

This sculpture combines contrasting elements, including volcanic rocks, a metallic bin, giant matchsticks, and an enlarged black bean. The assemblage recalls Surrealism's fascination with unusual object pairings that reveal hidden meanings. Rather than offering concrete answers, this work poses a question: can we glimpse something beyond the rational in the interaction of different forms?

For Kuri, Surrealism is "the equation of that which cannot be equated"; its appeal lies in "the power of transformation latent in all familiar things and situations when observed from an unconventional angle." His sculptural practice focuses on how to think and organize knowledge through formal relationships between disparate objects. While the work suggests an oblique message or system—a major theme in the artist's practice—these elements remain associative rather than explicit. He allows a poetic transformation to emerge from their union, urging us to see ordinary objects as repositories of latent possibility that encourage new ways of understanding the world's layered reality.





Miguel Calderón (1971, Mexico City)

Caída libre 1 [Freefall 1], 2017

Inkjet print

Paper Size: 84 x 117 cm (33 7/8 x 46 1/16 in.)

Calderón's work draws from the legacy of Surrealist photography, where the boundaries between past and present intentionally blur. The bodily imprint of denim pants and a ruffled shirt on the hood of a dust-covered black Dodge car creates a ghostly effect that echoes the Surrealist notion of the uncanny—something that unsettles the familiar. Surrealists were fascinated with both ghosts and photographs as forms of the uncanny that symbolize traces of what no longer exists.

Calderón's practice recalls that of Parisian photographer Eugène Atget (1857–1927), who inspired Surrealists like André Breton and is recognized as a forerunner of Surrealist photography. Similar to Calderón's images of Mexico, Atget's photographs document ordinary sights on the streets of Paris, often capturing deserted urban spaces with a dreamlike quality. *Caída libre 1* taps into the uncanny and mysterious aspects of everyday life in Mexico, inviting viewers to see the work as both realistic documentation and a source of imaginative reflection.







Manuel Álvarez Bravo (1902–2002, Mexico City)
La buena fama durmiendo 2 & 3 [The Good Reputation, Sleeping 2 & 3], 1938

Gelatin silver prints
20.3 x 25.4 cm (8 x 10 in.) each



The session that produced *La buena fama durmiendo* resulted in additional, lesser-known versions, each offering variations on the model's pose. In one, her chest is modestly covered by gauze, her posture slightly more provocative, and her gaze meets the viewer. In another, Álvarez Bravo experimented with double exposure, overlaying her figure in two poses on a single negative. This layering of images transforms the model's body into an ethereal, doubled presence—an effect that suggests the Surrealist practice of merging dreams with waking life.

The alternative compositions, now preserved in the Archivo Manuel Álvarez Bravo in Mexico City, reflect the photographer's evolving vision during this session. These photographs were created with a sense of spontaneity that can be seen as aligned with the Surrealist emphasis on automatism—a technique that allows intuition to guide the creative process—which is why they are frequently cited as his only self-proclaimed “surrealist” works. Each photograph captures a different angle as the image moves beyond eroticism and enters a space of contemplation, where beauty coexists with threat.











Dr. Lakra (1972, Mexico City)

Sin título (Abuela insecto) [Untitled (Insect Grandma)], 2006

Sin título (Mujer lobo) [Untitled (She-wolf)], 2006

Dried insects on photo-relief portrait on wood

39 x 23 x 4 cm (15 3/8 x 9 1/16 x 1 9/16 in.)

Dr. Lakra employs the technique of assemblage by combining parts of dried insects to create portraits of characters from another world. In these pieces, the formal attire of the figures and the wooden oval frame surrounding them lend a halo of distinction similar to that of traditional portraiture. What stands out in these compositions is the hybridization of human and animal forms. Surrealists such as German artist Max Ernst (1891-1976), from whom Dr. Lakra draws significant influence, commonly depicted hybrid forms in their work as a means to break down boundaries between reality and dreams, the rational and irrational, and different states of being. Insects particularly fascinated members of the Surrealist movement due to their ability to symbolize metamorphosis and mimesis, reflecting transformations in human identity and experience.





Small text label on the right wall, likely providing information about the artwork.



Julio Galán (1958, Muzquiz, Coahuila–2006, Zacatecas, Mexico)
Sin título (autorretrato doble) [Untitled (Double Portrait)], 1991

Watercolor on cotton paper

Frame Size: 69 x 88.5 x 3 cm (27 3/16 x 34 13/16 x 1 3/16 in.)

Although Galán never considered himself a Surrealist, he acknowledged that his work aligned “a bit in the route of Surrealism.” He shared with the movement the impulse to liberate the self through the creative act and to make the surfaces of his art a space where images flow without the mediation of reason. In this work, Galán employs the concept of the double, a common motif in the work of Surrealists. Derived from psychoanalytic theories, the double serves as a representation of the unconscious—the dimension of the self that remains hidden or repressed. Galán portrays himself through two figures that embody the dichotomy between the conscious self, which stares at the viewer, and the unconscious self, which remains with his eyes closed, perhaps in a dreamstate. The fragmented chains between them symbolize that one self cannot exist without the other.







Felipe Baeza (1987, Guanajuato, Mexico)
Acoge al fantasma [Embrace the Ghost], 2024

Hard ground etching and photogravure, woodcut with chine collé and collage
22.2 x 22.2 cm (8 3/4 x 8 3/4 in.)

Baeza's work crafts a visual language that bridges human and non-human forms to capture their untamed potential. Drawing from a vast visual archive that includes Mesoamerican imagery, Catholic art, botanical studies, and anatomical references, he envisions mythical, abstract worlds where bodies dissolve, reconfigure, and defy normative boundaries. Collage serves as a medium for transformation, evoking the Surrealists' pursuit of breaking down conventional distinctions to challenge the viewer's need for familiar categories. Baeza deepens this lineage by addressing themes of queerness, migration, and visibility politics in his compositions.

The figure within this work, reminiscent of flames and foliage, embodies resilience, symbolizing those who resist social norms. Having emigrated from Mexico to the United States, Baeza connects these personal experiences to the notion of landscapes in his work. He notes, "I rarely include landscapes or settings in my work because sometimes the body is the only landscape that some of us have." By presenting bodies as living landscapes of possibility, his work invites a reimagining of existence that celebrates ambiguity and the vitality of the unruly.





ART GALLERY



Carlos Amorales (1970, Mexico City)
Skeleton Images, 2011

Silver and gelatin on cotton paper
50 x 40 cm (19 11/16 x 15 3/4 in.) each

In *Skeleton Images*, Amorales reconfigures shapes from his *Liquid Archive*, a vast digital atlas of silhouettes developed since 1998, layering and overlapping them to create mysterious hybrid figures. Part-bird and part-human, these shadows mirror Surrealists' interest in subconscious imagery. This language opens an interpretive space for the viewer and unsettles conventional associations.

In 2008, Amorales traveled to Europe to see the work of German-French artist Hans Arp (1866–1966), an encounter that profoundly influenced his practice. Closely associated with both Surrealism and Dadaism—an avant-garde movement that emerged during World War I as a response to the perceived senselessness of war and societal values—Arp's work rejected traditional aesthetics in favor of spontaneity. Amorales was particularly struck by Arp's *découpages*—a series of artworks created by tearing or cutting paper into irregular, organic shapes, which he would then arrange on a surface, often letting them fall randomly and embracing the element of chance as part of the composition process. In this work, Amorales adopts some of these Dada and Surrealist techniques within a digital context, encouraging interpretations that remain fluid, unresolved, and suggestive.





kurimanzutto

gob. rafael rebollar 94
mexico city
tel. +52 55 52 56 24 08
info@kurimanzutto.com

516 w 20th street
new york
tel. +1 212 933 4470
newyork@kurimanzutto.com

@kurimanzutto
#kurimanzutto
#kurimanzuttony
#kurimanzuttolibros
www.kurimanzutto.com