

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Hybrid Objects for a Binary World

In ektor garcia's exhibition in Mexico City, sculptural assemblages that evoke altars, everyday tools, and sex toys blur conventional distinctions between types of artifacts.

Devon Van Houten Maldonado December 6, 2016



ektor garcia, installation view of *kriizé* at kurimanzutto, Mexico City (all photos by Abigail Enzaldo, courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2016)

MEXICO CITY — Up a flight of stairs and tucked into an inconspicuous corner of kurimanzutto's compound, there's an affectionate

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shrine to sadism, masochism, and contradiction. An installation without a beginning or end, ektor garcia's *kriziz* (intentionally lowercased as an assertion of queerness) is full of contradictions analogous to 17th century curiosity cabinets, with their wild mash-ups of natural and handmade objects. The exhibition's misspelled title alludes to a struggle with complex identity as intimate and purposeful but not evil, an expression of being disjointed with roots in multiple places. An orgy saturated with details of hybrid craft, diverse ways of making, plural cultures, and fluid sexes unfolds across the small gallery.

There is almost nothing on the walls, no pedestals, no vinyl, and no labels. The majority of the work is presented on the floor, stacked up or collaged according to unclear rubrics and ambiguous compositions that take the loose form of altars, everyday tools, and sex toys. This amalgamation creates the sensation that you're stepping into the artist's studio. But the work also looks like it could belong in a satanic theater



ektor garcia, installation view of *kriziz* at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2016

production, an S&M dungeon, or a Mexican “mercado de artesanías” (craft market).

Cock rings, dog masks, steel hooks, leather, and brass make up the installation's ethereal cast and palette, with ceramic acting as a middleman, a medium for the artist's hand to make its presence felt. It's important that the work doesn't make up a finished series, curator Chris Sharp explained during a walkthrough of the show; the sculptures and shrines are necessarily unfinished, encompassed by “the forever project,” i.e. artists' ongoing work

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as experimenters and category destroyers. The individual objects reveal an obsessive-compulsive maker who welds steel, manipulates clay, and binds leather as an expression of plural identities and queerness in a binary world. In *kriziz*, traditional Mexican crafts take their place alongside or even within unnerving contraptions with mysterious applications — apparently for both pain and pleasure.



ektor garcia, installation view of *kriziz* at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2016

The ultimate question posed by garcia is one about belonging and what it means to belong to multiple places, cultures, races, etc. His upheaval is funny and self-consciously melodramatic, with wry humor and tenderness just below the surface of dissonant darkness. The romance with his culture of origin is corrupted by Mexico's

traditionalism and homophobia, a present-day reality contradicted by Mesoamerican mystical practices characterized by gender fluidity or plurality. The installation throws the colonial cliché of the sensual, hyper-sexual “native” in viewers’ faces, exposing and materializing a cultural double standard as if by magic.



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Knitting and weaving bring *kriziz* back into the home, with vaginal and phallic forms alluding to conception within the womb, while garcia incorporates human

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and animal forms — what might be a voodoo doll, crocheted testicles, anuses, and animal skins — into his “combines,” to borrow Robert Rauschenberg’s term for his 3D compositions. Several found objects are also included in the fray, but garcia blurs the border between found and made through blended materials and modification. A small wooden and steel cart with wheels references traditional shoe shiners who hock their services in the streets of Mexican cities; a worn and haggard cage serves as a vitrine for a serpentine sculpture evocative of Mesoamerican antiquities; and a splintered wooden plinth displays an eerie but sweet ceramic “*la Santa Muerte*” (Holy Death) figure, lovingly deposited within a brass and glass container. A symphony of metaphysical and material references bounce around and collapse in on each other, striking a minor chord that reverberates around the space.

Perhaps the most surprising elements of the show are the inclusion of ceramics and the artist’s ability to mix them with so many other materials that are both literally and conceptually hard. This is particularly

surprising considering the prevalent purism in ceramics (with notable exceptions like Jessica Jackson Hutchins, who mixes ceramics with soft furniture and other domestic objects). The use of ceramics in *kriziz* is especially surprising because the material, with all of its history and baggage, successfully fulfills a very specific function: resolving some outstanding dissonance between the other materials and craft objects by suggesting flexibility and metamorphosis. In a material and metaphorical sense, the installation is impossible to negotiate from any moral high ground of universal reason or common sense. In this cabinet of curious hybrids, garcia has laid waste to preconceived notions about reality, identity, and culture.



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