

Fernando Gallo's *Process A9*

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"Artifice of absence perhaps, lacking better art in life. Hermeneutics, too. As a virtue, I think art is not a complacent view of canonized spirits, but in principle an uncertain itinerary, and, despite that, a transferring and transitory act."

Fernando Gallo

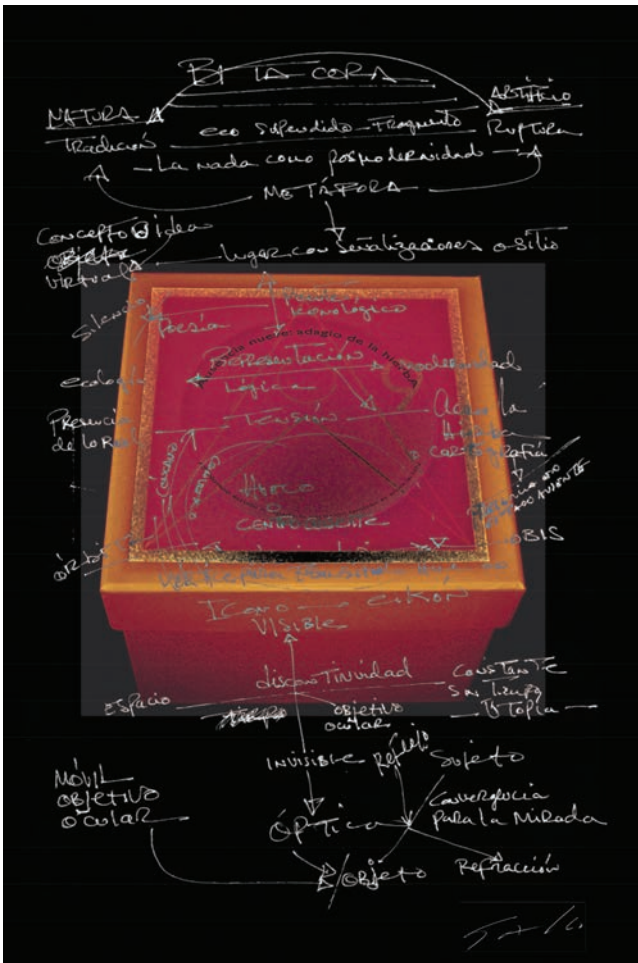


Absence One: Art of Grass. Vicarial Intervention. First shield or sword: patience. Room or Receptacle for Hiding. Bacocho Beach, Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, Mexico. December 2002.

Admired by certain specific groups of art professionals, Fernando Gallo works almost as a clandestine artist. Like Marcel Duchamp, his career is built more based on the presence of his absence than on constant affirmation in artistic milieus and the show-business crowd. His position implies both a definition and a function as an artist different from those that identify the vast majority.

I am understating it: his position is radically different from that of others in vogue. Not only does it propose a defense of the concept of the artist in its purest, most elevated state, but it counters that of the “producer” linked to the occurrential-daily works that we *consume*

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Log. Altarpiece (detail), 1998-2011, different sizes (old wooden cupboard, electrograph, three ceramic bowls, nine jars with red tops, and typeset).



Diagram Process_A9, different sizes, 1998-2011.

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in our day, which is based on diluting the concepts of art and artist; or on the weakening of suppositions inherited from the Renaissance, like singularity, autonomy, creation, inspiration.

Fernando Gallo is one of the world's most disquieting conceptual artists today, not only in Mexico. He comes from the best theoretical strain, as shown by *Process A9*'s multiple references, the clarity of how this complex proposal is put forward. To look at it, it is a good idea to keep certain considerations in mind.

In contemporary art, very diverse positions co-exist in a field of dialogue. Regarding the conceptual, it seeks the creation of a work of art with a discourse and not only—or not necessarily—an object (painting, sculpture, engraving) as its starting point. It is not like in modern art, in which a painting, for example, speaks for itself. On the contrary, in the conceptual line, the discourse is the protagonist, the ideas found in

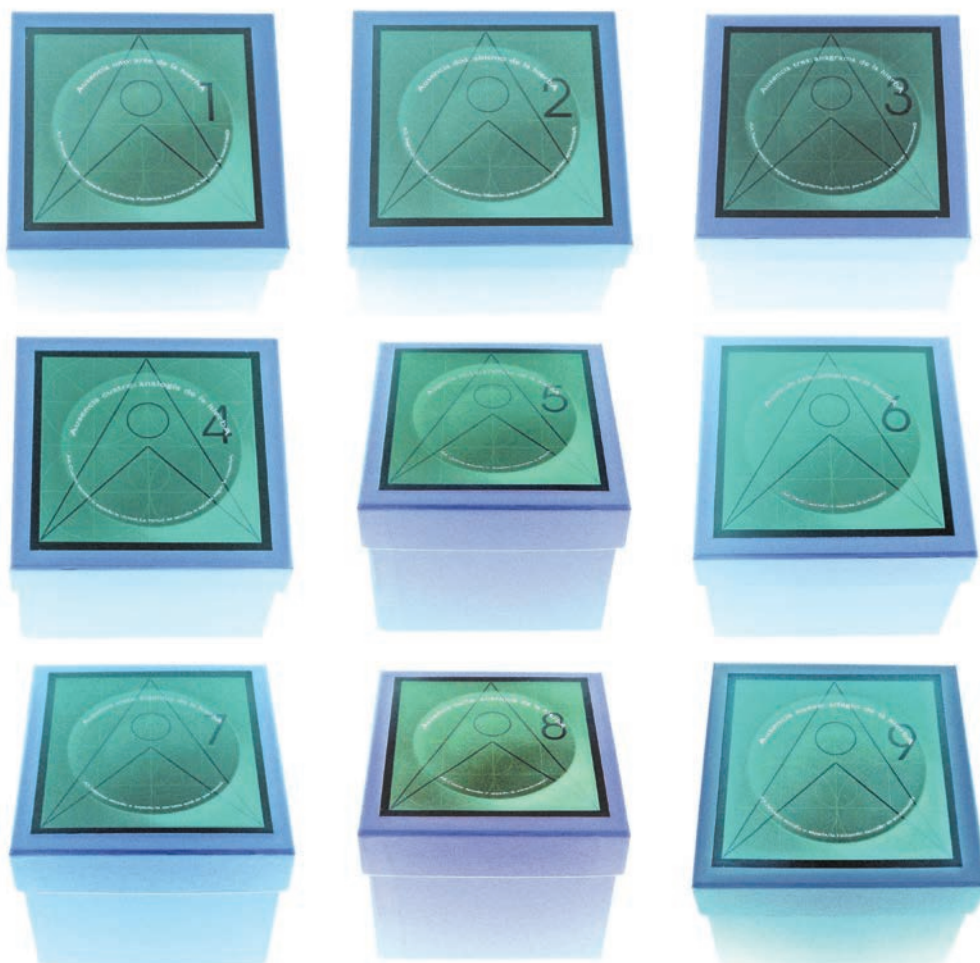
their “gaseous state,” as Yves Michaux says. The process of creation or investigation is often more important than the result, or than the work, which can even not exist or act in absentia. The work is the process, as happens to a great extent with *A9*. In addition, the design work can sustain the conceptual and formal proposition, thus vindicating *disegno* as art for generating ideas, and in the same way, profound distances and differences can be underlined about the art involved with the aesthetic and the beautiful, with visual art's expressiveness, with the content accessible to the majorities (in conceptual art they are often hermetic, polysemous, and polyvalent, as in this case), with immediate aesthetic pleasure, with emotionality.

Those of us who have seen *Process A9*—the author's shadow or the double of his absence, its creator would say—know that the artist has been able to avoid the dual trap Marcel Duchamp warned about in his silence: that of the

work of art and that of the artist's mask. A9 is a process oriented to reflecting about the crisis of the representation of Western culture, but it is important to point out that it is much more than an academic project: it is the road of an initiation in which a true artist is built and on which a true interlocutor can be built, not a "public" or a "viewer." As painter Ángel Orcajo comments in the explanation on the wall at the exhibition "A9 or How an Absence Is Haunting the West," open since September 14 at the Santo Domingo Cultural Center in Oaxaca,

Our author mentions in his *Manifiesto* the complete artists of the Renaissance. Some...work with gnoseological keys. We can follow the tracks of the *illuminati* or of other secret societies in the objects of their art...The initiation for this artist, who is halfway through his life and work, is the peak of the process, the key to his work.

A9 is a process of research and the production of texts, manifestos, poems, objects, sketches, designs, photographs, electrographs, paintings, videos, pieces in materials like cera-



Vicarial Receptacles of Process_A9, 1998-2011 (nine altered digital photographs).

PROCESS_A9, OR HOW AN ABSENCE HAUNTS THE WEST

A vicarial intervention in process, a possible itinerary based on absence. A process-work, situated between the virtual and the vicarial, launched publically *in situ* in the year 2000. A9 is made up of nine rooms, presences, or doubles of nine absences (ideal images of absent objects or vicarial interventions), occluded, placed in receptacles to be hidden in Argentina, Spain, and Mexico. proceso_A9.blogspot.com



Process_A9 Watch, different sizes, 2011
(altered digital photograph).



The Double of My Absence_One, (self-portrait),
different sizes, 2000 (altered digital photograph).



Grass Rack. Project of Rack, 2000 (ink and coffee on paper).

Those of us who have seen *Process A9* know that the artist has been able to avoid the dual trap Marcel Duchamp warned about in his silence: that of the work of art and that of the artist's mask. *A9* is a process oriented to reflecting about the crisis of the representation of Western culture.

mic, wood, stone, paper, glass, etc., that began in 1989, according to the premise “grass, maybe.” In that year, he made nine boxes related to grass —“Look for it,” wrote poet Eduardo Milán at the time, “like someone looking for an absent center” — that he intends to bury in Mexico, Argentina, and Spain, with a content we do not know and that determines the guiding absence of the process. Thus, the absence is present based on copies, replications, shadows, or sojourns that refer to it platonically.

What is presented at the Santo Domingo Cultural Center is the current state of *A9*, based on a large installation that also functions as an intervention, involving architectural and symbolic spaces and diverse viewers from Mexico, Argentina, Spain, Oaxaca, like Orcajo and Complutense University of Madrid scholar Rafael Alberto Pérez.



Living Room. Receptacle of Creation, Documentation, and Research for Process_A9, carried out between September 1998 and September 2011. Vicarial Intervention In Situ, various sizes (acrylic, cardboard, wood, and glass containers; cupboard; notebooks; ceramic bowls; electrographs on paper; mirrors; photocopies; Polaroid photographs; lamp; art books; the artist's books; light; 1960 model Olivetti lettera 22 typewriter; table; music by John Cage; the novel 1525, o la intuición dorada [1525, or the Golden Intuition] [work in progress]; pigments; chairs; and videos).

It is very surprising to see the artist's studio, his living room, and that that ambience would be the heart of a work that unfolds in beautiful images charged with sensations and meanings. It is also surprising to note the attractive simplicity of the mysterious boxes to be buried, so in tune with the design unifying the whole, in which the colors white, black, red, and yellow rule, denoting an alchemistic discourse, as María Antonieta Marbán so rightly notes. Spanish painter Orcajo again tells us,

Each box, self-contained, uniform, numbered, mysterious, luminous, imperative, symbolic, marks a path to follow, like in goose pens. It is a place that takes to another place. It is an itinerary, or, as

the author says, a labyrinth. A riddle? It is curious that he closes up the grass of paradise in his boxes, as his secret... That is, the grass from a field of silence that resounds among the calls of many atavistic voices brought to this same point by the thread of an old story, as old as time. (The clock completes the log.) They are the voices of other heroes who have convened this dream of knowledge so the rite of art can be completed.

Years ago, I had in my possession one of the cases that hold A9. Different from the boxes designed to hold and be buried, I remember their impeccable design and manufacture, and a kind of aura that surrounded not the object as such, very attractive though it was, or the reproductions, but the project and the ideas. It reminded me of Marcel Duchamp's fascinating portable museum that the French artist made various replicas of to show his works in different places. In its 40x30 centimeters, it contained a real treasure of knowledge: from a rigorous genealogical reflection on conceptual art, to many diverse horizons of knowledge that Fernando Gallo has also journeyed through.

Like Duchamp, Gallo works on projects that take him long periods of reflection, research, and realization. His tem-

A son of Saturn, Gallo knows the ambiguity of the effects of this planet: fearful and at the same time propitious for creation.



Archival Receptacle Process_A9, different sizes, 1998-2011 (altered digital photograph).

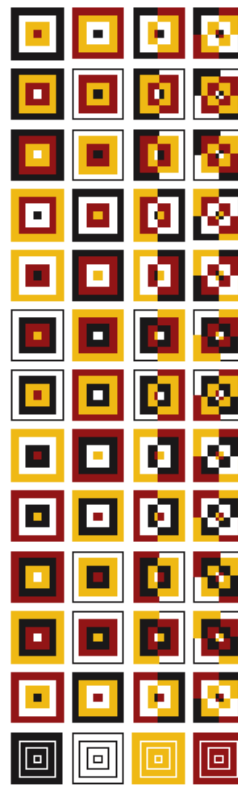
porality as an artist is to a great extent determined by qualities that require patience and maturation. In addition, his objects of study, which are at the same time a poetic motif, presuppose a real deepening of the knowledge based on transferring the Zapatista premise to art, by saying that “theory belongs to he/she who works it.”

In effect, as though he had proposed illuminating the intricate problems of this relationship, contributing not only about the *what*, but, above all, about the *way toward* establishing arboreal and rhizomatic connections, Gallo connects the thinking that comes from philosophical aesthetics with the artistic thinking distinguished from that heritage (the one that differentiates the aesthetic from the artistic, as Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez proposed), with contemporary French thought, with various theories of signification, with diverse poetics, with the discourse of several artists, among them,

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Pretext_Context_Post-text (detail), different sizes, 1998 (installation).

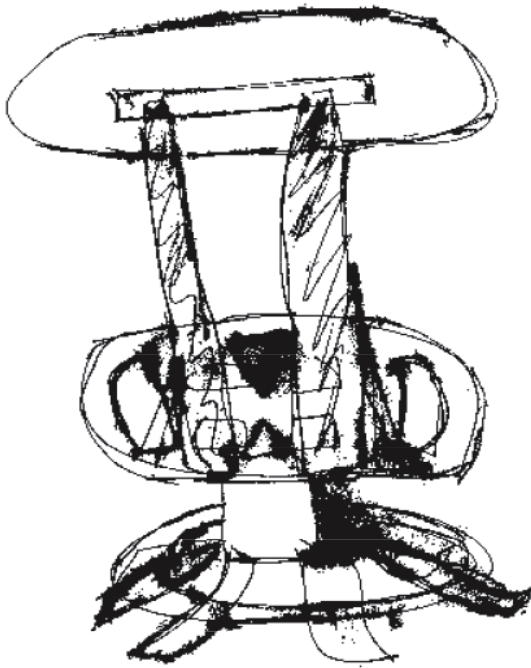


Labyrinthos Espolones Editores Codex, 390 x 30 cm, 240 grams, 2004
(electrography on opaline cardboard).

Duchamp, and with various fields of knowledge that require an initiation.

The map is as broad as it is precise and suggestive in its coordinates. He begins by recognizing his debt to the 1960s, when conceptual art began to be conceived, recognizing in its various tendencies the paternity of Duchamp, and which ends by melting into the artist’s original creation. Conceptual art that emerges from concepts. Above all, originality that originates in a man and truly original artist, who has easily dealt with the extremely difficult challenge of illustrating theories.

In knowing how to exist and be in silence, equilibrium, virtue, cadence, pause, intuition, certainty, knowledge, and initiation, the nine regimes that correspond to the nine presences of nine absent images that constitute the A9 process, Fernando Gallo has traced the initial route that resituates the Renaissance artist, as the exponents of romanticism did in their time; the mental artist imagined by Leonardo, capable of generating knowledge to the same degree as scientists.



Chair, 28 x 21.5 cm, 2000 (ink on paper).

A son of Saturn, Fernando Gallo knows about the ambiguity of the effects of the highest of the planets; fearful and at the same time propitious for creation. Armed with spurs, with shields and swords, with absences and theories, Gallo has journeyed through peaks and abysses, through cursed and ineffable forests, through indispensable blocks of sensations. He knows of the risks of working with the flammable material of art, but he also knows how to affirm lucidity, and with that, the possibility of being an independent artist today. He knows —let’s say it like this— how to journey through astrological corridors and build (“pact with Jupiter,” as the Renaissance men would say): give a transcendental dimension to artistic activity.

His work celebrates the aforementioned genealogy of the artist, who becomes modernist and then conceptual, in the most disquieting of his transformations (his resurrections). We know that that genealogy, of such noble legend, is in Fernando Gallo’s past, present, and future. It will also be in the art capable of emerging from his own absence, from his own shadow. **MM**



Fernando Gallo was born in Oaxaca, Mexico in 1959. He is visual artist, writer, editor, cultural empresario, designer, the founder and director since 2004 of Espolones Editores publishing house, and a founding member of the Iberoamerican Forum on Communications Strategies (FISEC), headquartered in

Madrid. He also founded and headed the cultural company Los Caprichos: imagen arte, headquartered in Mexico City from 1990 to 2003.

He has designed and coordinated art publications, including posters, catalogues, and books by renowned visual artists and poets like Martha Chapa, Eduardo Mitre, and Javier Barreiro. He has also given the courses Theory of Light and Color and The Hermeneutics of the Image, as well as workshops on electrography in Argentina, Spain, and Mexico.

Since 1984, he has participated in collective exhibitions in Argentina, Chile, Spain, the United States, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. In 1991, he created and coordinated the Memesis Project, the first folder of Ibero-American graphic art done in electrography.¹

His work has been chosen to show, among other events, in Mexico City’s Sixth Rufino Tamayo Biennial and the Fifth Diego Rivera Biennial (both in 1992) and at the University of Colorado’s Mexican Art: Images in the Age of Aids (1994). Some of his work has been included in permanent collections in Mexico (Oaxaca, Mexico City, Monterrey) and abroad (Argentina, Chile, Seville, and Cuenca, Spain). Since 2009, he has been living in the city of Oaxaca.²



Living Room. Receptacle of Creation, Documentation, and Research for Process_A9. Domina Chapel, Santo Domingo Cultural Center, Oaxaca, Mexico, from September 14 to November 13, 2011.

Notes

¹ Copy art, or electrography, an artistic genre within the discipline of engraving, began in the 1960s, and consists of producing series of or single graphic works using photocopies. [Editor’s Note.]

² For more information about Fernando Gallo, see <https://librodeartista.ning.com/profile/FernandoGallo>. [Editor’s Note.]