

# ¡Viva la Muerte!

## Art and Death in Latin America

17 October 2007 – 17 February 2008, halle 2

### **KUNSTHALLE wien**

Museumsplatz 1, 1070 Vienna, infoline +43-1-52189-33, [www.kunsthallewien.at](http://www.kunsthallewien.at)

Daily 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Thur 10 a.m. – 10 p.m.

**Press preview:** Tuesday, 16 October 2007, 10 a.m.

**Opening:** Tuesday, 16 October 2007, 7 p.m.

*Our cult of the dead is a cult of life, as all love thirsty for life longs for death.*  
Octavio Paz

¡Viva la Muerte! – the ecstatic festivities celebrating the “Día de los Muertos” in Mexico, the brutal killing rituals of the Colombian drug cartels, the cruelty of Latin American dictators, and the complex faults of Spanish colonial history raise the question whether people in Latin America have an attitude towards death different from that prevailing in the Northern hemisphere. Nobel Prize winning author Octavio Paz maintains that dying is suppressed in Europe and the USA, while Latin Americans take pleasure in familiarity with the horrible and have an inclination towards self-extinction: “North Americans seem to consider the world as something that can be perfected, but we regard it as something that can be redeemed.”

*¡Viva la Muerte!* explores this association of Eros and Thanatos and their reflections in contemporary art. The exhibition presents itself as a theater of cruelty unfolding the various facets of *violencia* in an aesthetically condensed and conceptually stringent manner: the Mexican Ivan Edeza shows an almost unedited snuff video featuring men gunning down Indians in the Brazilian jungle; marking the way to the president’s palace in Guatemala City with bloody footprints, Regina José Galindo focuses on a specific kind of machismo partly informed by the Spanish colonial rule; and the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles highlights the history of reckless missionary endeavors, linking the trinity of money, power, and spirituality in a monumental installation of bewitching beauty.

The space of ideas emerging in the exhibition *¡Viva la Muerte!* spans from the Mexican Enrique Metinides’ sensation-seeking tabloid photographs of accidents, murders, and catastrophes to the Brazilian Vik Muniz’ sneering “Clown Skull” and the émigré Cuban Ana Mendieta’s “Silueta” performances, which combine ritual practices from Mexico and Cuba with elements of the radical avant-gardes of Western modern art.

*¡Viva La Muerte!* provides the viewer with material but does not deliver a final result. Differences in art and the history of ideas on the Latin American continent remain visible between the various objects as rifts and clean cuts, while the fundamental divergence between North and South concerning the attitude towards death inscribes itself into the microstructure of numerous works as a contradiction continuously renewing itself.

The highlight and apotheosis of *¡Viva la Muerte!* are the works by Teresa Margolles who has dedicated her career to the documentation and artistic reflection of ignored deaths in Mexico City. What the statistics list as an uncontrollable megalopolis’s collateral damage recovers its human proportions and ethical dimensions in Margolles’ work. The artist makes casts of corpses and uses the water the corpses have been cleansed with to produce soap bubbles; she has created an acoustic piece confronting the visitor with the scratching and

scraping noises of medical instruments penetrating into corpses. "The morgue is a place that encourages me to do something as an artist with the irritating pictures and the mad unreality I see every day," Teresa Margolles says. "It also gives me the power to take on the role of a mediator towards society. The feelings of helplessness and bitterness I share with the victims' families find an outlet in art and turn into concrete blocks, air, and soap bubbles."

**Artists:** Francis Alÿs, Carlos Amorales, Juan Manuel Echavarría, Ivan Edeza, Regina Jose Galindo, Cristina Garcia Rodero, Daniel Guzmán, Dr. Lakra, Ilan Lieberman, Stephan Lugbauer, Jorge Macchi, Teresa Margolles, Cildo Meireles, Ana Mendieta, Enrique Metinides, Vik Muniz, Gabriel Orozco, Esteban Pastorino, José Alejandro Restrepo, Pedro Reyes, Bastienne Schmidt, Santiago Sierra, Melanie Smith

**Curators:** Gerald Matt, Thomas Mießgang

¡Viva la Muerte! is an exhibition produced by the Kunsthalle Wien in cooperation with Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Gran Canaria.

**Exhibition Catalogue:** This Spring 2008 an edition of the catalogue will be published in Spanish/English.

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