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Claudio Rivera-Seguel
Tracking a Nomad

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Air consists of a delicately balanced wood horn two metres in length. To blow a horn, one must inhale, then exhale energetically through pursed lips. The presence of such an instrument here recalls the unconscious act we perform hundreds of times a day to draw life-giving oxygen into our bodies. While an environmental subtext runs through the exhibition, it is especially evident in *Air*. Soil and water pollution are undoubtedly serious problems. But watching the horn sway gently back and forth in the gallery while standing there breathing makes one aware of our fragile dependence on clean air. As an ancient means of communication, the horn is also suggestive of social congress—although the horn's imposing size lent an oddly patriarchal flavour to this reading as most women would lack the lung capacity to make it sound properly.

The installation's final element, *Fire*, is composed of four totem-like female figures wearing ornate headdresses made of apples, latticed wood, tin and flames. From the interior of each woman's head, light shines through the eyes in emulation of fire. The four women are meant to symbolize the life force that burns within us. Viewing the grouping, I was reminded of Spring Hurlbut's research into the origins of classical architectural motifs, and her theory that columns were carved by pagan Greeks in an effort to recreate the forest grove where many of their ceremonies were originally held. Here we had a literal transcription of the column form in wood. Two of the female figures have Asian/Slavic features. With their full lunar/solar faces and enigmatic smiles, they prompt a serene feeling. The third figure, outfitted in a cone-shaped tin helmet, resembles an ancient Middle Eastern warrior or noble. While not aggressive, the woman does convey a sense of strength, an unwillingness to submit—perhaps alluding to the survival instinct that lies at the core of our being. The final figure features a soot-blackened face encased in a halo of flame. With an anguished expression reminiscent of the tortured figure in Munch's *The Scream*, the woman is obviously in significant physical, psychological, or spiritual distress, as if the life force that burned within her had flared uncontrollably and begun to consume her. While powerful, the installation was marred somewhat by the need for wood panels to support three of the columns on the carpeted floor (the fourth column had an extended base, and was thus able to stand on its own).

While Larson grounds *Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Wood* in her own personal experience, through her use of universally familiar materials and symbols, she manages to speak to every viewer regardless of their gender, ethnicity or age. This transcendence is magnified by the freedom granted us to touch her finely crafted objects. Through the trust she shows in us to handle her work with the care it deserves, she enhances the sense of intimacy, protection and preservation embodied in her installation.■

Doris Wall Larson,
Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Wood
Rosemont Art Gallery, Regina
Feb. 3–Mar. 5, 1999

Claudio RIVERA-SEGUEL TRACKING a NOMAD

CURTIS JOSEPH COLLINS

The art of Claudio Rivera-Seguel is always transient, and thus reflects its creator's continual movements through metropolitan centres across North America, Europe and South America. Using urban refuse Rivera-Seguel transforms and produces spaces, often within an architectonic sense, that contest mainstream standards of cultural signification. His installations as well as public actions executed during the final decade of this century, are based on a multinational language of altered symbols which are ultimately parodies of Western belief systems. The *LUZ=LUZ* simultaneous international public installations in Fredericton (Canada), Paris (France), and Santiago (Chile), during 1999 and 2000, represent his most ambitious series of interrelated ephemeral creations to date...

Claudio Rivera-Seguel was born in 1965 in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, and at the age of two was relocated to Concepción in southern Chile. His family moved from this small city to Santiago, the nation's capital, when he was an adolescent. In 1973, during General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte's military coup over the socialist Chilean government of Salvador Allende, the artist's father, Claudio Edwardo Rivera-Villalobos was incarcerated as a political prisoner. After eighteen months of being moved from one concentration camp to another, Rivera-Villalobos gained exile for his family to Canada.

The young Rivera-Seguel attended elementary and secondary school in Vancouver, followed by two years of study in urban planning and economic geography at the University of British Columbia. In 1985 his family returned to Santiago where he enrolled in the architecture program at the University of Chile. During his undergraduate studies the artist was involved in a student revolt or "toma" (Spanish colloquial term for "occupation"), and was expelled by university officials pending review. However, following his re-admittance to the school, he was politically persecuted and decided to quit in protest. In 1988 Rivera-Seguel moved back to Vancouver and entered the Bachelor of Architecture program at the University of British Columbia, where he graduated in 1992.

This nomadic artist's career over the past ten years is marked by a variety of productions spread across three continents, including works created for specific locations in Santiago, Vancouver, New York, Montreal, and Paris. One of his earliest public actions,

entitled *Los Commendadores*, moved from the foot of San Cristóbal Hill, in the centre of Santiago, to a busy thoroughfare known as Los Commendadores. The 1992 performance featured the artist surrounded by a circular brick formation on the ground, a configuration intended to mimic the landscaping of trees on the hill. Rivera-Seguel's own body in combination with the circle gradually became a symbol of civil disobedience as he posed in the midst of oncoming traffic. Such an act underlined the irony of humanity's attempt to manage nature and the artist's moral objection to such a process of control.

Upon moving back to Vancouver later in 1992, Rivera-Seguel joined with Marta Pan and Alan Switzer to produce a collective installation at the Smash Gallery. The body reference suggested by the show's title *We Plexus* was evident in the Canadian-Chilean's transformation of air vents on the main floor into a pair of giant eyes using black and white paint. On an adjacent wall he rendered a full-scale black, red, and white stairwell in perspective, providing viewers with an imaginary link between the gallery's first and second floors. The colour schemes and facial features were inspired by Aboriginal sculpture and painting of the Northwest coast, as Rivera-Seguel incorporated ceremonial-based arts within this architectonic creation. Such local factors serve to guide the artist's methods and forms of production, which for *LUZ=LUZ* in Fredericton will be determined by the Beaverbrook Art Gallery's façade, grounds, and function.

In 1993 this restless artist temporarily relocated to New York City, where he carried out a public action on the side walk in front of the Museum of Modern Art. *Barbecuing America at the M.O.M.A.* is among his most poignant critiques of how the international art scene is dominated by American economics, taste and rhetoric. With flags of the United States of America draped over his shoulders, Rivera-Seguel burnt copies of Art in America, Artforum, and Artnews in a barrel. Moments before the police arrived he extinguished the flames with red paint and left the scene of the crime. The barrel used in this performance was acquired from a nearby homeless community where it served as a heater. Such an object of the destitute stood in contrast to the cultural wealth represented by the internationally famous museum. His symbolic destruction of the prestigious New York art periodicals foreshadowed an anti-aesthetic with a socio-political edge; characteristics which are pivotal to *LUZ=LUZ*.

After relocating from New York to Montreal in the summer of 1993, Rivera-Seguel selected a vacant lot on Saint Denis Street located between a laundromat and a *dépanneur* for the creation of an outdoor installation called *Barricades*. The artist utilised a free standing sign at the front of the property which read: À LOUER-MAGASINS-BUREAUX 285-6358, as the main wall of a house-like construction. Inside the A-frame shanty, a scavenged television, video tape machine, and couch functioned as the common denominators of passive Western cultures which are constantly exposed to mass media messages. Altered advertising posters lining the dwelling's interior and exterior walls warned of late Capitalism's inherent problems, including homelessness, unequal distribution of wealth, and military expansionism. On a Cable News Network poster featuring Bill Clinton with a clenched fist, during his first election campaign, the artist painted a black and yellow gun below the aspiring American president and blocked-out all text except for the words: IF YOU THOUGHT.

After moving to Paris in 1994, the Canadian-Chilean created an installation called *Heaven and Hell* at the Atelier Crimée. The show consisted of works in two adjacent rooms . In one room, he painted red, yellow, and black flames on the ceiling, from which lengths of canvas hung down in a canopy-like configuration. Each canvas section featured a pair of glaring eyes, and attached to the bottom edge of this construction were wooden sticks with postcards of Christian images by Renaissance painters suspended just above the floor. The sole source of illumination in the installation was a table lamp positioned on the floor. Perhaps this light was a metaphoric reference to the light of God surrounded by crucial moments in the history of Christianity, all of which relegated Rivera-Seguel to Hades. In the other room, the floor was painted in spiralling areas of red, blue, and yellow, while the walls featured countless dabs of colour in swirling patterns. Amid this frenzied depiction of Kingdom Come were two-metre high cut-outs of Barbie affixed to the wall. The artist scavenged these images from a local dumpster following a world-wide advertising blitz celebrating the famous American doll's 50th anniversary. Also in one corner of Rivera-Seguel's paradise was a collection of shopping carts stacked on top of each other, in an idealistic space symbolic of how American consumer values have come to dominate Western cultures in the latter half of this century. Has the supposed euphoria of gaining material wealth finally replaced the spiritual salvation offered by Christianity as the ultimate goal of life? Such questions are central to *LUZ=LUZ*, as evident in the slogans that will appear on a electronic advertising board in Fredericton, which include: *Rejoice the overwhelming emptiness of your converted soul.*

Through the deployment of urban refuse as art Rivera-Seguel's creations have failed to enter the process of commodification, which is critical to the existence of art dealers, institutions, collectors, and magazines. The public actions and installations discussed thus far currently survive only in photographic or electronic forms, with the exception of a few remnants held by friends located along the artist's regular migratory routes. Most of his works return to the environment from which they were scavenged, thus eliminating the possibility of aesthetic baggage as an anathema to such a wandering soul. In 1995, during one of his sojourns to Santiago, Rivera-Seguel teamed up with Ximena Zomosa to create an exhibition entitled *Lo Real*. The show, which took place in an abandoned building, questioned the "normal course of artistic events in today's Chile," and how avant-garde art has been marginalized by the country's cultural institutions. The meaning of "the real", as referred to in the show's title, was inverted by these artists in an effort to sabotage Chile's acknowledged art circuits. Can such an anti-institutional art exist in New Brunswick's official provincial gallery for the current *LUZ=LUZ* international project, or has Rivera-Seguel finally succumbed to the pressures of mainstream recognition?

Regardless, the Chilean-Canadian's installation *A B DICK* for *Lo Real* examined the vacated edifice's history, which was originally a nineteenth-century villa that had been converted into a commercial space in the mid-twentieth century. The structure's modern corrugated metal façade masked its former colonial existence to passers by. While cleaning up a room that had served as a graphics studio for the *A B DICK* advertising firm, the artist decided to return the space to its residential origins. Using dilapidated furniture and appliances he created surreal living quarters that included a blue bed frame, a table with extended legs, a stove with a wooden exhaust pipe, and a sink without faucets. This symbolic recuperation of history via art presented viewers with an example of how the present or real is only an accumulated layer of the past.

The machinery of Western art history was the focus of Rivera-Seguel's 1996 solo exhibition *Art in America*, created during one of his rare winter stays in Canada at Montreal's Quartier Éphémère. Using massive sheets of recycled paper to create four walls and a floor, the artist converted a dank basement studio into an archetypal white cube gallery. Among the works of fine art on display in this fraudulent space was a collection of discarded chairs with a silhouette of the artist's profile cut into their respective seats. This same image appeared in repetitive tile-like fashion on the paper floor and a single signed edition was set in gold frame that hung on the gallery's most prominent wall. The repeated use of his own image parodied the celebrity status that galleries, magazines, critics, and curators confer upon artists, and how such discreetly manufactured idols are governed by cultural as well as economic power structures. Rivera-Seguel's own silhouette is the *LUZ=LUZ* project's fundamental image, and it functions as an international corporate logo of cultural dissent.

Another more elaborated chair, from his 1996 installation, constructed from scrap wood upholstered with Art in America magazines again refers to the print media's central function as a prime signifier of artistic merit and monetary value. The pointed ends of rusty nails protruding from this fragile piece of furniture's seat confirm its non-utilitarian status, as the chair has become an overused and ultimately empty symbol of post-modern musing. Perhaps, the most telling expression of Rivera-Seguel's irreverence towards the art world's hierarchies was a cross-shaped floor assemblage manufactured from old wooden slats and newspapers. Its vertical axis was terminated by four black, white, and grey painted portraits honouring the twentieth-

century "masters": Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, and Claudio Rivera-Seguel. The Canadian-Chilean's alliance of himself with these once radical artists, was a testament to their collective influence upon his work and the ability of mainstream cultural institutions to co-opt the avant-garde.

In many respects Claudio Rivera-Seguel's *LUZ=LUZ* international project in Fredericton, Paris, and Santiago mark both a culmination and shift in his art of the 1990s. The trajectory of his work thus far is linked by a tendency towards socio-political posturing, which has taken the form of public actions as well as installations. He routinely rejects the fundamental tenets of late Capitalism, and employs art to reveal the less attractive realities of Western cultural phenomenon. This attitude has been informed by the human tragedies he has witnessed in Chile, and the fine line that this artist perceives between military dictatorship and liberal democracy. Mass media forms are used as tools against a range of middle-class assumptions, which the artist alters in a multi-linguistic and symbolic process.

The nomadic Chilean-Canadian has rarely applied in advance or been selected by a gallery or cultural institution for the many shows he has participated in over the past decade. Rather, Rivera-Seguel prefers to organize his own shows and issue catalogues based on the locations and resources at hand in any given city across three continents. Such artistic autonomy is a necessary part of his unsettled lifestyle, and it has enabled him to develop a very sophisticated aesthetic of survival. Urban refuse in its many forms is the basic vocabulary of his perfomance and architectonic-based creations, providing viewers with glaring examples of how Western societies are incessantly manufactoring, over consuming, and then carelessly discarding the planet's resources. However, the highly produced new objects in *LUZ=LUZ*, including massive banners, t-shirts, key chains, posters, and cards are signs of the artist's recent efforts to extend his manipulation of formats as well as spaces into the realm of pure mimicry. Rivera-Seguel's electronic messages on a public sign board in Fredericton, posters on media boards in metros throughout Paris, and signs in advertising light boxes along the boulevards of Santiago also contribute to this truly international anti-art marketing campaign during the years 1999 and 2000.

LUZ=LUZ (Spanish term for light equals light) is an enigmatic equation, perhaps referring to the relationship between art and life. For this Chilean-Canadian has developed a very complex visual method of undermining the contemporary art scene's trappings, in a larger effort to question how social values are entrenched. The interior displays at each venue include a series of light boxes with text and photographs featuring the artist standing in front of selection of cultural, commercial, and spiritual institutions. Phrases pasted above and below the images function as counter signifiers, questioning commonly held beliefs that are central to Western society. Art does not equal art is undoubtedly the overriding slogan of his current show, and it has been combined with his own silhouette to create a fictitiously registered corporate logo. The official looking logo is emblazoned on the plethora of manufactored articles mentioned above, not to mention its communication over the internet and throughout this publication. It will also be rendered via a series of public actions on lawns, roadsides, and urban sites yet to be determined. Such a process represents the artist's attempt to flood an international public with an easily understood symbol of parody. Two massive banners on The Beaverbrook Art Gallery's façade with giant *arte≠arte* trademarks are the most bombastic and architectonic evocation of his nihilistic message. Are the institutional settings and highly finished nature of *LUZ=LUZ* a contradiction of Claudio Rivera-Seguel's artistic ethics, or does this internationally co-ordinated effort reflect a new direction for him into the next millennium? ∎

Vessna Perunovich
Red E Scape

PAULA GUSTAFSON

Vessna Perunovich's *Red E Scape* installation delineates the problematical territory between our desire for intimate contact and our fear of vulnerability. *So Many Lures, So Little Time*, the centrepiece in Perunovich's exhibition, simultaneously attracts and repels.

We want to come closer, to touch the metal bed-frame's weathered textures, but caution tells us to keep our distance. Barbed hooks and brightly-coloured fishing lures hang like a shimmering cloud overhead. Suspended below the fishing lures, just above the tensely-spiralled bedsprings, are red droplets; small sand-filled cloth bags the colour of blood.

So Many Lures, So Little Time gives substance to a human dilemma. When we open ourselves up to a lover or friend, we accept the possibility of being hurt. Yet, to fully explore our emotional capacities, we must acknowledge a paradox; that physical violence can occur within the most tender sexual experience, and that psychological exploitation sometimes occurs among the best of friends.

A familiar object of our social landscape, Perunovich's double bed is a delicate wire structure that could be perceived as a romantic site for seduction and pleasure. Curving tracery at the head and foot appears like a line drawing, softening the rectangular geometry of the metal skeleton and questioning whether the bed is sturdy enough to support a body—let alone the rambunctious intercourse of two bodies.

For all its familiarity in domestic life, in Perunovich's installation the bed is a hazardous zone. Her bright hooks shiver suspended in the air. The red cloth bags hang heavily. They may be imitative of drops of blood but they also convey the weightiness of body bags. Every interpretation suggests the threat of wounding, of violation, of wracking pain. Inevitably, rape comes to mind.

So Many Lures, So Little Time

Vessna Perunovich, *So Many Lures, So Little Time*, 1999. Iron bed, red fabric, lures, fish hooks, sand. 22.86 x 10.16 x 15.24 cm. Photo courtesy of Third Gallery & Vessna Perunovich.