



Rodrigo Valenzuela
Barricade No. 2
Barricade No. 3
Barricade No. 4
Barricade No. 6
2017

FOREWORD + ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The USF Contemporary Art Museum provides a broad framework for exhibitions and related programs that are designed to provoke critical interpretation and explore ideas and issues relevant to the larger fields of cultural, social and political practice. The campus museum becomes a place where imagination and knowledge meet and offer the possibility of a transformative experience for students and community visitors.

For the exhibition *The Return of the Real: Robert Lazzarini and Rodrigo Valenzuela*, Christian Viveros-Fauné, CAM's Curator-at-Large, invited two artists from different generations and cultural backgrounds. They created installations that offer experiences that defy a single definition of the *real*, requiring from viewers an intense engagement with the work and a continual assessment and reassessment to distinguish the *real* from the *fake*. Viveros-Fauné has provided a curatorial statement that describes the innovative practices of Robert Lazzarini (b. 1965) and Rodrigo Valenzuela (b. 1982). He discusses the ways in which the two installations resonate with each other, and how they tackle defining the *real* in our current cultural condition where the proliferation of information is often confusing and difficult to absorb and interpret.

Both artists make work that is grounded in materiality. American-born Lazzarini makes objects based on mathematical distortions of common objects which require the viewer to walk around the sculptures trying to locate the normative perspective where the whole of the object is recognizable. He often selects familiar objects such as chain link fences, locks and crushed doors that imply cultural violence. Chilean-born Valenzuela creates installations that include photographs, objects and video which require the viewer to sort out contradictory narratives. Based on his own history, he often addresses issues of immigration and labor by including sawhorses and other objects that refer to the construction site. Both artists disrupt the usual cognitive process of recognition.

I am pleased to acknowledge and express my appreciation for the contributions of the faculty and staff of the USF Institute for Research in Art. Deputy Director Noel Smith managed all details of the organization of the exhibition with the able assistance of Program

Coordinator Amy Allison. Shannon Annis, Curator of the Collection/Exhibitions Manager, worked closely with the artists and curator to assist in the production of the commissioned works as well as coordinated loans and shipping. Exhibitions Designer Tony Palms designed the overall exhibition and assisted in the production of the works along with Curatorial Associate Eric Jonas. Chief Preparator Vincent Kral led the staff team in the installation of the show. Curator of Education Leslie Elsasser designed the education program. New Media Curator Don Fuller provided oversight and design for printed materials and the banner, assisted by Marty de la Cruz. Others on the team who worked together to bring about this exhibition and its related educational programs and special events include Jessica Barber, Alyssa Cordero, Mark Fredricks, Ashley Jablonski, Will Lytch, David Waterman, and Randall West, as well as students and volunteers Adam Bakst, Kikélomo Denton, Annalieth Garzon, Olivia Gasparoni, Jakob Greenstein, Gillian Olortegui and Veronika Sengsbartl.

Many others from across campus and in the community have collaborated with various aspects of this exhibition. For their interest and support, I thank the CAM Club, and Matthew Kennedy of the USF School of Music. Chuck Magee in the School of Art and Art History provided technical assistance.

I am grateful to galleries Klowden Mann, Culver City, CA and Marlborough, New York and London, for their assistance with loans of artwork.

It is always the quality of the work that makes for a great exhibition. I am most grateful to artists Robert Lazzarini and Rodrigo Valenzuela for participating in this important exhibition and sharing their work with our community.

—
MARGARET MILLER
Director, USF Institute for Research in Art



Robert Lazzarini, *chain-link fence (torn)*, 2012. (Cover shows detail)

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THE RETURN OF THE REAL: Robert Lazzarini and Rodrigo Valenzuela

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THE RETURN OF THE REAL: Robert Lazzarini and Rodrigo Valenzuela

“When you give people too much information, they resort to pattern recognition.”

That’s communications theorist Marshall McLuhan in 1968 predicting how information glut could hurtle humanity back to an ancient tribalism. In failing to absorb every data point, he explained decades before the adoption of the Internet, people turn to discredited stereotypes and subjective beliefs. In such situations the idea of objective truth disappears faster than you can say “lock her up.” What proliferates, instead, are familiar know-nothing plagues: filter bubbles, confirmation bias, fake news and the sort of epistemological crises that accompany wars, famines and technological earthquakes.

“Epistemology” is a fancy word that philosophers use when referring to the study of knowledge itself. An “epistemological crisis,” then, is a crisis of knowledge, a disruption in which, to quote philosopher Hannah Arendt, entire populations choose to actively ignore “the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought).” Such periods produce important alterations in commonly accepted ideas. These, in turn, often lead to epochal dislocations in which entire populations reject the premises of logic, science and other confirmable propositions for conspiracy theories, mass delusions and magical thinking.

Barack Obama wasn’t born in the U.S., the moon landing was faked, the CIA created AIDS in a laboratory, the earth is flat, 9/11 was an inside job, lizard people (a.k.a. “reptilians”) run the world, the FDA is withholding the cure for cancer, politicians ran a child prostitution ring from a Washington D.C. pizza parlor, climate change is a hoax. These and other conspiracies typify U.S. culture today. More insidious than the 20th century populisms historian Richard J. Hofstadter dubbed “the paranoid style in American politics,” these 21st century myths constitute an environment in which reality becomes pliable and subject to manipulation. Such periods are the playground of politicians and ideologues; since at least the time of Surrealists, they have also proven fertile ground for artists of every stripe.

Enter the U.S.-based artists Robert Lazzarini (U.S., b. 1965) and Rodrigo Valenzuela (Chile, b. 1982). In an era increasingly dominated by fabricated fears, alternative facts

and fake news, both of these creators have—individually and in isolation from each other—selected to rearrange, reconstruct and ultimately recreate alternate versions of reality in order to question its most fundamental premises. Together they exemplify a certain kind of fact-based artist: one who actively mobilizes the real in order to undermine its basic tenets. Their two-person exhibition at USFCAM illustrates, among other things, how reality is made up of more than just perception—its surfaces can, in fact, harbor fantastical possibilities.

Robert Lazzarini is a poet of the hyperreal, a term that refers to the inability of consciousness to distinguish between reality and its simulation. For more than two decades the New York-based artist has availed himself of everyday objects, or their ideal forms, in order to subject these to a series of mathematical distortions via computer modeling. Utilizing the original materials of his chosen object—he uses wood and steel when rendering a hammer, actual bone powder when casting a skull—the artist arrives at altered forms that prove, at once, recognizable and hallucinatory. The fact that Lazzarini avoids the process of material translation, where elements like plaster or bronze stand in for the original object, charges his minutely detailed objects with a force that is fundamentally destabilizing.

At USFCAM, Lazzarini charts a new American landscape full of fear, violence and transgression. A twisted chain with a broken padlock, a crashed-in motel door, several contorted and bullet-riddled metal signs, a melting police barricade, a tangled 23-foot chain-link fence topped with concertina wire. All of these distorted objects propose a warped foundation for a parallel reality—one in which recognizable objects defy the laws of optics, gravity and rationality. Among Lazzarini’s sculptures, *chain-link fence (torn)* (2012) is by far the most elaborate and complex. Cast in carbon steel in more than 350 separate hand-finished parts, this spectacular barrier-sculpture dramatizes, among other themes, the nearly liquid instability built into walls of every type, from the Amorite Wall raised by the ancient Sumerians until today.

L.A.-based artist Rodrigo Valenzuela, for his part, also addresses the subject of barriers as well as their political and philosophical implications, while refusing to firmly demarcate the difference between material reality and its representation. In a mind-and-eye bending installation that includes the



Rodrigo Valenzuela
General Song, 2019

sculpture of a felled watchtower, eight photographs of ghostly barricades and a video featuring a group of Latino workers discussing the value of organized labor, the Chilean-born artist highlights the way individual and collective experiences exist in tension with one another. In the world of politics and work—the undocumented and documented kind—his art suggests, these contingencies constitute competing visions of the real.

As an artist who immigrated to the US and worked as an undocumented laborer before returning to school to study art, Valenzuela brings a keen awareness of the immigrant experience to his artwork. Additionally, his photographic and video work makes poetry from straddling fantasy and fact. In the series of photographs he has titled *Barricades* (2017)—it’s partly inspired by Pablo Neruda’s epic poem *Canto general (General Song)*—he constructs studio versions of historical street barricades that he subsequently photographs. He then re-photographs these in front of scale prints of the selfsame constructions. That doubling effect, besides citing a slew of mirroring pictures (among them Diego Velazquez’s *Las Meninas*), captures the essence of instability. Like mirages from Ferguson or Hong Kong, Valenzuela’s carefully staged photographs belie their ramshackle look: they invoke displacement, distortion and deception, as well as the precariousness of what we take in with our senses.

The Return of the Real celebrates a particular mode of art making: one that is committed to re-presentation as a mode of visual experimentation and reasoning. The hyphen is intentionally added to destabilize the normal reading of the word “representation” as a transparent record of reality. In the words of critic Hal Foster—from whom the title of this exhibition is borrowed—the work of both of these artists is grounded in the fact of actual bodies, objects and social sites. For Lazzarini and Valenzuela, these contingencies drive the two artists to arrive at new ways to rethink real life urgently and critically. Their contributions, in the form of the sculptures and images that make up this exhibition, provide clues to help make sense of the world’s current dislocations—while consistently arguing for more reality, not less.

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CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ
Curator-at-Large, USF Contemporary Art Museum

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

ROBERT LAZZARINI

***chain-link fence (torn)*, 2012**
steel and pigment
134 x 276 x 75 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough, New York and London

***chain with broken padlock*, 2012**
steel, pigment
6 x 18 x 6 in.
Courtesy of the artist

***dead end sign*, 2012**
metal, paint
35 x 35 x 1 in.
Courtesy of the artist

***motel door (kicked in)*, 2012**
wood, Plexiglas and paint
102 x 70 x 48 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough, New York and London

***no trespassing sign*, 2012**
metal, paint
22 x 23 x 1 in.
Courtesy of the artist

***police barricade*, 2019**
wood, metal, paint
46 x 108 x 41 in.
Courtesy of the artist

***posted signs*, 2019**
mixed media
74 x 97 x 1 in.
Courtesy of the artist

RODRIGO VALENZUELA

***Barricade No. 1-8*, 2017**
archival pigment prints mounted on Sintra
55 1/2 x 45 1/2 in. framed (each)
Courtesy of the artist and Klowden Mann, Culver City, CA

***General Song*, 2019**
site specific installation
clay, cardboard, wood, fluorescent lights
variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and Klowden Mann, Culver City, CA

***Prole*, 2015**
HD digital video
8:47 min.
Courtesy of the artist and Klowden Mann, Culver City, CA



Robert Lazzarini
motel door (kicked in), 2012