YOSHUA OKON

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, 1970. Lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico **Selected Solo Exhibitions: 2000** 'The Best of the Best', La Pandería, Mexico City; 'Orillese a la Orilla', Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City **2002** 'Oríllese a la Orilla', Art & Public, Geneva **2003** 'Cockfight', galleria francesca kaufmann, Milan **2005** 'Lago Bolsena', The Project, New York **Selected Group Exhibitions: 2002** 'Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values', P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; Kunst Werke, Berlin **2003** Istanbul Biennial **2004** 'Adaptive Behavior', New Museum, New York **2005** 'Pantagruel Syndrome', Torino Triennale, Turin **2006** 'Los Angeles/Mexico: Complexities & Heterogeneity', La Coleccion Jumex, Mexico City **Selected Bibliography: 2002** Holland Cotter, 'Pictures of You', *New York Times*, 10 May; Gavin McInnes, 'Money will make the dog dance', *Vice Magazine*, June **2003** Christopher Phillips, 'The Uses of Strangers', *Strangers: The First ICP Triennial of Photography and Video*, ICP; Steidl **2004** John Welchman, 'Crying Wolf', *Flash Art*, January - February **2005** Christopher Knight, 'Our Values and Ideals Enshrined', *Los Angeles Times*, 26 April

Yoshua Okon addresses issues of cultural and political correctness, normative social behaviour and the mechanisms of its disruption. In 1997 he made a video in collaboration with Miguel Calderon, showing the latter smashing a car window and stealing the stereo. The video was later exhibited, together with the stolen stereo (and 119 others, bought on the black market in Mexico City) as an installation entitled **A Proposition** (1997). Since then, all of his works have been performative renderings of transgressive conduct and its relation to money, corruption, power and media stardom.

In the double video projection **Cockfight** (1998) is a performance of contravention: two innocent schoolgirls act out in words and gestures a chauvinistic Mexican insult as a routine in front of the camera. Similarly transgressive is **Skirting the Edge** (1999-2000), a series of videos in which Okon filmed policemen behaving in ways that did not befit their uniforms. In a video titled **Pull Over** (1999) the policeman performs a square dance; in another, he insults the artist; in a third he boasts about his skills with the baton while making obscene gestures; in a fourth he tells jokes to the camera. This unexpected behaviour was accomplished by means of a small bribe, and the absurdity of the scene raises questions about institutional corruption. The title of the work, the colloquial order: 'Pull Over!', hints at who, in the end, has the authority and the power.

The subjects portrayed in these works are real people rather than professional actors, and in this sense they are authentic. Yet they almost never behave in the way one would expect from someone in their position, which we can clearly identify based on their uniforms, social type or jobs. This contrast is also manifest in **Parking Lotus** (2001), a series of photographs and a three-channel video showing security guards meditating in parking lots.

In the pseudo-documentary film **Rinoplastia** (2000) members of the public are asked to play themselves as the main subjects of the film; rather than the uniform, in this instance transgression is inherent to the role. **Rinoplastia** puts the viewer in an uncomfortable position, as we watch an obnoxious group of rich, upper-class youths snorting cocaine and insulting lower-class people from the safety of their new car.

The moral position of the viewer vis-à-vis issues of exploitation is also put to the test in works like **All Employees ...** (2002), a video showing all the workers in a Los Angeles fast food chain dressed in uniform as the management policy dictates. The gradual superimposing of the images reflects the dehumanizing and standardized approach of the industry.

By reversing the mechanisms of power, class, ethnicity, gender and institutional affiliation, Okon challenges us to consider our own ethical position regarding pre-conceived notions of normative and transgressive behaviour. ∗ **Sergio Edelsztein**