

Yoshua Okon

PARKING LOTUS (2003)

Site: Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

The improvised video performances of Mexico City artist Yoshua Okon are provocatively funny. Examining the notion that reality is a fiction, Okon creates incongruous situations and then records their unpredictable outcomes. The humour is so borderline that the implications of viewing the compromised figures in Okon's scenarios become questionable. As Okon describes, "These interventions act like detonators that dislocate social codes, bringing about uncontrolled and unexpected effects."¹

Usually inviting strangers to participate in his performances, Okon highlights the mix of fascination and fear that surrounds this engagement. Often he challenges and manipulates figures of authority by setting up confrontational situations in urban public places. In *Parking Lotus*, Okon continues his investigations on the authoritarian stranger by asking security guards to meditate in the parking lots of their workplaces around central Los Angeles.

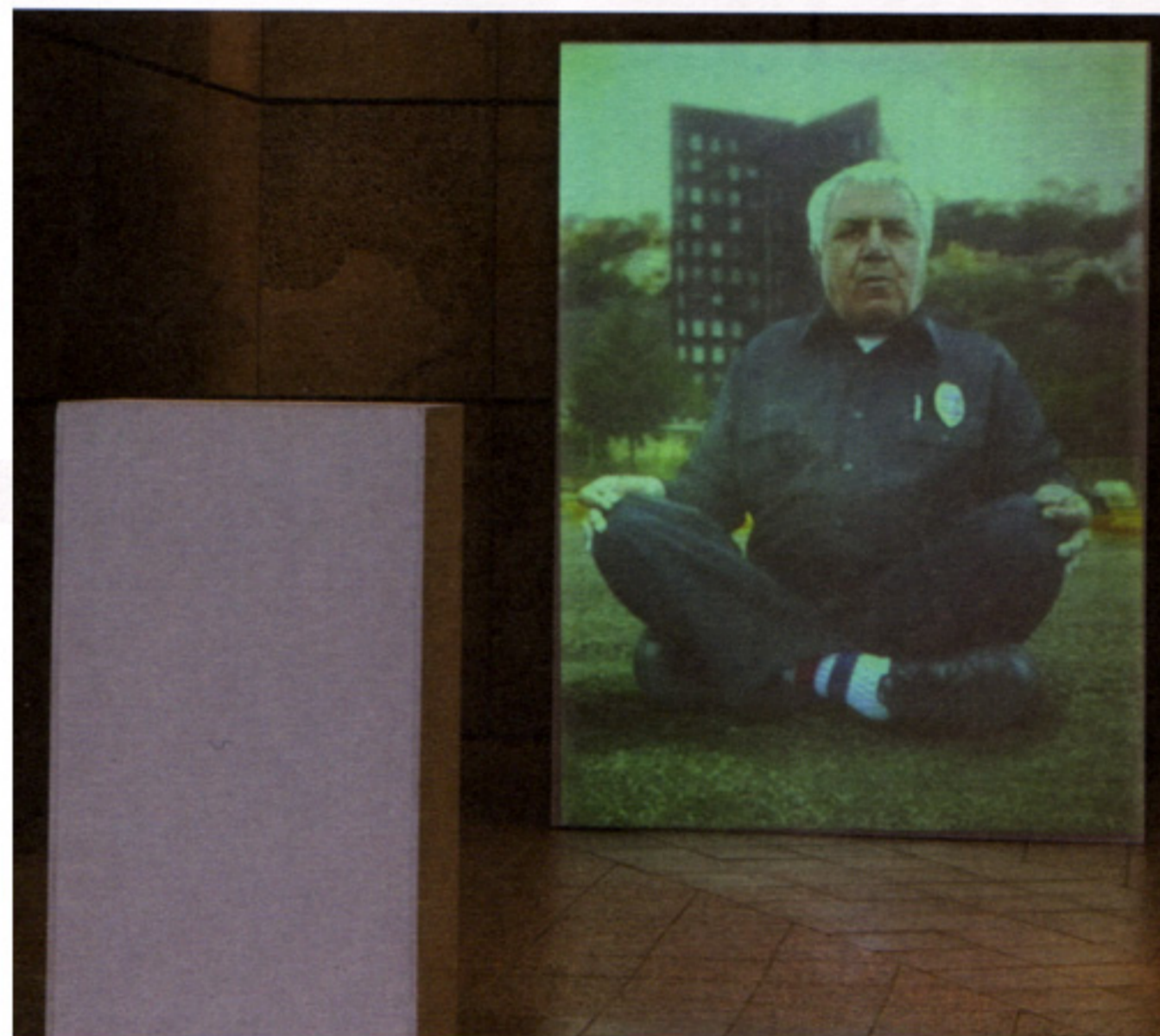
This video work documents the security guards in their usual settings, but complicates the encounter by requesting the guards to meditate for the camera. In watching the watchers, we become voyeurs of our unseen urban guardians.

As they enact a playful interpretation of how they spend their time, *Parking Lotus* brings politicised attention to the undervalued and sedentary behaviour of the security guard, which is both enlightening and disturbing.

In keeping with the comedy of Okon's practice, *Parking Lotus* occupies the uneasy terrain between homage and ridicule. We become uncertain of the work's intentions and further of our own reactions. It is this sense of ambiguity that reflects Okon's ongoing concern with complicating the distinctions between fiction and reality.

LAURA PRESTON

¹ Irene Hofmann, 'Yoshua Okon' in *Presenta*, 1998, cat. 33, p. 39.



Yoshua Okon was born in Mexico City in 1970, and lives and works in Mexico City and Los Angeles. His work, like a series of near-sociological experiments executed for the camera, blends staged situations, documentation and improvisation and questions habitual perceptions of reality and truth, selfhood and morality.

Okon has shown his work at the Kunstwerke in Berlin, P.S.1-MoMA and the New Museum in New York, the Istanbul Biennial, Galleria Francesca Kaufmann in Milan, The Project in New York and Galería Enrique Guerrero in Mexico City, amongst others. In 1994, he co-founded La Panadería, an independent space dedicated to the exhibition and discussion of contemporary culture, a project that he directed for eight years. Since 2002, Okon has also been a visiting teacher at the University of California, San Diego.

www.yoshuaokon.com