



"Bad Route" by Miguel Calderon.

MONEY WILL MAKE THE DOG DANCE

Mexican Punks Change Art Forever

THE ART IN MEXICO CITY IS SHIT. Correction — the art in Mexico City WAS shit until a punk painter named Miguel Calderon and his buddy, video artist Yoshua Okon, rebuilt it from the ground up. Now the city is an international player with young artists getting flown up to Paris every week and retaining galleries everywhere from New York City to Geneva.

"NAFTA was bad for Mexico in a lot of ways," says Okon, who is spending the summer in LA finishing his masters in video art. "It killed our economy and lowered our standard of living, but it opened up the citizens of Mexico to a whole other world."

Back in 1990 art galleries looked like something out of a Soprano's living room. Huge red circles with a peach square behind them and some gold splatterings were offset by porcelain sculptures of leopards holding their prey. Galleries were where rich, stupid, tacky people went to decorate their mansions with hideous garbage. Then Mexico opened its borders

to information and the frauds were exposed. Olive-skinned punk rockers sporting mohawks and cheap flip-flops learned about skateboarders like Ed Templeton and galleries like Alleged. They learned that art wasn't the gaudy bourgeois shit they thought it was and that anyone could do it. The year was 1994.

At the time, Miguel's band Los Intestino Grosso (The Large Intestines) were getting sick of blowing everyone's mind night after night with hilarious and gut-wrenching hardcore shows. They wanted to get something real going on. Like working-class London in 1979, the oppression had reached a tipping point and it was going to take more than a few fast-paced songs to get over it. Miguel liked to paint and felt like it was the time to link up with his childhood friend, Yoshua. They decided to risk getting their asses kicked by police and took over an abandoned bakery called La Panaderia. Within weeks there were regular punk shows and art shows and fights and orgies and a crazy guy with a

huge beard making plastic owls of people. Teenagers with homemade tattoos and incredible oil paintings on their skateboards were learning they were not the only ones.

"Just like punk rock was about anyone picking up a guitar, La Panaderia was and is about anyone picking up a paintbrush — or anything," explains Miguel from his La Condesa apartment, a few blocks from The Bakery. "We started inviting both young and established people from Mexico and other countries that were doing different stuff. Chris Johansen had a show here that went really well and he had us go up there to show our work. We did this all on our own, which was unheard of in Mexico City. It used to be very insular here, very exclusionary. I think that, thanks to the do-it-yourself attitude, a lot of artists have realized that it wasn't necessary to be kissing ass to make art and show it."

Today there are a dozen art galleries just like La Panaderia. The rich-people shit of ten years ago is scoffed at by the same



Top row: Middle-class East LA man tells his wife, "if you don't like it, leave!" Middle row: Two crackheads forgive each other after a fake fight. Bottom row: A chubby lady laughs hysterically after having a good cry.

millionaires that used to buy it. Now they want a Brian Degraw painting of Black Flag or a Terry Richardson. Not only did Miguel and Yoshua open the door for hundreds of incredible new artists, but they helped expose the previous art scene for the ridiculous pantomime it had become. "I'm not going to deny that we had a lot to do with the art scene that's there today," admits Yoshua, "but it's like the Sex Pistols. We were at the right place at the right time. Things had reached a boiling point and we were there to let off the steam."

Now, if Yoshua made only half decent videos of hot girls hanging out and Miguel painted naive drawings of metalheads, this would still be the most consequential thing to happen to the city since the Spanish killed everyone and drained the city's water supply hundreds of years ago. Fortunately, their work is of the "socks blowing off" variety.

Yoshua's latest piece involves setting up a camera in a furniture store and letting strangers improvise soap operas. When shown, the three angles are played a second or two apart so you get this multi-angled, echoing effect that would be great even if the dialogue was crap. The acting is sensational, however. Homeless junkies and fat grandmas show us how inept most of the actors we know and love really are. At one point in the film, an overweight retarded woman spontaneously begins yelling at a porcelain rabbit, "You're so ugly...so ugly...so ugly!" (Remember the lack of synchronization gives every word a triple-echo effect). "Your paws aren't lucky. The only thing lucky about you is that I can't smash you." Then she turns to the camera with tears streaming down her face and yells, "His mother bought me this piece of crap for our wedding and she wasn't

EVEN THERE!... THERE!... THERE!"

Another VICE favorite is *Money Will Make the Dog Dance*, wherein Yoshua pays corrupt Mexico City cops to do things like dance around and tell knock-knock jokes. One even agrees to be beaten up for \$20 (a segment that got them arrested after other police saw what they were doing which, ironically, they were able to bribe their way out of it). This isn't *Jackass*, though. That's what's so remarkable about the work Yoshua and Miguel make. It's not just good Mexican art — it always goes a step further than that. At the end of the piece there's an almost spooky moment where a tired policeman counts his bribe money and says to the camera, "Look at you. A privileged kid with a video camera, ever protected in his perfect little environment. You understand nothing about real needs. About real life."

Miguel's work is equally haunting. Remember those disturbing paintings in Owen Wilson's character's house in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (pictured on p.35)? "That painting was inspired by this story I saw on a TV show about five brothers that waited in the woods for couples to pass by on their bikes and then did terrible shit to them," Miguel told us cheerily. "It seemed fucked up that all five brothers were accomplices in these acts." When paintings like these show up in France they're not there as a token tribute to the Third World. They're there because they're fucking amazing. The French media was hysterical for weeks when Yoshua showed up with nothing but a film of a hairless Mexican Chihuahua fucking a well-groomed French poodle. They thought it was genius.

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There's nothing better than hearing about a group of kids revamping a tired old system and permanently changing the way culture is perceived. It's the ultimate

underdog story, and it's the reason people are still so fascinated by the history of punk. The thing that differentiates La Panaderia from most of these other movements is that the resulting work is of an unprecedented caliber. If you think '70s punk rock took talent, check out the article below. La Panaderia is like the CBGB's

'70s punk scene if any of those bands could actually play their instruments.

It takes balls to change the way Mexico City looks at art, but it takes watermelon-sized, genius balls to change the way the world looks at artists from Mexico City.

La Panaderia did both.

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