



Yoshua Okón's artistic practice is distinguished by his often provocative and humorous approach to performance, video and installation as a means of exploring perceptions of reality, fiction, morality and identity, principally that of the 'other'. Born in Mexico City in 1970, Okón pursued his formal artistic education abroad, earning his BFA at Montreal's Concordia University (1994) and, in 2002, completing his MFA at UCLA with the support of a Fulbright scholarship.

Based in Mexico City, Okón has proven to be consistently innovative and influential since the early 1990s, particularly in founding the artist-run space La Panadería with Miguel Calderón in Mexico City in 1994. As Okón explains, 'I connected to this tradition of ... structures created by artists ... It is about artists going beyond the creation of objects and really shaping the world around them. Okón has expanded this dedication to activating and discussing the role of art in society by founding (along with artists including Eduardo Abaroa, Francis Alÿs and Julieta Aranda) the

independent art-educational space SOMA in 2009 in Mexico City.

Since founding La Panadería, Okón's practice has gained international renown for its witty approach to performance, documentation and installation. Perhaps the seminal work to have originated from La Panadería is the 1997 collaborative video installation (with Miguel Calderón) *A Propósito* (On Purpose), which combines an installation wall constructed from 120 car stereos with an apparently documentary video of Calderón breaking into cars and stealing the stereos. (With the exception of one stereo, the artists actually purchased the machines on the black market.) The work's relevance is made clear by its intertwining of reality and fiction as a means of questioning social and cultural constructions.

Okón's video installation *Chocorrol* (1997) was included in the seminal 2002 exhibition *Mexico City: An Exhibition about the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values* at MoMA PS1 in Long Island City. Featuring a Xoloitzcuintli (the

Mexican hairless dog) copulating with a white French Poodle, the video parodies racial bias in Mexico by means of unexpected deadpan humour. Also among his best-known works is the six-channel video installation *Orillase a la Orilla* (1999-2000), a colloquial phrase that can be roughly translated as the standard police command 'Pull over!' Featuring actual Mexico City policemen in surprisingly comical and compromising poses, Okón capitalised on the medium's ambiguous nature, prompting viewers to question what they were seeing.

Okón's works are innovative in their exploration of social issues and, perhaps most notably, their interactivity. 'I am much more interested in creating environments where your body ... really plays a role and occupies a space ... giving the spectator an active and creative role,' the artist explains. He utilises re-enactment as his primary means for engaging viewers to reformulate established, often dominant, narratives regarding history and identity. This approach is evident in *Octopus* (2011), a four-

channel video installation and travelling solo exhibition that Okón produced during a residency at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. Staged in the car park of a suburban Home Depot and working with untrained Guatemalan day labourers as actors, Okón's video reinterpreted the civil war that plagued Guatemala for nearly forty years following the overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz, which was allegedly engineered by the CIA. 'Octopus' is the nickname given by Guatemalans to the United Fruit Company, whose interests the CIA was accused of defending. In the film, the absurd game of war using shopping trolleys and flatbed carts (in fact, the day labourers were all *exguerrilleros* who had fought in their country's civil war) unfolds under the indifferent gaze of the store's employees and shoppers. The commonplace setting evokes Okón's ability – principally through the use of unexpected humour and satire – to address socio-economic and culturally weighted issues for a broader audience, creating alternative entry points to lesser-known chapters of history.



facing page  
**Chocorrol**, 1997  
 Lightjet C-print  
 68 x 101 cm  
 Edition of 5  
 Courtesy of the artist, Mor-Charpentier, Paris,  
 Kaufmann Repetto, Milan

top  
**Oríllese a la Orilla (Pull Over)**, 1999-2000  
 Installation vies, Museo Universitario de Arte  
 Contemporáneo, Mexico City  
 Courtesy of the artist, Mor-Charpentier, Paris,  
 Kaufmann Repetto, Milan

above  
**Salò Island**, 2014  
 Video stills  
 Courtesy of the artist, Mor-Charpentier, Paris,  
 Kaufmann Repetto, Milan



top and left  
**Octopus, 2011**  
 Video still  
 Duration: 18 minutes 31 seconds  
 Courtesy of Yoshua Okón,  
 Mor-Charpenter, Paris,  
 Kaufmann Repetto, Milan

above  
**Octopus, 2011**  
 Installation view, Cornerhouse,  
 Manchester, England  
 Courtesy of Yoshua Okón,  
 Mor-Charpenter, Paris,  
 Kaufmann Repetto, Milan



above  
**Latex**, 2012  
Installation view, Orange County Museum of Art,  
Newport Beach, USA  
Courtesy of Yoshua Okón,  
Mor-Charpentier, Paris,  
Kaufmann Repetto, Milan



left  
**Canned Laughter**, 2011  
Installation view,  
Mycellium Ingenium Gallery, Mexico City  
Courtesy of Yoshua Okón,  
Mor-Charpentier, Paris,  
Kaufmann Repetto, Milan