

Gabriel Rico: Unity in Variety Opens at the Institute of Contemporary Art, San Diego on September 24, 2021

Note to Editors: A press preview is scheduled for Thursday, September 23. For details, press@icasandiego.org.



// The artist's first solo exhibition in California will feature a sweeping installation of man-made and natural objects sourced locally in San Diego County

// His "riskiest" exhibition to date transforms the Balboa Park galleries into a futuristic landscape that considers the illusion of a boundary between humanity and the natural world

San Diego, CA, August 23, 2021—The Institute of Contemporary Art, San Diego will inaugurate its Balboa Park gallery with the first California solo show of Mexican artist **Gabriel Rico** (b. 1980, Lagos de Moreno, Mexico) from September 24, 2021 to January 23, 2022. Trained as an architect, Rico works in post-Surrealist and Arte Povera modes, the radical Italian art movement of the 1960s and 70s in which artists



used materials like soil, rags, and twigs. He is celebrated for an experimental, inventive sculptural practice characterized by what he calls mixing seemingly disparate objects alongside coded and personal visual formulas, equations, and philosophical propositions that explore the remnants of the human race, future ruins of our civilization, and 21st century technology. “A fable,” “a post-apocalyptic vision,” and what he says is his “riskiest” exhibition to date, Rico will transform the double height galleries with neon, branches, rocks, shells, gems, taxidermy, glass, sand, and augmented reality into a journey that considers “the illusion of a border” between humanity and the natural world with new sculptures made exclusively in 2021 for the exhibition.

Through a special collaboration with the San Diego Natural History Museum (The Nat)–Rico enjoys working and collaborating with natural history museums– the artist will incorporate taxidermy specimens from the beloved institution’s collection into the exhibition at ICA San Diego and within a site-specific installation within The Nat’s ongoing Unshelved exhibition via a display case intervention with elements typically found in the artist’s practice, such as balls and neon. *Gabriel Rico: Unity in Variety* is organized by Andrew Utt, founding executive director of ICA San Diego and a curator with expertise in Latin American art. The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated exhibition catalogue with the most in-depth scholarship to date on the artist by Utt and Alana Hernández, Executive Director and Curator of CALA Alliance in Phoenix.

“I would like for the exhibition to absorb you,” enthused Rico, who recontextualizes man-made and natural objects—a steak, a shoe, a cactus—into panoramic installations. At a young age, he would gather and collect shells and snails with his mother and today is “interested in objects because they have energy that I cannot control.”

Added Rico, whose art inputs everyday objects into scientific, philosophical, and mathematical equations to achieve a sense of universal balance, said, “The entire ecosystem from Baja California, Sonora, and California works together like a unity: the fish can cross the border, so do mammals and insects.”

“The creations of Mexican artist Gabriel Rico demonstrate the uniqueness of all living beings and non-living objects through a speculative vision of our future,” said Utt. “He has invented an immersive environment with unique inhabitants that exist in the



space between reality and perception. We are thrilled to inaugurate our Balboa Park galleries with his vision.”



Background

Sweeping, immersive, and dynamic, Rico imagines a futuristic landscape akin to the arid terrain and biodiversity of Southern California and Northern Baja California. Greeted by animals, flora, and fauna native to the regions, the viewer descends into a layered, walkable environment filled with sand, coyotes, birds, augmented reality, glass, and human-scaled figures. A series of startling sculptures, *Fish begin to stink by the head* (2020, 2021) resemble human bodies in contemporary life, such as a roughly six foot tall form featuring a flat television screen as a head, a body made of rebar, hand-painted ceramic, and neon,

or a mirrored glass sphere adorned with turkey feathers that crowns a steel body draped in a fabric suggesting an otherworldly ghost or spirit. Nearby, a sleek, pastel-hued wall-based work of found objects, including a painted mask, neon, shell, and a leaf glows (pictured). Overhead, a large-scale mobile measuring nine by nine feet across is suspended above the viewer and comprised of essential human elements—numbers, vowels, the senses of sight, smell, and hearing, and shapes, in neon red, blue, white, and polished brass.

Rico proposes a new logic that respects the natural world, and to that end, punctuates the installation with large, thick panes of transparent glass in mounds of sand, a material of interest to him for its artificiality and invisibility to the animal kingdom. In *can you smell the maths* (2021)—inspired by American poet James Thurber’s “The glass on the field,” in which a flying goldfinch is knocked cold by a plate of glass standing in a field—a pane of glass leaning



against a wall has been shattered by a bird that lies on the ground. For Rico, the question is if a “threshold of equality” can coexist with animals and insects.

The artist often uses augmented reality in his art practice, creating panoramas in which the digital and the physical world collide. Coyotes are a sacred animal with special powers among the Indigenous peoples of the West and Northwest of Mexico, and here they appear as guides. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to launch the ICA San Diego application on their own phones and “follow” the demure coyotes through the exhibition.

About the artist

Gabriel Rico (b. 1980) lives and works in Guadalajara, Mexico. He studied architecture, earning his B.A. from the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Occidente Mexico in 2004. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the 58th Venice Biennale’s International Art Exhibition, *May You Live In Interesting Times* (2019); with recent solo-exhibitions including: *Nature Loves to Hide*, Perrotin, Paris (2020); *The Stone, The Branch, and the Golden Geometry*, Perrotin, Seoul, South Korea (2019); *The Discipline of the Cave*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, USA (2019); *ONE LAW FOR THE LION & THE OX IS OPPRESSION*, Perrotin, New York, USA (2017); *PROXIMIDAD*, The Power Station, Dallas, USA (2017); *DEAD, DEAD, LIVE DEAD*, ASU Art Museum, Tempe, USA (2017); *VIS VIVA*, Gyeonggi Creation Center, Ansan-do, South Korea (2016); *ZEA MAYS, MAZ* (Zapopan Art Museum), Zapopan, Mexico (2015).

The artist is represented by Perrotin, New York and OMR, Mexico City.

A yearlong season dedicated to ecology

The ICA also announced today the details of its 2021-2022 season focused on ecology, *In this broad Earth of ours*, specifically eco-politics, ethics, technology, feminism, and social ecology. In this broad Earth of ours, artists on view, including Rico, will explore how our lives are intertwined with the environment from social, cultural, historical, or political perspectives in an adventurous, thought provoking lineup of shows, public programs, and classes.

Support

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About the Institute of Contemporary Art, San Diego

Opening September 2021, ICA San Diego is a platform for experimental art and learning with a mission to question everything. A living laboratory of art, ideas, and programs unfold inside its galleries totaling more than 8,000 square feet in Balboa Park, nested inside 1,200 acres of lush public gardens, and in Encinitas, in 7,000 square feet of exhibition and education spaces on six acres of coastal landscape overlooking the San Elijo Lagoon. Cutting edge but accessible, daring yet thoughtful, challenging and inviting, the ICA welcomes the community to gather together to learn, question, and experience the new. A rotating, continually changing program of exhibitions, installations, commissions, classes, and workshops reflects an organization committed to the future and on the forefront of art and public life. Founded in 2021, yet evolved from over 100 years of combined experience, the ICA is always free and open to the public. The ICA is located at 1439 El Prado in Balboa Park, ICA Central, and 1550 S. El Camino Real in Encinitas, ICA North.

About the San Diego Natural History Museum

The San Diego Natural History Museum (The Nat) is one of California's oldest and most respected cultural and science institutions. Founded in 1874 by a small group of naturalists, the Museum works to preserve and protect this amazing place we call home. The Museum is located at 1788 El Prado, San Diego, CA 92101 in Balboa Park. For more information, visit sdnat.org. To stay up to date on Museum news, follow The Nat on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and join the discussion on [Facebook](#).

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[#GabrielRicoUnityinVariety](#)**

Featured images

Gabriel Rico, Fish begin to stink by the head (La calibración del arma para matar a Dios), 2021, TV screen, corrugated steel rod, hand-painted ceramic, snail, volcanic rock, neon & metal, 47 ¼ x 72 ⅞ x 45 ¼ in. © Gabriel Rico

Gabriel Rico, XIII from the series - Freedom of manoeuvre, 2021, mix of found objects, neon, shell & leaf, 55 ⅞ x 92 ½ x 7 ⅞ in. © Gabriel Rico



Photography by Diego G. Argüelles, Courtesy of Gabriel Rico Estudio

