

TERESA MARGOLLES

La búsqueda

24 May – 17 August 2014

The works by Mexican artist Teresa Margolles (b. 1963, Culiacán) revolve around themes such as death, violence and social exclusion. Since the start of the 1990s, she has also worked in the forensic medicine department of an autopsy facility in Mexico City, where numerous, mostly anonymous, victims of violent crime are brought in on a daily basis. Her works, which adhere to a minimalist approach, are produced against this societal backdrop. Since 2005, this artist has mainly examined the extreme violence in the northern Mexican border city of Ciudad Juárez and the drug war that is raging there. Also for her first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland, Margolles is addressing Ciudad Juárez as a place of crime. At the center is a series of female homicides, so-called femicides, that has been ongoing since the start of the 1990s. Here, Margolles is primarily interested in the traces that the brutal crimes leave behind on architectures, and how these shape people's everyday lives. By transposing such traces into an exhibition space, the artist generates a charged interplay between mundane presentation and grim realism.

Curator:
Raphael Gygax,
Curator, Migros Museum
für Gegenwartskunst

As a founding member of the artists' group Semefo (Servicio Médico Forense; 1990–99) Teresa Margolles already began her career at the start of the 1990s, addressing explicit materials and the evocative themes that preoccupy her to this day. Even though her works are sometimes very polarizing, the artist does not set out to shock. Instead, she wants to demonstrate the social injustices in her home country, which also continue to exist after death: the anonymous corpses resulting from violent crimes often disappear in mass graves; the same thing happens with deceased whose families cannot raise sufficient funds for a funeral. In Margolles's works, the traces of such dead bodies, even if their presence is only minimal, represent the value system of a society in a state of emergency. In an interview with the exhibition's curator, Raphael Gygax, Margolles explains: "It is a form of perverse minimalism. Historical minimalism has no emotions. However, all of my works are filled with emotions. People are better at concentrating when faced with minimalist forms."

As part of her first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland, Margolles presents a new work consisting of 8 glass panes transferred from Ciudad Juárez. This sound installation focuses on the missing women and the female homicides in Ciudad Juárez. Here, Margolles directs her attention to the traces that the brutal crimes leave behind on architectures. Ciudad Juárez, a city with over a million inhabitants on the border with the USA (El Paso, Texas), is one of Mexico's most rapidly growing cities and has a leading position in the country's crime statistics. However, it appears that this has been changing recently: already in 2012, the number of crime victims dropped significantly, and drug-related crimes in particular saw a decline. However, there is no decrease in the female homicides that have kept occurring since the 1990s. According to Amnesty International, 370 women and girls were killed between 1993 and 2005. Local women's rights organizations put the number of deaths from 1993 to 2013 at over 600. In the first years, the victims were mostly workers at American corporations' assembly factories, whereas in the recent past they have been mainly students. Many of the found corpses have been attacked, raped and mutilated in a sadistic manner. Although arrests have been made, the series of murders is not stopping, and to this day the motives also remain unknown. Such abductions and gender-related murders are also committed in other Mexican states and Central American countries, such as Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras, for instance.

La búsqueda is also a research on sound sensations. The sound comes, or has been recorded, from a train in Ciudad Juárez that goes in and out of the city carrying merchandise produced there. The train crosses over 12 km of the city and the sound it produces can be heard all around the city. The recorded sound has subsequently been transformed by a sound technician in Zurich, thus making the museum an epicenter of pain and tragedy.

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In this exhibition, alongside the new work on the female homicides in Ciudad Juárez, the sculpture *Mesa y dos bancos* can be seen. This comprises a table and two benches, made from a mixture of cement and material taken from the ground, on which there lay the body of a person murdered at the northern Mexican border. Via the presentation of this sculpture in a western city, the Central American cartels' global drug market and the associated relentless murders are thematized in a formally subtle way.

Teresa Margolles's works have been exhibited internationally, for instance at Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (solo exhibition, 2010/11), Venice Biennale (2009), Manifesta (2008), Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (solo exhibition, 2004), Kunsthalle Wien (solo exhibition, 2003) and the Lyon Biennale (2000). In 2010, the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst presented her work *37 cuerpos / 37 Bodies* (2007) as part of the group exhibition *Une Idée, une Forme, un Être – Poésie / Politique du corporel*.

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Sound installation

Intervention with sound frequency on glass panels transported from the historical center of Ciudad Juárez. The audio was recorded from the train that divides the city, and transformed into low frequencies.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist und Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich

Terrace (Mezzanine E1):

Teresa Margolles

Mesa y dos bancos

2013

Made from a mixture of cement and material taken from the ground, on which there lay the body of a person murdered at the northern Mexican border.

Table: 85 x 80 x 200 cm, benches: 50 x 45 x 140 cm each

Sammlung Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst

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