A biotechnological work of art activated by wastewater: The Galerie de l’UQAM presents Mexican artist Gilberto Esparza

Curators: Nuria Carton de Grammont and Véronique Leblanc
Dates: May 10 to June 17, 2017
Opening: Tuesday, May 9, 2017, 5:30 pm

Montréal, April 24, 2017 – The Galerie de l’UQAM presents Mexican artist Gilberto Esparza’s first solo exhibition in Canada: Plantas autofotosintéticas. Working in collaboration with researchers such as engineers, biologists and robotics experts, Esparza produces hybrid entities—part machine, part living organism—that address a number of issues related to the environmental crisis. The artist’s practice creates a stimulating dialogue between contemporary art, science and new technologies, in an effort to examine the impact of human activity on the natural world.

Curated by Nuria Carton de Grammont and Véronique Leblanc, the exhibition Gilberto Esparza. Plantas autofotosintéticas is possible thanks to the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes from Mexico and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.

The exhibition
The exhibition at the Galerie de l’UQAM centres on Gilberto Esparza’s most recent work, Plantas autofotosintéticas (Autophotosynthetic Plants), which has been presented since 2013 in several cities around the world (Lima, Mexico, Linz, Ljubljana, Athens). Both functional and utopian, the work produces an alternative and renewable source of energy by processing the contaminants found in sewage, while offering alternative ways to envision the city’s future. As Montréal celebrates its 375th anniversary, this installation invites us to reconsider the city’s criss-crossing network of underground sewer systems, normally hidden from view and beyond public consciousness, as an energy-generating structure that can feed and maintain a living ecosystem. Also on display are research documents that detail the social issues and artistic processes behind the project.

This exhibition also features a film based on the large-scale project Plantas nómadas (Nomadic Plants, 2008–2013), which chronicles the activities of an autonomous biological robot designed to live on the shores of polluted rivers. Set along the banks of the Rio Lerma and the Rio Grande de Santiago, in Mexico, the work reveals how water pollution and privatization have affected the area’s natural resources and rural populations. A series of photographs from this project are presented concurrently at the Maison du développement durable (Centre for Sustainable Development). By combining art practice with developments in biotechnology, and creating space for education and public awareness, Gilberto Esparza’s work demonstrates the urgent need to radically transform how we manage our resources and energy production through new approaches that are less devastating to human life on Earth.

Video - Presentation of the work Plantas autofotosintéticas: https://vimeo.com/167715023

Video - Presentation of the fabrication process of Plantas autofotosintéticas: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEEuFdfCOzk

Video - Plantas autofotosintéticas in Lima, Peru: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEV0h80ib0s

Video - Presentation of the work Plantas nómadas: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQwYEWAeHTs

Video - Presentation of the artist’s practice, Polluted Art: Gilberto Esparza’s Fuel Cell Symphony: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dvh-yw1ENno

The artist
Gilberto Esparza is interested in the social, economic and political impact of new technologies on urban spaces and the environment. Over the past ten years, he has participated in more than 70 group exhibitions around the world, as well as a dozen solo exhibitions in Mexico, Spain, Slovenia and Peru. He studied Visual Arts at the Universidad de Guanajuato (2003, Guanajuato, Mexico), and Fine Arts at the Universitat Politècnica de València.
(2000, Valencia, Spain). He began working with alternative energy in 2008, and in 2013 he was awarded the TEDActive Prize from The Lincoln Reimagine Project in California, and the Prix Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria, in 2015. Esparza’s use of recycled electronic materials and biotechnology creates a playful and critical context for discussion and awareness within public spaces and art galleries.

gilbertoesparza.blogspot.ca
arronz-art.com

The curators

Nuria Carton de Grammont is an art historian, curator and part-time faculty at Concordia University, where she specializes in Latino-American contemporary art. She holds an MA in Art History from UQAM, a PhD in Art History from Concordia University, and two post-doctorates from the Université de Montréal, including one from the Montréal Centre for International Studies, and the second from the Department of Geography. Carton de Grammont also coordinates the Research Network on Latin America (REAL) at the Université de Montréal. She is the co-editor of Politics, Culture and Economy in Popular Practices in the Americas (Peter Lang, 2016), and has published several articles in magazines such as Oltreoceano, Les Cahiers ALHIM, Fractal, esse arts + opinions, Inter - art actuel and Archée. As a curator, Carton de Grammont has focused on projects that foster interculturalism. In recent years, she has presented Milpa, ritual imprescindible (Botanical Gardens of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016), Espejismos by Catherine Bodmer (Espacio Mexico, Montréal, 2014), Narcotrafic and the art of violence (Center for Ethnographic Research and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Violence, Montréal, 2014). She lives and works in Montréal.

Véronique Leblanc is a curator, writer and part-time faculty in Art History at the Université du Québec à Montréal. The focus of her research is on contextual, process-based and relational art practices, as well as the links between art, ethics and politics. Her most recent exhibitions include Richard Ibhgy & Marilou Lemmens. Putting Life to Work (Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen, Montréal, 2016), Polyphonies (Optica, Montréal, 2015) and faire avec (AdMare, Magdalen Islands, 2013). Leblanc holds an MA in Art History from the Université du Québec à Montréal, and is the recipient of the John R. Porter Prize from the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. She is one of five curators for LandMarks2017/Repères2017, a cross-Canada project initiated by Toronto's Partners in Art, which invites artists to create new works based in or around Canada’s National Parks that take a critical look at how we envision our relationship to the land, as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation. In the fall of 2013, Leblanc was awarded the M&M Curatorial Research Residency Program, organized by Oboro in Montréal and the Laboratorio Arte Alameda in Mexico City, and sponsored by the Conseil des arts de Montréal. That residency was the starting point for the presentation of Gilberto Esparza's work in Montréal. Véronique Leblanc lives and works in Montréal.

Mediation activities

Opening of the exhibition at the Maison du développement durable
Tuesday, May 9, 2017, 12:15 pm
At the occasion of the Maison du développement durable's Summer programming
Suggested donation: 5 $
RSVP: lamdd.org/ete2017

Guided tour of the exhibition with the artist and the curators
Tuesday, May 9, 2017, 4 pm
Galerie de l’UQAM
Free admission

Bioelectronics workshop
Wednesday, May 10 and Thursday, May 11, 2017, 10 am to 5 pm
In partnership with Hexagram UQAM and the Exposition agriculturelle
Registration fees: $ 60
Registration and details: http://hexagram.uqam.ca/content/atelier-en-bioelectronique

Lead by artist Gilberto Esparza, engineer Diego Liedo Lavaniegos and artist and professor Gisèle Trudel, this workshop is intended for any artist, scientist, engineer, student or professional interested in sustainable development. Participants will learn to treat wastewater with biological processes in order to obtain electrical energy from microorganisms. This “green” energy will be used later to experiment with analog electronics and translate biochemical processes into electrical signals to activate devices developed in the workshop. This workshop encourages interdisciplinary reflection and action about the importance of water. It combines art,
engineering and science in the realization of a collective project on bioelectronics that values an ecological approach to technology.

Educational activity prepared by the Cœur des sciences (UQAM)
Dates and details to be confirmed
Includes the visit of a laboratory of the Faculty of Sciences (UQAM) as well as a guided tour of the exhibition at the Galerie de l’UQAM.
Free admission

Guided tours of the exhibition
Available any time. Reservations required with Philippe Dumaine, 514 987-3000, ext. 3280, or dumaine_allard.philippe@uqam.ca

Support provided by

Address and opening hours
Galerie de l’UQAM
Judith-Jasmin Pavilion, Room J-R120
1400 Berri Street (corner of Sainte-Catherine East), Montréal
Berri-UQAM metro

Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 6 pm
Free admission

Information
Phone: 514 987-6150
www.galerie.uqam.ca / Facebook / Twitter / Instagram

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