

My Art Guides

Daniel Garza Usabiaga, the new artistic director of Zona Maco unveils fair's features and tells what we shouldn't miss in Mexico City.

Mara Sartore: In September 2015 you have been appointed artistic director of Zona Maco September, before that you were curator of the Museum of Modern Art and then Chief Curator of Museo Universitario del Chopo, which is one museum of contemporary art of the National University. What is your vision for the upcoming Zona Maco in February?

Daniel Garza Usabiaga: The upcoming Zona Maco will have the same structure of past years: a general section, a section devoted to Modern art, the curated program known as Zona Maco Sur (curated for second occasion by Luis Silva and João Mourão), a section dedicated to young galleries and emergent artists (Nuevas Propuestas/New Proposals, selected by Humberto Moro) and a section focused in design (headed by Cecilia León de la Barra). For the first time, Zona Maco Diseño will occupy an adjacent hall of exhibitions to the one in which the fair takes place. This is a sign of the increasing importance that Zona Maco is given to the specialization of its fairs and, simultaneously, of the consolidation of the art fair and the development of the design section under De la Barra's curatorial program. Regarding the issue of specialization, Zona Maco has been working for a long time to make of the fair a strong and professional event that gathers not only gallerists and collectors, but also institutions and curators, artists and students, and of course the general public; a place in which to interchange ideas, present projects and new initiatives as well as to discuss relevant themes regarding contemporary art. This is the objective of the educational program and platform of Zona Maco. This year we will feature an ambitious program presenting a whole array of outstanding curators, academics and artists that will talk and present their projects, work and ideas. The fair will feature different panel sessions organized by De la Barra, Moro, Silva and Mourão as well as presentations by Jens Hoffmann, Dan Cameron, Marisa Olson, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, among others.



Daniel Garza-Usabiaga

MS: How much does this edition focus on Mexican art scene and how much on the international art scene?

DG: The presence of Mexican galleries and artists is always considerable. Mexican galleries represent 30% of the participating galleries (122) at the fair and local artists are more than well represented. A good example to illustrate this presence of local artists is this year's program of Zona Maco Sur. Silva and Mourão conceptualized a curatorial proposal (Case Study #2: Rhythm is a dancer) that was articulated under certain key concepts such as geometry, movement, the nineties, eyecandy, performance, rhythm, amongst others. There is strong presence of local artists in this section that, in a very productive way, gathers emergent as well as established figures (Carlos Amoraes, Mario García Torres, Debora Delmar, Miguel Monroy, Javier M. Rodriguez, Tania Candiani, Rodolfo Díaz Cervantes, Miguel Fernández de Castro, Manuel Solano). Nevertheless, these artists share the section with a considerable number of other artists from abroad (such as Xavier Veilhan, Federico Herrero, Danielle Tegeder, Dan Rees, Bjorn Melhus). I think this year's Zona Maco Sur illustrates the positive confluence of local and international artists, galleries, collectors, and public that defines the overall mission of the fair. Under this perspective, locally, Zona Maco is a great opportunity for the local public to get to know better the international art scene not only in what concerns production but also regarding ideas, discourses, works and different sort of projects (from curatorial to editorial) of curators, academics, artists, and collectors from abroad. Simultaneously, it is an opportunity to show local art production to an international audience that visits the fair. I think Zona Maco has played a very relevant role in giving visibility to local artists and galleries in an international plane.



Zona Maco 2015

MS: How many galleries will take part in the 2016 edition? There are 122 galleries and 27 studios or initiatives in the Design Section.

MS: Fair around the world have built or are trying to build an "art week", so when people fly to the country for they fair they find a rich program in town. What is happening in Mexico City during Zona Maco?

DG: In this regard, when Zona Maco takes place, galleries, museums or independent spaces develop and showcase remarkable initiatives, exhibitions and other kind of art events. The fair holds in great stem this kind of participation. Overall, it presents something that it is a fact: that the local art scene is active, dynamic, and full of multiple and interesting projects, exhibition and events. A lot of things happen at the fair but outside, in museums, galleries and independent spaces, there is the same sort of energy.

MS: How is the selection of galleries for Zona Maco done?

DG: The galleries in the General Section are selected by a Selection Committee. This year it was conformed by Stefania Bortolami (Bortolami Gallery), Ben Loveless (Galerie Nordenhake) and Patricia Ortíz Monasterio (Galería OMR). The Modern Art section also had a Selection Committee: Enrique Guerrero (Galería Enrique Guerrero), Mariana Perez Amor and Alejandra Yturbe (Galería de Arte Mexicano GAM). As mentioned, Humberto Moro headed Nuevas Propuestas /New Proposals, Cecilia León de la Barra Zona Maco Diseño and Luis Silva and Joao Mourão curated Zona Maco Sur.



Daniel Garza Usabiaga. Photo: Alejandra Carbajal. © Time Out Mexico

MS: How do you see the growing art scene in Mexico?

DG: The Mexican art scene has been very dynamic and interesting for a long time now, from my perspective of course. Nevertheless, and as you mentioned, it is also a growing scene. Each year there are more galleries and more independent initiatives which are very interesting and which allow the artistic and cultural interchange between Mexico and other places. The local context is very interesting and it allows seeing different ways to create platforms for the promotion of art and artistic culture in general.

MS: I'm very interested in these independent art spaces and platforms that are opening. Do private patrons finance them or is the government involved in art?

DG: In other countries non-profits can receive funding from private patrons because certain matters of legislation. In Mexico the law to establish a non-profit institution devoted to art is quite complicated. This has lead artists or the people that run these spaces to find ways to support their initiatives. In this way, their programs are more flexible and, up to a point, experimental; because they don't depend from organizations, institutions or patrons. Nevertheless, this issue places this kind of spaces in a less stable situation, in terms of economy. There are some grants sponsored by local governments but that's something very recent. Others apply and are granted economic support from international institutions.

Most of these spaces and platforms, however, have developed very interesting ways, from educational platforms to the production and sale of series of artworks, in order to raise money and continue operating.

MS: Doesn't this become a bit dangerous meaning that only rich and wealthy people can do this? Is there also an underground art scene in Mexico?

DG: No, it does not have to do with wealth. In fact, most of these kinds of spaces are run with almost no budget. I think it's a matter of creativity in order to raise money, and (almost never) of having huge amounts of money to guarantee the operation of one of these spaces. Several independent spaces hold exhibitions, screen videos, organize book presentations with few resources.

MS: Beyond that could you tell us five places that people shouldn't miss when traveling to Mexico?

DG: Regarding independent spaces, Casa Maaud (<http://www.casamaauad.com/>) holds a very interesting residency program and, also, organizes periodical exhibitions of local and international artists. The Experimental Museum El Eco has a very interesting program of activities and exhibitions and the architecture of the place, design by Mathias Goeritz in the 1950s, is outstanding. I also enjoy the program of the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros in the way they revisit, through contemporary practices, the legacy of the muralist. Casa del Lago has developed a very interesting program of exhibition that has paid special attention to the local scene. I also recommend LIGA, an independent platform that deals with architecture and its culture.

DG: Several galleries, museums and independent spaces are concentrated in the central part of the city. Nevertheless this central area of the city is quite big and comprehends several neighborhoods such as the historical downtown, Santa María, San Rafael, Roma, Juárez, Condesa, Cuauhtémoc, San Miguel Chapultepec and Polanco. Beyond this zone, there are other spaces and landmarks in the south of the city (such as the Museo Carrillo Gil, Anahuacalli, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of the National University – MUAC). As you know, Mexico City is huge. Nevertheless, it has a cultural and artistic offer not only in the center, but also through different areas.

Mara Sartore