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Contact: Greg Svitil
gsvitil@oas.org
Tel. (202) 458-6016

Argentina in Focus: Visualizing the Concept—Cristian Segura/Sergio Vega

On view September 16-November 21, 2010

Art Museum of the Americas

201 18th Street, NW Washington, DC 20006

Gallery talk and press preview: Wednesday, September 15 at 12 noon

Opening reception: Wednesday, September 15 at 6:30 pm

With a parrot speaking into a microphone in its galleries, and its façade in flames, the Art Museum of the Americas of the Organization of American States announces **Argentina in Focus: Visualizing the Concept—Cristian Segura/Sergio Vega**. This exhibition of multi-media artists from Argentina marks AMA's new focus on both emerging and established contemporary artists of the Americas. In the words of OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza, the AMA "will concentrate in showcasing cutting-edge works by forward-looking and talented artists from the Americas. "

Curated by **Alma Ruiz** of The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, this exhibition fuses contemporary trends that took shape geographically apart and that belong to different generations. **Vega** represents the Argentine Diaspora in the US, while **Segura** has emerged from a local Argentine setting.



Cristian Segura *Patinar en el MACBA, Museu d' Art Contemporani de Barcelona* (Skateboarding at MACBA, Museu d' Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2008)
Wood, fabric, paper, metal, polyester, and video

Cristian Segura (b. 1976), who lives in Tandil (a city in the province of Buenos Aires), follows a line of work that comprises a range of strategies to deal with the mechanisms and variability of contemporary art, always with a critical and reflexive eye on the institutional terrain. He took an early interest in art, which led him to become a museum volunteer at fourteen, an exhibitions coordinator at nineteen, and the director of Tandil's municipal art museum at twenty-three.

His experiences with navigating issues surrounding museum work motivated him to produce artwork of his own, and these themes remain vital to **Segura's** output. He explores the conservation of the artistic histories that are housed in the institution, the dependence on political and public support, as well as the idea of permanence and preservation of the arts when a museum can fall victim to its own poor management and a lack of interest, or even literally be consumed by fire. In *Incendio en el museo* (Fire in the museum, 2010), a piece created for this exhibition, **Segura** simulates flames on the exterior of the Art Museum of the Americas, calling attention to the real possibility of objects vanishing from the natural world in a matter of hours or minutes.

In *Skateboarding at MACBA, Museu d' Art Contemporani de Barcelona* (*Patinar en el MACBA, Museu d' Art Contemporani de Barcelona*, 2008), **Segura** addresses museums being used for purposes beyond what they are intended for. His piece includes imagery of skateboarders using the steps outside of the institution for performing tricks, incorporating the hat of a security guard who would be tasked with preventing such use.

Sergio Vega (b.1959) is interested in the concept of Latin America as an exotic place and therefore desirable to outsiders for reasons that only account for a small portion of reality at most. His studies of Argentine-born Spanish-colonial historian Antonio de León Pinelo, who believed the Garden of Eden to be located in the center of South America, led **Vega** to embark on the body of work known as Paradise in the New World, which continues to evolve.

The artist creates exotic worlds of felt tree cutouts which light struggles to penetrate, documents the slashing and burning of forests, and confronts viewers with images of slums and extreme poverty. The images are a harsh contrast to the concept of Latin America as a place of quasi-biblical exoticism and mythology.



Sergio Vega *Across the Corpus Callosum* (Al otro lado del corpus callosum, 2005), Stuffed parrot, microphone, paint

In *Across the Corpus Callosum* (Al otro lado del corpus callosum, 2005), **Vega** invites a parrot to speak at a museum. The stuffed parrot perches behind a microphone before a color sampler that shows the range of hues found in parrots' feathers. **Vega** had noticed that the Bible depicts parrots as the only non-human animal capable of speech, as well as the only animal that exists in every color gamma. Exhibition curator Alma Ruiz notes that "the parrot's anthropomorphic qualities and its mimicry skills have been discussed by scientists, philosophers, and writers: this time it is **Vega**, a visual artist, who invites the parrot to speak in the museum, the very institution that **Segura** has held under a microscope."

Argentina in Focus: Visualizing the Concept—**Cristian Segura/Sergio Vega** brings together the work of two Argentine artists of different generations. Art collector Dani Levinas, who brought this project to AMA and co-organized the show, was much inspired by conceptual artist and critic Brian O'Dougherty's legendary phrase "Space now is not just where things happen; things make space happen."

Levinas wanted to bring two artists from his native Argentina whose works reflect the diversity of contemporary art in that country: "**Sergio Vega** brings the world into the museum and Segura takes the museum out into the world."

Segura has participated in many solo and group exhibitions, among them: "Museum Expansion," John Erickson Museum of Art (variable locations) (2010); "I Trienal de Chile: Los límites del arte," Santiago (2009); "Talleres abiertos: ¿Quiénes somos? ¿De dónde venimos? ¿A dónde vamos?," Hangar, Barcelona (2008); "Macrocash," Centro de Expresiones Contemporáneas, Rosario, Argentina (2007); and "Mirador urbano: La (ex)posición del espectador," Galería del Poste, Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Buenos Aires (2006).

Vega has an extensive exhibition history. His work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions around the world, among them: "Paradise: Real Time," Ikon Eastside, Birmingham, England (2010); "Third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art: Against Exclusion," Moscow (2009); "Crocodilian Fantasies, Palais de Tokyo," Paris (2006); "51st Biennale di Venezia: Always a Little Further," Arsenale, Venice (2005); "Etnografía: Modo de Empleo—Arqueología, Bellas Artes, Etnografía y Variedades," Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas (2002); "Sonsbeek 9: Locus Focus," Kronenberg Mall and Arnhem Museum of Modern Art, Arnhem, the Netherlands (2001); and "Kwangju Biennale 2000: Exotica Incognita," Kwangju, South Korea (2000).

[CLICK HERE](#) to read curator Alma Ruiz's catalog essay "Two Individual Visions."

This exhibition is linked to the Smithsonian Latino Center's "Argentina at the Smithsonian 2010" which commemorates this country's Bicentennial. This series will feature programs and exhibitions which highlight the history, arts, culture, and science of Argentina.

Also on view on the museum's second floor during this time span will be **Emilia Gutiérrez: Drawings and Paintings**.