

Sicardi |
Ayers
Bacino

Gabriel de la Mora:
Unearthing the Mirror

January 21 to
February 27, 2021



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3,983 I, 2020
Pigmented turkey feathers on museum cardboard
31 1/2 × 31 1/2 × 1 9/16 in.
(80 × 80 × 4 cm.)

Neornithes, or: The (Un)Buried Mirror

I.

The recovery of the visual forms of ancient civilizations and the appropriation of the remote indigenous past have been recurrent impulses in the practice of important Latin American artists and architects, particularly between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th. Within these early tendencies of modernity, during the dictatorial rule of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico an idea was formulated of constructing a present in synchrony with the technological advances of the developed world (e.g., electric lighting) in order to renew the dislocated social temporality of pre-Hispanic cultures, transforming it into a monument of the present. In this regard, it has been maintained that the Porfirian appropriation of pre-Hispanic cultures served only to impel the notion of past as spectacle in the process of the consolidation of the nation-state.

II.

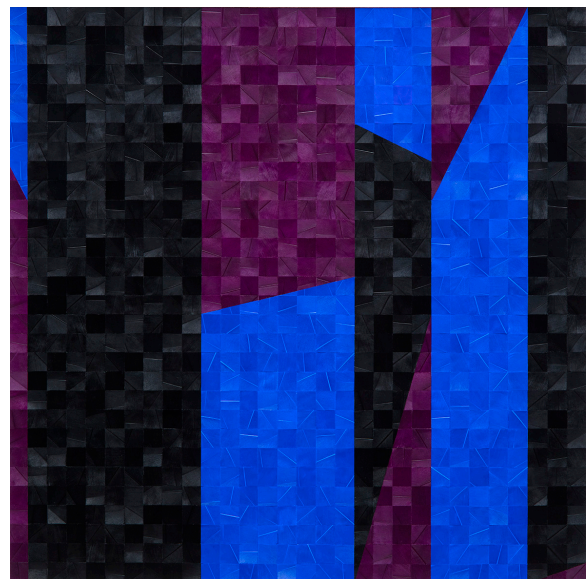
Shortly after the overthrow of the Mexican autocrat, this work on the ancient past drew closer to the life of the average citizen, in that it aimed to generate identity connections linked to a post-revolutionary civic pedagogy. That is, after Díaz, the images of Mayan and Aztec culture were made to form part of an array of murals

where the elaborated representations of this remote past interacted daily with the circulatory and transit flows of the urban public in the form of a continuum and without the mediation of a technological discourse. The city and its artistic devices adopted the imaginary of the past as part of a complex condition shaping the present.

III.

The contemporary artist Gabriel de la Mora has created the series *Neornithes*, two-dimensional works made with feathers that adopt as their titles the scientific name used to classify all birds. These works, in monochrome or with abstract color patterns, make use of colonial feathered art, which dates from the Viceroyalty of New Spain (16th and 17th centuries) and which encompassed fabrics and decorations that contained an expression of Nahua culture. The *Neornithes* unearth old debates over the appropriation and recovery of the indigenous past, transporting them this time onto the terrain of the universalist aspirations of the avant-garde movements that advocated abstract art in its Latin American versions, from which Mexican modern art was programmatically removed, unlike in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

943 I, 2020
Pigmented turkey feathers on museum cardboard
16 7/8 × 16 7/8 × 1 9/16 in.
(43 × 43 × 4 cm.)



IV.

A characteristic of Gabriel de la Mora's working "method" is its capacity to generate compositional systems for two-dimensional works founded on a productive logic which the artist applies to specific materials. Paradoxically, these materials (human hair, eggshells, feathers) become camouflaged through use of a chromatic pattern taken from a modernist point of reference that underpins it. In the concrete case of the *Neornithes* series, the cutting and affixing of these materials mosaic-style on painted paper is carried out with almost mathematical precision, to the degree that the result minimizes the effect or covers up the compositional materials that act in correlation to the color of the feathers and are organized according to chromatic patterns derived from the modern artist Josef Albers.

I decided to begin the series of feathers with turkey feathers, since this bird, known in its undomesticated form as the guajolote, is Mexican and originates in the American continent; I pigmented the feathers in a commercial style to obtain colors based largely on natural combinations from various birds.

When we see a composition from the *Neornithes*, we are made to appreciate a kind of relief-collage-mosaic wherein are concealed the delicate plumages that compose the works, only to appear as pixilated fragments of a whole whose material we are unaware of or cannot precisely identify.

V.

I have made some pieces where the same composition or image is made with hair in one and with feathers in another, thus showing the evolution of the series, and for about a year and a half I've been exploring the third stage of this series using fish scales, and with this the hair of mammals (humans), turkey feathers, and the scales of different fish or reptiles connect the series in a certain way with the theory of the evolution of species. Mammals, birds, and reptiles alike may be found in water, in the air, and on earth, and in the gestation of these three different species, scales, feathers, and hair are equally formed with keratin and contain genetic information.

It is a fact that the feathers of the *Neornithes* are elements that carry genetic information. Nonetheless, and prior to the fall of Tenochtitlán, feathers were social markers in the Mexica system and fundamental elements in rituals and religious acts, many of which were devoted to the mythical Quetzalcóatl (the plumed serpent).

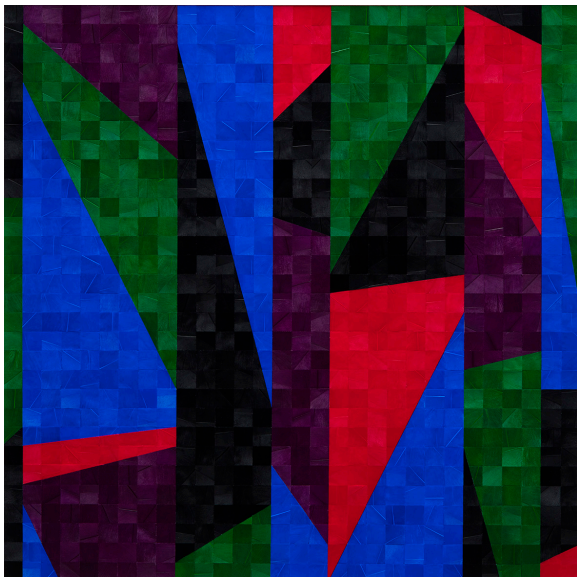
VI.

Pre-Hispanic Mexico was not alien to obsidian mirrors, a stone that was also employed to cut the plumages that the artisans would affix to a canvas.

Gabriela Rangel

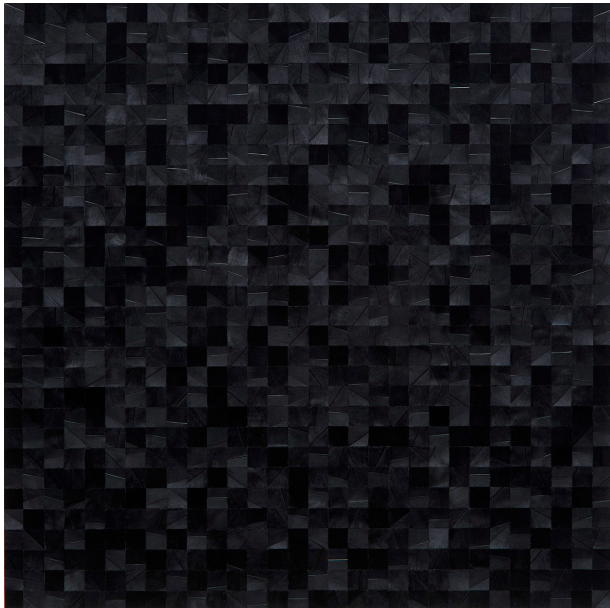
Brooklyn, December 30, 2020

Text translated by Christopher Winks)

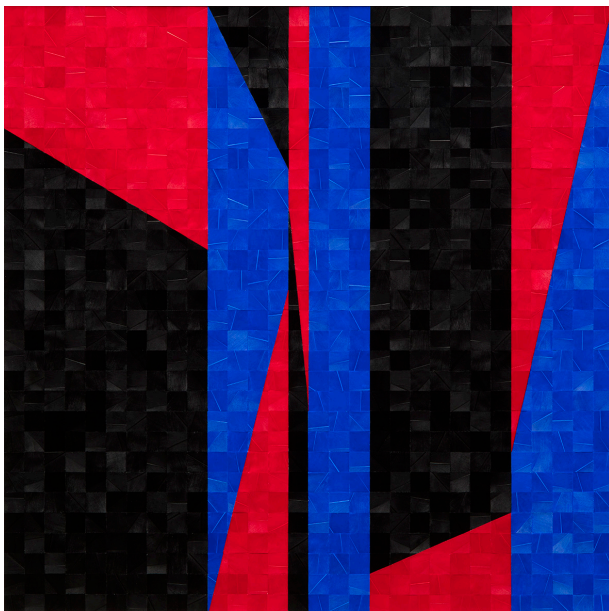
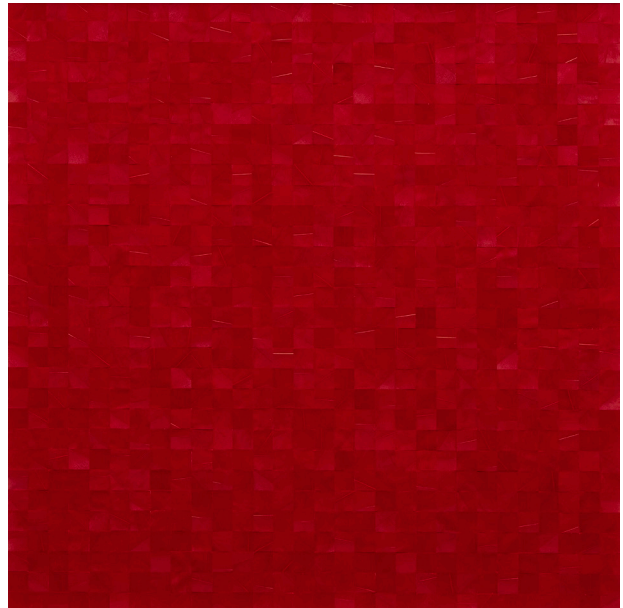


1,076 II, 2020
Pigmented turkey feathers on museum cardboard
16 7/8 × 16 7/8 × 1 9/16 in.
(43 × 43 × 4 cm.)

900 V, 2020
Pigmented turkey feathers on museum cardboard
16 7/8 × 16 7/8 × 1 9/16 in. (43 × 43 × 4 cm.)



900 VI, 2020
Pigmented turkey feathers on museum cardboard
16 7/8 × 16 7/8 × 1 9/16 in. (43 × 43 × 4 cm.)



992 II, 2020
Pigmented turkey feathers on museum cardboard
16 7/8 × 16 7/8 × 1 9/16 in. (43 × 43 × 4 cm.)



1,117 II, 2020
Pigmented turkey feathers on museum cardboard
16 7/8 × 16 7/8 × 1 9/16 in. (43 × 43 × 4 cm.)