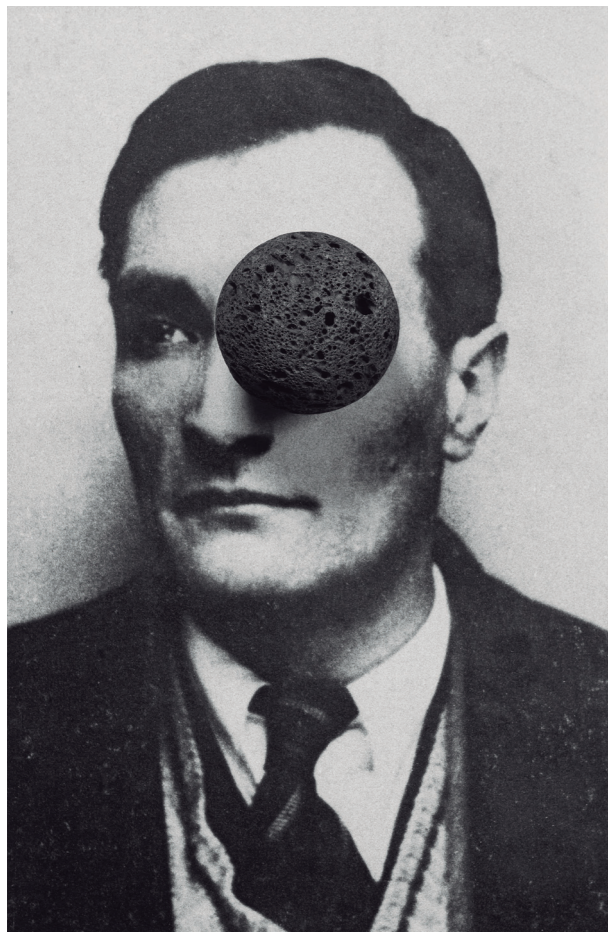




Abraham Cruzvillegas, *The Friday Workshop*, 2016.
Five flower pots with cacti.
Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.



Rometti Costales, *Antonin Atónito*, 2015.
Black and white digital print.
Courtesy of the artists and gallery joségarcía ,mx

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THE SIERRA OF THINGS

Up until now I have been an artist, which is to say, I have been a manipulated man.
"Lo que vine a hacer a México"
(What I Came to Do in Mexico, *El Nacional*, 1936),
Antonin Artaud



Rudolf Zabel, Photograph of the Tarahumaran Sierra, 1925.
Black and white photograph on glass plates. Reproduction authorized by Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Museo Nacional de Antropología INAH-CANON / Secretaría de Cultura - INAH - MNA - MEX

ARTAUD 1936

FEB. 10 — APR. 01, 2018



Javier Téllez, *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, 2016. Still.
Courtesy of the artist and Koenig & Clinton, Brooklyn

With works by: Antonin Artaud, Bruno Botella, Raymonde Carasco, Rometti Costales, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Germán Cueto, Nicolás Echevarría, Lucio Fontana, María Izquierdo, José Clemente Orozco, Luis Ortiz Monasterio, Nancy Spero, Luis Alberto Spinetta, Javier Téllez, Rudolf Zabel
Curator: Manuel Cirauqui

MUSEOTAMAYO

This exhibition commemorates the legendary figure of Antonin Artaud, his trip to Mexico in 1936, and the influence of his artistic and literary legacy—as well as that of his life—across the entire American continent. Linking objects from pre-Hispanic cultures with modern and contemporary artworks and archival elements, this exhibition draws connections among Artaud’s present, past and future, situating us in a continuum or *anachronic present* in which everything is linked. Impulses, gestures and traces coexist in the exhibition, emulating Artaud’s thought process and dismantling the linear order of history, constructing a particular geography. The exhibit will thus feature various works by artists who, over the past five decades, have responded to Artaud’s work and celebrated his experience of a Mexico which is at once tangible and impossible.

Actor, poet, playwright, draughtsman, heretic of surrealism and a martyr to psychiatric institutions, Antonin Artaud (Marseille, 1896 – Ivry-sur-Seine, 1948) was an uncomfortable character in his time—Only in the last years of his life he received the recognition that nowadays is considered canonical and unquestionable. His writings on theater, but also on cinema, as well as his explorations on the boundaries of spoken language, made their mark on multiple schools of thought and art in the twentieth century, from performance art to philosophy, as well as visual arts. And yet, what remains of his work—around thirty books, thousands of handwritten pages, drawings, a handful of sound recordings, as well as the feature films where he acted—does not reflect the traumatic impact of his path on modern and contemporary culture. Among the landmark moments of his lifetime we can highlight his nine-month stay in Mexico in 1936, and a mythical visit to the Sierra Tarahumara mountain range, which will constantly reappear in his most important writings right until his death.

Beyond the chronological specificity that the exhibition’s title would seem to imply, *Artaud 1936* sets out to eschew the historical boundaries of Artaud’s travel through Mexico, in order to give an account of the timelessness of his experience, and to place it in continuity with the work of several artists who would later rethink it. The exhibition will have two stages, between which some mutations and changes will mediate: *La sierra de las cosas (The Sierra of Things)*, from February 10 to April 01, and *La tinta invisible (The Invisible Ink)*, from April 05 to May 20. Each of these two periods will present a complementary selection of works and archival elements, replacing objects, changing their places, encouraging events and encounters. In this way, the same exhibit will be presented in two different versions, with related contents. This duplicity will replicate, in some way, Artaud’s estrangement towards himself, and the unstable persistence of his sensibility in others.

His life and work have been, since his death in 1948, an inexhaustible object for revision and interpretation. His image, dream and myth replace the man, where history can offer but fragments. And *Artaud 1936* is, in this sense, a radically anachronistic project, underpinned by the voids and paradoxes of Artaud’s existence: the lack of documentation of his trip to the Sierra Tarahumara, his experience of rituals linked to peyote; the paradox of his trip to Mexico, which physically lasts for nine months but spiritually spreads over

15 years, from the writing of *La Conquête du Mexique* in 1933, to the dance of *Tutuguri* in *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* in 1947. From these imaginary or hallucinatory movements, we find a powerful symbol in the dagger depicted by Artaud during his time as an inmate of one of the mental asylums where he spent the years of World War II. A dagger wrapped in fishing hooks and stones which, a few days before his arrival in the port of Veracruz on February 1936, a *santero* officiant in Havana had offered him as an object of protection; a dagger which, naturally, the troubled traveler would misplace at a later point of his trip.



Bruno Botella, *Artaud le Clodo*, 2017. Ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Samy Abraham, Paris

Unreal and viral, Artaud’s Mexican dream is in this exhibition fused with the visions of artists whom he saw and loved—María Izquierdo, Luis Ortiz Monasterio—, those who would emulate his path decades later, and with objects which he might never have seen, yet nonetheless *observe him* from different enclaves of the museum space: masks, like the one by Mexican artist Germán Cueto, which coexist with the death mask of the French poet and playwright; drums of Aztec (*teponaztlis*) and Tarahumara (*ramporas*) origin, in whose hypnotic rhythms Artaud would project his idea of an existence in a state of permanent trance; ceremonial knives (*técpatl*) and obsidian mirrors, tools of mediation in an Otherworld, organized by sophisticated and brutal rituals; evocations of the Conquest in the paintings of José Clemente Orozco, which resemble the scenes Artaud was able to imagine in his visions of Mexico; and ethnographical images of the Rarámuri community taken by Rudolf Zabel in the years around Artaud’s travel, which show us what could have been their strange encounter.

Some connections are evident; others, explicit. In other cases, the exhibition traces latent ties with objects from the past and the future, two territories with which Artaud held a legendary and divinatory relationship. These connections and links are inscribed with an *invisible ink*, the reading of which takes us through the bizarre pathways of Artaud’s influence; an influence which affects all of those who are to celebrate him in the future, yet also bears repercussions on the past by force of its new interpretations of colonization, medieval epidemics, oriental theater, and psychiatric power—the enemy to poetry and magic. Becoming exposed to Artaud’s figure equals exposure to a contagion which for many has been irreversible.

Among the modern and contemporary works included in the exhibition, we can highlight the evocations of Artaud executed in the sixties and seventies by artists such as Lucio Fontana—who in 1968 designed a system of oval plates for marking the pages of a biography of Artaud—and Nancy Spero, who at the time assumed the writer as an alter ego in whose existential rage, sexual conflict, and linguistic unraveling she spontaneously recognized herself. Likewise, significant figures of recent cinema, such as the French Raymond Carasco and the Mexican Nicolás Echevarría, sought out Artaud’s footprints in works halfway between the documentary and the poetic essay, through which we can get to know key aspects of the Tarahumara culture and of the pre-Hispanic Mexican antiquity, in which Artaud envisioned a future for Europe. Simultaneously, Argentinian musician Luis Alberto Spinetta produced, in 1973, *Artaud*, one of the most influential records in Latin American rock, in which he displayed a poetic expression filled with hallucinatory imagery, howls, whispers and sudden rhythmic shifts.

More recently, artists such as Abraham Cruzvillegas or Javier Téllez have carried out projects in which Artaud’s figure is emulated directly or indirectly. From the latter we can highlight his films *To Have Done with the Judgement of God* (2015) and *La Conquista de México (The Conquest of Mexico)*, 2012). In the first, Artaud’s legendary radio recording, which includes direct references to Tarahumara rites, is broadcast for the first time in the language and land of this people native to the Sierra; in the second, Téllez takes the programmatic text of the “Theatre of Cruelty” into the context of a psychiatric institution in latter-day Mexico. This Venezuelan artist likewise contributes to this exhibition with a number of documentary pieces, among which is a compilation of the French writer’s books containing Mexican references. Cruzvillegas, on his part, displays his random tracking of Artaud’s figure in Paris, through found objects (*Autodestrucción 3: Mots et choses*, 2013) and fictitious maps (*Autodestrucción 3: avant et après le voyage d’Antonin Artaud à la terre rouge*, 2013). Constantly reflecting on Artaud’s impulses and gestures, Cruzvillegas also contributes with a piece carried out *in situ* for Museo Tamayo (*Glossolalia*, 2018). With this work, accompanied by a performance, the artist evokes the hammer with which the French poet marked the rhythm of his declamations and vociferations. For their part, artists Rometti Costales and Bruno Botella propose an approximation to various aspects of Artaud’s legacy: be it his graphical work, which evidently echoes on Botella’s

drawings (*Artaud le Clodo*, 2017); or his poetic and anarchic reinvention of shamanism, which Rometti Costales reactivate through the character of Azul Jacinto Marino and which materializes in vegetable sculptures that are at times imposing (*Columna de plumas, courtesy Azul Jacinto Marino* [Feather Column, courtesy Azul Jacinto Marino], 2016) and at times fragile and nomadic (*Escalas Psiconáuticas de un espacio de igualdad en flor* [Psychonautic Scales of a Space of Equality in Bloom], 2015).

Reinforcing in each gallery the idea of a sudden dialog among objects—a *Sierra* of things—the exhibition’s rhythm is set by the presence, on each space, of an issue of *El Nacional* newspaper, on which Artaud would regularly write during his stay in Mexico. On this medium, the poet and playwright would capture his reflections on the contrast between European culture and modern-day Mexico, and between the aspirations of the artistic avant-garde and the potential of a past that is equally remote and imminent. Time and time again, poetic time clashes with historical time, drawing filigrees and paradoxical associations. For Artaud, the artwork was a hybrid between the document and the totem. Likewise, the selection of works and objects answers, in part, to a documentary interest on the spread of gestures which bear the sign of Artaud, implicitly or explicitly. On the other hand, the works often project a totemic presence, such as that of ritual emblems. Tracks and symbols, tools and visions cross their gazes within the space of *Artaud 1936*.



Nancy Spero, *Artaud Painting – Une fatigue de commencement du monde*, 1970. Gouache, ink and collage on paper. © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts/Licensed by VAGA, New York, N. Fotografía: Gasull Fotografía. Courtesy of the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA)