

**Gabriel Kuri: *sorted, resorted***

**6 September 2019 – 5 January 2020**

Curated by: Zoë Gray

Gabriel Kuri knows how many beans make five. Working as an undercover economist, he creates sculptures that embody question of value, arresting usually intangible flows of information in witty and engaging forms. His practice is strikingly material and his exhibition at WIELS adopts material as its organizing principle, sorting his works into four categories: paper, plastic, metal, and construction materials. This is an absurdly simplistic approach to complex, conceptually driven works that are rarely made of just one element. It was in part inspired by the way that we sort refuse, colour-coding waste according to its components. Adopting this system – shaped by environmental policy and the desire to establish a circular economy – Kuri asked himself what would happen if he were to categorise his own work following the same logic.

Kuri gathers his resources from a variety of sites before combining them in a manner that draws upon tradition of assemblage with a nod to Surrealist montage, fusing references from his native Mexico with his adopted home, Belgium. His exhibition at WIELS – his first institutional solo show in Brussels, where he has lived for the past 16 years – highlights the hybrid nature of his playful work. It comprises over 60 works, including new pieces produced for the occasion, revealing both the diversity of Kuri's formal approach and the consistency of his underlying themes: flows of information, notions of commercial and cultural value, consumerism, as well as material and its poetic (mis)use.

Many of Kuri's pieces are themselves systems for sorting. The opening section of the show establishes categorization as central to his approach, featuring works that adopt the form of noticeboards or punch-cards, or his waste bins as pie-charts. This is followed by four sections presenting works according to the categories of plastic, paper, metal, and construction materials. Diverse in form and scale, the works are installed to create different rhythms for viewing Kuri's dynamic sculptural practice.

## **PUBLICATION**

WIELS creates publications to offer in-depth analysis of artistic practices and to broaden the international visibility of the artists with whom it works. This exhibition is accompanied by a book featuring an introduction by senior curator Zoë Gray and an essay by art historian Cathleen Chaffee (Chief Curator, Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo), and four texts exploring our material world by Brian Dillon (author, Professor of Creative Writing at Queen Mary, University of London). It is designed by OK-RM (London) and published in English with translations in French and Dutch.

## **Extracts from Cathleen Chaffee:**

“Kuri often borrows from the lexicon of Anthony Caro's curved steel planes, John McCracken's reflective Minimalist planks, and Giovanni Anselmo's earth-bound jagged stones. But he inevitably balances such allusions to the Modernist sculptural tradition against small but intractable nubbins of geographic and temporal specificity: a ticket stub, a cigarette butt, a receipt, a hotel shampoo bottle, a seashell. These are patently remains, remainders, evoking the stuff of travel that hitchhikes home in our suitcase linings and gathers in grey paper balls at the bottom of our coat pockets. Transformed into sculptures, however, they are also aide-mémoires, reminders.”

“*Untitled (scratch lotto oysters)*, 2019 [is] a work structured [according to] the outcome of a game. In the top two of four rows, five scratch-off lottery tickets ordered in ascending size and potential value are each positioned above an open oyster shell, held in place by magnets on a stainless-steel board. Things get more complicated in the bottom half of the composition, however. Here, the pattern seems to fall apart; the lotto tickets and shells proving to be as nonconformist as the beans in his plaques. A much more traditional and labour-intensive game of chance—hunting for oysters in the hope that they contain pearls—faces off against its contemporary counterpart. Having scratched the surface just enough to reveal the tickets’ QR codes, only Kuri knows their true value. A potential buyer of the artwork must therefore decide whether to discover if the tickets are winners at the cost of destroying the piece. And these glittery tickets, images of pure economic potential, catch the light just the same as the empty nacreous shells, so much hope rhyming perfectly with rubbish from a seaside lunch, gluey with bivalve remains.”

“All these works using shells and beans, objects which once operated as commodity money, are what Kuri has called “pre-rational or primal” organic forms with which he disrupts, or at least pokes fun at, the façade of rigor concealing the speculation, superstition, and rumour that fuel economic systems. In so doing, they evoke the work of Marcel Broodthaers, specifically projects from the 1970s in which he mooted the systems that govern the economic value of art.”

“Travel [...] inspired Kuri’s relatively large body of recent work using stainless steel. Designed to resist traces of the body, it has become the material we most often find ourselves leaning on in public places. As Kuri has noted, “A lot of my [...] reflections have been in public space, while I’m travelling in trains or airplanes or in public restrooms where I see all these stainless steel fittings and devices. [...] They have to be resistant to repeated use, so the material itself has a reason, a resonance.” In his 2019 installation *Tongues and Holes* (p.XX), examples of the kinds of stainless steel paper towel dispensers that Kuri has encountered in different restrooms around the world are adorned with pink seashells. The ribald anthropomorphism of the paper towel “tongues” and accompanying seashells undercuts the promise of sterility that is largely behind stainless steel’s ubiquity in high-traffic restrooms.”

1970 born in Mexico City. Lives and works in Brussels.

Institutional solo exhibitions include Oakville Galleries, Oakville (2018); Altefabrik, Rapperswil (2016), Galerie Kukje, Seoul, Korea (2015); Aspen Art Museum (2014); The Common Guild, Glasgow (2014); Parc Saint Léger, Pougues-les-Eaux (2013); ICA Boston (2011); South London Gallery, London (2011); Museion, Bolzano (2010); Kunstverein Freiburg (2010); Kunstverein Bielefeld (2010).

Recent group exhibitions include *Converter*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2018); *Autorreconstrucción: Detritus*, Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte, Mexico City (2018); *ISelf Collection: Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2017); *We Are Here: We are Everywhere*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2017); *Living Apart Together: Recent Acquisitions*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2017); *Desert X*, Coachella

Valley (2017); *L'esprit du Bauhaus*, Musée Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris (2016); *The Natural Order of Things*, Fundación JUMEX, Mexico City (2016); *me – new forms of self-portraiture*,

Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main (2016); *The Corner Show*, Extra City Kunsthall, Antwerp (2015); *12. Bienal de la Havana*, Havana, Cuba (2015); *Beaufort Beyond Borders*, Beaufort Triennial (2015); *Made in L.A. 2014*, The Hammer Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles (2014); *Between Critique and Absorption: Contemporary Art and Consumer Culture*, Haggerty Museum of Art, Milwaukee (2014); *Soft Pictures*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2013); *México Inside Out*, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth (2013); *ILLUMinations*, La Biennale di Venezia - 54th International Art Exhibition, Central Pavilion, Giardini, Venice (2011).