

# RODRIGO VALENZUELA | MUECAS



Rodrigo Valenzuela, *New Land C023*; Photo: © Galerie Kandlhofer

Gallery Kandlhofer is pleased to present, starting Tuesday, February 25th 2025 *MUECAS*, a new solo exhibition by Rodrigo Valenzuela (b. 1982, Chile) which will be on view at Brucknerstrasse 4, 1040 Vienna until Friday 28th of March 2025. It is the artist's seventh exhibition with the gallery.

Bringing together works from his *New Land* and *Garabatos* series, along with the ceramic *Muecas* sculptures, this exhibition continues Valenzuela's critical examination of the socio-political landscapes that shape human experience. His research-driven practice often focuses on the struggles of labourers, the persistence of historical injustices, and the potential for collective resistance. By isolating familiar forms and placing them in unexpected contexts, Valenzuela challenges the framework of collective memory, creating a compelling narrative around power and the ongoing struggle for agency.

Both his photographs and sculptures operate through translation - of medium, appearance, and context - blurring distinctions and allowing elements to dissolve into one another. His *Garabatos* series, in particular, presents ambiguous sculptural installations within interior spaces, unsettling the possibilities and limitations of non-verbal communication. Organic and industrial structures are pieced together to create compositions reminiscent of makeshift stages or abandoned machinery. This series stems from Valenzuela's research into Latin American subcultures and music scenes during the dictatorship years, following Operation Condor - a CIA-led initiative aimed at suppressing socialist movements in South America by coordinating military regimes. Using archival images, magazines, and films, Valenzuela isolates bodily gestures, transforming these documentary sources into a distinct visual language. By recreating and photographing these movements as abstract sculptures, he conjures a reflection on collective memory and the visceral expression of suppressed voices.

His *Muecas* series features white ceramic sculptures cast from his own hands, posed in contorted, ambiguous gestures and mounted onto aluminium pipes and metal armatures. Inscribed on their surfaces are marks — chiselled dots, lines, and shapes - suggesting the presence of an unspoken or developing language. For Valenzuela, these gestures embody a "motion of desire," forming a lexicon of human expression that often goes unnoticed. By framing these works as attempts to communicate from a place of powerlessness, the *Muecas* contribute to a broader vocabulary of struggle and resilience.

The *New Land* series examines historical narratives such as Manifest Destiny and the Homestead Acts - policies that fuelled westward expansion while reinforcing white European-American supremacy. Created using a labour-intensive toner transfer process on raw canvas, these landscapes reference the bureaucratic burdens endured by immigrants, becoming metaphors for resilience and resistance. Incorporating photographs taken in the Atacama Desert in Chile and the American West, Valenzuela layers these images with hand-drawn elements and acrylic paint.

Valenzuela's work constructs a powerful meditation on power, memory, and resistance. He underscores the intersections of history, identity, and labour, prompting viewers to reconsider the forces that shape social and political realities. In his practice, he blends archival aesthetics with the dynamism of performance, subverting the traditional role of galleries and museums as spaces of canonised beauty and knowledge. Instead, he advocates for a more egalitarian and intuitive approach - one that prioritises lived experience and bodily wisdom over institutional authority.

### **About the artist:**

**Rodrigo Valenzuela** (b.1982, Santiago, Chile) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA, where he is an Associate Professor and Head of the Photography Department at UCLA.

Using staged scenes and digital interventions, Valenzuela's photography, video and installation work is rooted in the contradictory traditions of documentary and fiction, at the same time, these pursuits are equally centered on a semiotic, politically engaged post-capitalist critique of social constructs and civic institutions.

Rodrigo Valenzuela's photographic assemblages are often evocative of the kind of transitional spaces in modern living associated with building construction, urban decline and civil disobedience. These built environments, already a simulacrum of reality, are further complicated by his technique of using his own photographic work as backdrops against which additional installations are seamlessly built and rephotographed. In this way a complex sense of spatial displacement is created. Taken as a whole his work makes poetic use of the liminal spaces that modern living so often places us within, locations that are always on the threshold of being built or sliding into decline. Valenzuela speaks of travelling across the US by car and paying witness to the parts of the landscape that we look away from, the discarded parts of the American Dream that line the roadside mile after mile.

Valenzuela is the recipient of the 2025 Foundation of Contemporary Art/ Richard Pousette-Dart award, 2024 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation award, 2023 Harpo Foundation Grant and the National Endowment for the Arts. He has received the 2021 Guggenheim Fellowship in Photography, the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, Joan Mitchell Award, Art Matters Foundation Grant, and the Artist Trust Innovators Award. Recent solo exhibitions include The Griffin Museum of Photography, Winchester, MA; Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockland, ME; The Print Center, Philadelphia, PA; BRIC Arts Media, NY; Screen Series at the New Museum, NY; Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, OR; Orange County Museum, Santa Ana, CA; Portland Art Museum, OR; Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA.

Recent residencies include the Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA, Dora Maar Fellowship, Ménerbes, France; Fountainhead Residency, Miami FL; Core Fellowship at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Madison, ME; MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, NH; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE; Lightwork, Syracuse, NY, and the Center for Photography at Woodstock, NY.

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### **Rodrigo Valenzuela | MUECAS**

Opening reception: Tuesday, 25th of February 2025 | 6 - 8 PM

Exhibition dates: 25th of February - 28th of March 2025

Address: Brucknerstrasse 4, 1040 Wien

Contact: Galerie Kandlhofer; Email: [info@kandlhofer.com](mailto:info@kandlhofer.com), Phone: +43 1 5031167

Opening Hours

Di - Fr 11 AM - 6 PM

Sa 11 AM - 4 PM

We kindly ask you to report and are available for further questions at [info@kandlhofer.com](mailto:info@kandlhofer.com) or +43 1 5031167

Additionally, we want to invite you to the exhibition preview in the presence of the artist on February 25th starting at 6:00 pm at the gallery.

All photo material on the exhibition, such as work images, will be added shortly and can be accessed [here](#).

Yours Faithfully

Galerie Kandlhofer