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## A Century of Mexican Creativity at Art Basel Hong Kong

Think of Projectos Monclova's booth as a well-curated dive into art history, showing the titans of Mexican Modernism alongside the superstars of today.

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"2.96" (2022) from the series "Tablas," by Eduardo Terrazas. The gallery Projectos Monclova curated a mix of works by well-established Mexican artists, like Mr. Terrazas, and current stars for its booth at Art Basel Hong Kong. WhiteBalance, via Projectos Monclova

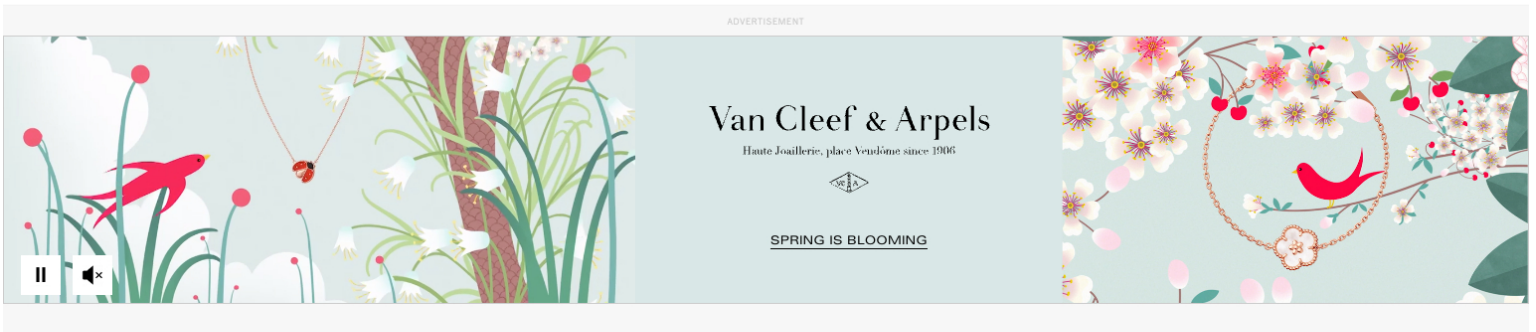
By Ray Mark Rinaldi  
March 22, 2023

MEXICO CITY — Art fairs are full of galleries with dreams of launching the art world's next big thing. Exhibitors pack their booths with work by promising newcomers and talk them up relentlessly, hoping they will break through with the collectors and critics who wander the aisles.

[Proyectos Monclova](#) of Mexico City takes a different approach. Instead of banking on the future, it invests in the past, bringing to fairs artists who made their reputations decades ago in Mexico and whose careers it says it believes are ready for a turn in the international spotlight.

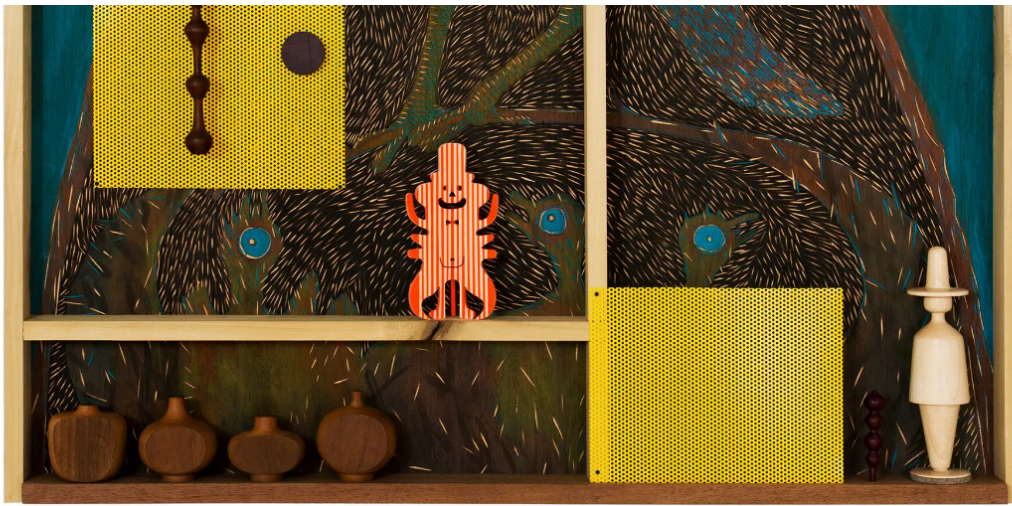
Alongside all those potential stars of tomorrow on display at this year's Art Basel Hong Kong are Proyectos Monclova's lineup of colorful, geometric weavings by 87-year-old Eduardo Terrazas — famous for being a co-designer of the [1968 Mexico City Olympics poster](#), with its psychedelic black-and-white lettering and rainbow-inspired rings — and stone carvings by [Ángela Gurriá](#), a central figure of Mexican Modernism who died on Feb. 17 at 93. The gallery is also showing small sculptures from the early land artist Helen Escobedo who died in 2010 at 76.

Proyectos Monclova also represents top names in Mexico's current scene, including Gabriel de la Mora, who incorporates discarded things like match boxes and turkey feathers into his work; the multimedia artist Edgar Orlaineta; and Yoshua Okón, who is best known for his video work.



The gallery is combining work old and new in its booth, presenting an exhibition that crosses the years and serves as a quick history lesson on Mexico's modern and contemporary art. It is a fitting move for the gallery, considering that it is the only exhibitor based in Latin America to show at this year's fair.





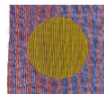
“The mountain is a bird,” by Edgar Orlaineta (2020). Materials for the sculpture include wood, sheet metal, acrylic paint, electrostatic paint and Chinese ink. WhiteBalance, via Proyectos Monclova

“That’s really our mission going to Asia,” Isabella Aballí, Proyectos Monclova’s director of sales, said in the light-filled gallery in the Polanco district of Mexico City. “Introducing the work of our more contemporary artists that are at the height of their careers or on their way there, and then also reintroducing these iconic artists that are well known on this side of the world, but not necessarily over there.”

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The strategy is something of a gamble, Ms. Aballí said. Getting people and product to Hong Kong is a lot more expensive than, say, transporting wares a few miles away to Mexico City’s annual mega-fair [Zona Maco](#), where Proyectos Monclova is a regular presence. The gallery will need to do good business to make a profit at Art Basel Hong Kong, which “at the end of the day, is a sales event,” as she put it.

But Proyectos Monclova believes that its geographical diversity will make it stand out, and it has tested the Asian market on a smaller scale. The gallery took advantage of a special “satellite” option that Art Basel offered to exhibitors during the two previous years when the coronavirus pandemic made travel especially difficult. Galleries were able to have a presence by shipping work to Hong Kong where a local representative, assigned by the fair, set up the display and dealt with customers.

Proyectos Monclova dipped its toe in the Asian waters during the first of those two fairs, in 2021, with an edited-down satellite show of works by just one artist, Gabriel de la Mora.

“There was this huge question of ‘Do we do it? How are sales going to be?’ We were quite worried,” Ms. Aballí said.

Things went better than expected. The booth sold out. The gallery returned in 2022 with a slightly expanded list and did almost as well. More important, it made new connections with collectors in a faraway region. It is ready to go full force this year with a gallery-staffed booth in the fair’s main space, bringing a fuller roster.

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“Maqueta para ‘Río Papaloapan’” (1970), a silver sculpture by Ángela Gurría. Ms. Gurría, a central figure in Mexican Modernism, died in February. WhiteBalance, via Proyectos Monclova

“We’ve been in conversations with people ever since, sending them more information about different artists, our programs,” Ms. Aballi said. “They are really interested in us. Being that one Latin American gallery is something that really stands out.”

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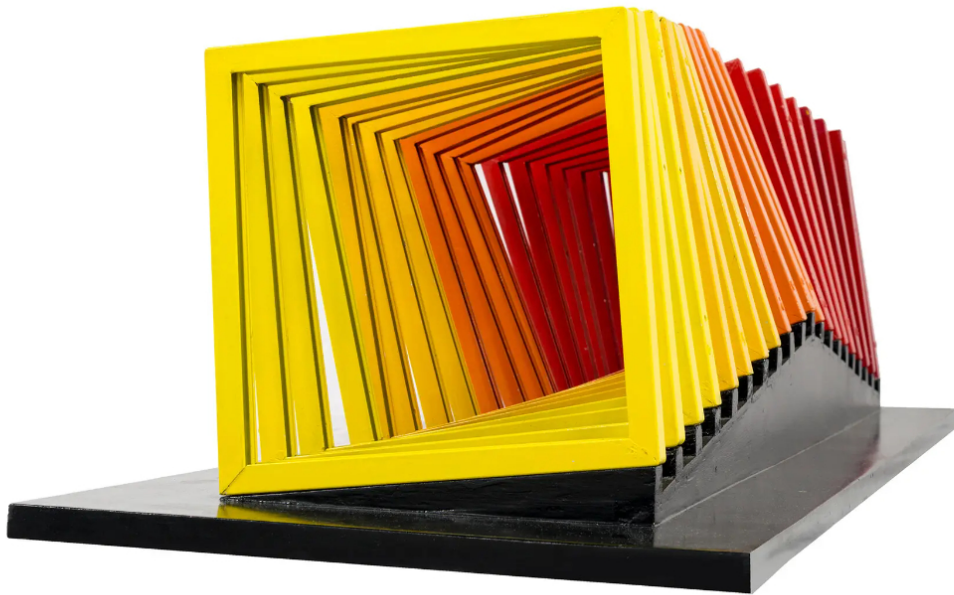
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But it is the type of fare that Proyectos Monclova purveys, that integration of names past and present, that makes it a notable dealer as well, and which has given it crucial role in Mexico as a preserver of national art from the 20th century. In the United States and Europe, the job of documenting the careers of those artists falls mostly on museums, where curators regularly produce well-researched exhibitions of painters and sculptors whose biggest days are behind them

Projectos Monclova are behind them.

Those shows go a long way toward helping their subjects secure a lasting place in art history.

Latin America simply has fewer art museums, and they are often underfunded and understaffed, so even the best artists are in danger of being forgotten. Commercial galleries have picked up the slack, and every country seems to have one gallery that follows Proyecto Monclova's model of polishing vintage work in a way that makes it visible and — once again — commercially viable. In Colombia, it is [Galería Casas Riegner](#) in Bogotá, which has helped reignite the career of the 90-year-old painter Beatriz González. In Argentina, it is [Galería Nora Fisch](#) in Buenos Aires, which deals in art created in the 1970s and 1980s during a dictatorship.



A model for "Cóatl" (1980), a massive public sculpture at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México by Helen Escobedo. WhiteBalance, via Proyecto Monclova

"Galleries are taking a very important role in this way," said Mr. Orlaineta, the multimedia artist. "And they are taking risks and they are doing what they believe they have to. This is the situation in Mexico right now."

Mr. Orlaineta, who was born in 1972 and is now firmly midcareer, is one of Mexico's most in-demand artists, making hybrid sculptural forms out of wood, metal and glass that explore the history of industrial design. Abstract, boldly-colored and geometric, and with references to both the customs of everyday life in Mexico as well as imagery from pre-colonial times, the work bears many traits associated with Mexican Modernism.

His presence in Hong Kong, alongside the output from actual practitioners from the modern era, adds a chapter to the long-running national story Proyecto Monclova strives to tell. His present-day popularity could bring buyers to the booth who will then encounter artists who laid the groundwork for what he does.

"They are historical and very important artists that we think need to be in people's minds and in their collections, whether it's museum or a private collection," Ms. Aballí said. "We want the world to know about them."

