

## Mauricio Guillen

Mauricio Guillen's work has incorporated diverse media and forms, from both still and moving images to transformations of found objects and entire spaces. His diverse oeuvre is connected by a series of underlying concerns, and a strategy of subjecting situations to 'ideological inversions', to adapt a recent title. One of Guillen's primary concerns is how the borders and dividing lines between spaces are created and maintained. Such a concern in part arises from the artist's experience of different 'social contracts', having lived in Mexico, New York and London. Accordingly, a number of his projects generate speculative, symbolic play with the policing of national boundaries and crossings. Other recent works have unpicked how the divisions between social groups and individuals are maintained through the demarcation of property boundaries.

In one recent work, 'Running Pink Line', the artist stretched a single thread across the lines of demarcation separating three properties, through their rooms and over their gardens. Whilst barely touching the property itself, Guillen's work acted as a trespasser breaching property rights, highlighting the peculiarities of ownership to the outside world. Characteristically, the artist's intervention had the lightest of touches, both physically and figuratively. In certain spaces, the work barely registered as a visual presence; in others the vivid pink string was thrown into relief against the lush green exterior spaces. In an earlier work, 'Jardin Adulto' of 2002, the artist enclosed a children's slide in a public park inside steel protective fencing. The seemingly arbitrary enclosure of public space, especially when the wider park remained untouched, is an intentional provocation.

Upon whom would a child be trespassing? Why would they require protection from play? We are left to decipher whether such an intervention is an authoritarian gesture of control, or a subversion of the status quo. For the children intended to play there, the arbitrary appropriation of 'their' space acts as a cautionary tale: do not trust the public sphere to be benign or disinterested. The work acts as a salutary 'lesson' in how easily private interests can control public resources. Yet 'Jardin Adulto' can also be read in an alternative way which illuminates a second set of Guillen's concerns. Whereas earlier generations protested for liberation – the May 1968 uprising creating the slogan 'underneath the paving stones, the beach' – he reaches more salutary conclusions. His works begin from the starting point that invisible boundaries are if anything more potent than concrete ones. In 'Jardin Adulto' he enquires what price we pay for 'security'.

Where territory is contested, of course, the need for preserving security is so much the greater, and the accommodations and compromises we have to make all the more pressing. 'No Sharp Objects' addresses this issue, by similarly reconfiguring an everyday situation so that it becomes shockingly different. At first sight, the short video could scarcely appear simpler or more unassumingly presented. We encounter a small, documentary-style, grainy video of an anonymous man's hands peeling an apple. After a few seconds, it's clear that the man is either taking exceptional care, or that the blade is exceptionally blunt. Each painstaking action is conducted at a stately pace, so that peeling the apple takes several minutes rather than seconds. The subject could scarcely make fewer claims to grandeur or drama. And yet from this most unprepossessing of situations, Guillen is able to speak about issues of the greatest scope and urgency: the new millennium's geopolitical order and the consensus that religious-political protest is the primary threat to national security; the balance between individual security and freedom; and the state's surveillance of its citizens. Having had our patience tested by the work's apparent monotony, when the hands all but finish peeling the apple, the ambient background noise is interrupted. An off-screen voice announces "Good morning, this is your captain speaking..."

In a split second, the work flips inside out from banal to terrifyingly loaded; from tedious to pregnant with drama and threat. Questions abound: who is the camera operative? How did they carry a potential weapon onboard, and one so similar to those used to hijack the planes on 9/11? When our heart rate slows, we realise that, uniquely we seem to be placed in the position of 'the enemy' in the 'war on terror'. If Guillen is able to elicit tedium, adrenalin and fear in short succession, he also arouses an uneasy sense of power as the first-person perspective allows an alarming identification with the silent protagonist. When the loop begins again, we may also realise that Guillen's work speaks at a more symbolic level to allow further chains of association in play. Most likely, the character is imagining paradise; as the apple appears on screen it seems to become a symbol of danger and temptation, as though fresh from the Garden of Eden. The implication is that for both 'sides' in the war on terror – from Islamic jihadists to America's Fundamentalist right – paradise is pictured as an eternal garden.