

MORIS (ISRAEL MEZA MORENO)



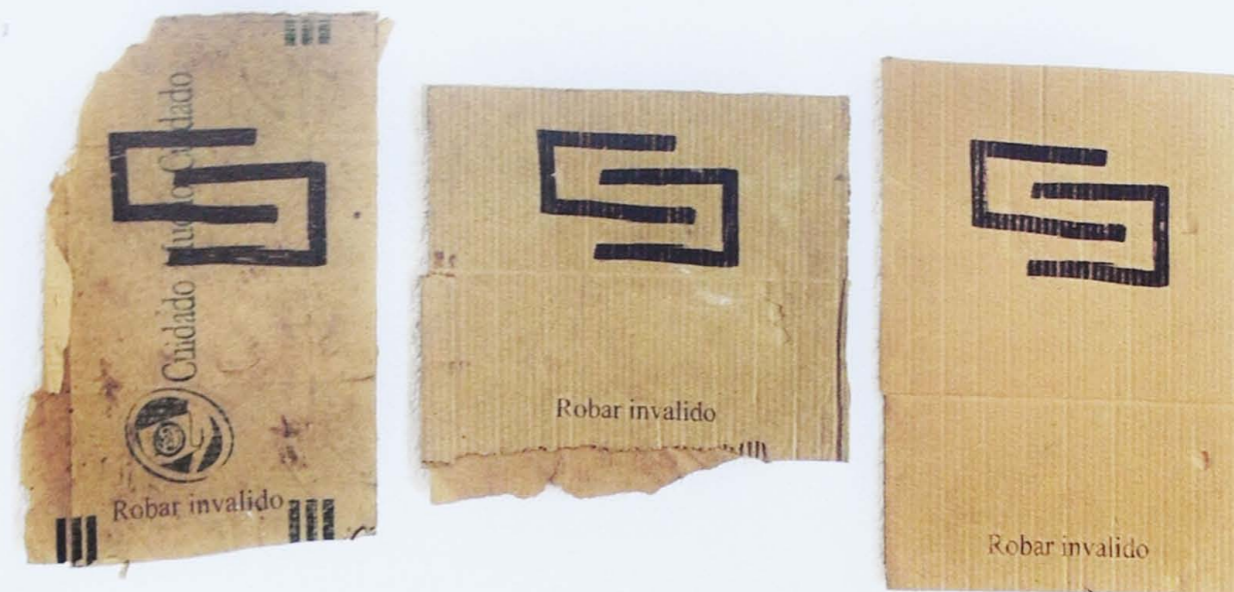
- 1
Sembrar II
2009, Poured cement,
found women's shoes
- 2
Paisaje Censurado 17
[Censored Landscape 17]
2010
- 3
Robar Invalido
(Rob Invalid)
2007
- 4
Hermoso Paisaje 1
[Cartolandia]
Beautiful Landscape
[Cardboard City]
2007, Mexico, Collection
Isabel and Agustín Coppel

Moris (Israel Meza Moreno) uses the dense urban jungle of Mexico City as an excavation site and laboratory for his artistic practice. For Moris, public space functions as the site for field exercises where the artist moves about the city observing, collecting data, and objects that will later be studied, processed, and transformed into art. Moris studies the survival strategies developed and adopted by the inhabitants of marginal communities in Mexico City. His art is a response to the adverse conditions that are dealt with on a daily basis by millions of people around the world. Rudimentary architectural techniques used to build shelters by the homeless, or basic housing for low-income families, homemade tools—including weapons—designed for specific needs, codes of conduct, signage, and secret ciphers used by burglars all form part of Moris's urban vocabulary. The artist is also tapping into the unbridled ingenuity and extreme resourcefulness of these communities—skills needed to survive in communities with limited resources and strict codes of conduct.

Moris is an insider; his level of engagement goes beyond observation and collecting data. The artist lives in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Mexico City, where his studio is in ground zero from which he ventures not as a tourist, but as a native. Working from within, he is granted privileged access to the city and its inhabitants. This familiarity allows for exchanges with the people who live there. Tools that have been used to commit violent acts such as bats, knives, and other weapons, are at first appropriated and then modified to make art. Moris has pasted text onto a club that read, *Solo yo tengo la razon* (Only I Am Right), 2010. In one of his most compelling series of works titled *Nido de malviviendes* (Delinquent's Nest), 2007, the artist deciphered the symbols used by burglars to mark homes before robbing them. The symbols were drawn onto three torn sheets of corrugated cardboard with phrases such as, *Woman Alone*, *Charitable House*, and *Can be Robbed*.

Homeless children inspired the large-scale installation titled, *Hermoso Paisaje 7: golpes, pan duro y baños de agua fría* (Beautiful Landscape 7: beatings, stale bread, and cold showers), 2010. A tower resting on a bed of sand alludes to a playground. Four plaster statuettes of San Judas Tadeo support the base—the patron saint of miracles serves as the pillars. The top half of the tower, which was made of cardboard boxes inscribed with prayers, has collapsed, revealing a makeshift mattress covered in the toxic glue known in Mexico as *Resistol 5000*. Replicas of *bolillos*, loaves of Mexican white bread, are strewn around the tower. Three tarps used to cover loads on trucks hang from the ceiling bordering the sand. The tarps have been cleaned, with dirt and grime removed from the surface in order

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to draw an idyllic American-style home; a brick wall that symbolizes the lack of access to a normal life, with text painted onto canvas that reads: “We are here but we are not playing.” The installation shares the same theme as Luis Buñuel's classic film, *Los Olvidados* (The Forgotten) in which bands of homeless children struggle for survival. The artist incorporates elements used by children to navigate the urban jungle. Children beg for money and steal in order to purchase *bolillos* and *Resistol 5000*. The former is the cheapest and least-nourishing food, the latter is a toxic substance desired for the fumes that stave off hunger, and whose intoxicating high gives a false sense of security to those forced to sleep on the streets.

