

ARTFORUM

Gabriel Sierra | 500 Words
By Gabriel H. Sanchez - October 01, 2015



Gabriel Sierra, *Untitled (o(op(ope(open)pen)en)n)*, 2015, MDF and burlap, dimensions variable. Installation view, SculptureCenter, New York. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

Gabriel Sierra is a Colombian-born artist whose site-specific installations and performances aim to create environmental “intrusions” within space. “**Numbers in a Room,**” a solo exhibition of his work, is on view at **SculptureCenter** in New York from September 20, 2015, through January 4, 2016. He will also have a solo show at the *Kunsthalle Zurich* from November 21, 2015, through February 7, 2016.

I’VE BECOME OBSESSED with how we experience the present. For example, I can’t help but think of how this interview is happening in real time, for something that will be transcribed and read at a later date on the Internet, which will ultimately describe an exhibition opening on the twentieth of September, and which someone might not read until years after the show has passed. We live in a complicated era in which time has become almost irrelevant. This is why my recent work experiments with the exact moment when a visitor enters the gallery. I’m interested in how a body moves through the space, and the idea that the work can become the space itself. So when I change the title of my exhibition every hour, as with my recent exhibition at the Renaissance Society in Chicago, I aim to focus on the moment in which the visitor steps into the show. Depending on the title at the time of your visit, you’ll have a different experience. I’d even go so far as to say that the title of the exhibition is more important than the show itself.

In “*Numbers in a Room,*” my exhibition in SculptureCenter’s lower-level galleries, I’m drawing attention to the particularities and physicality of the building’s architecture. While most galleries aim to be as neutral as possible, this space is unusual: It’s a catacomb-like warren of small rooms, dark narrow corridors, with no natural light. I’ve installed pieces that will act as intrusions, and which ask visitors to modify the way that they would normally navigate the space. Other works in the show are signs and numbers from the

New York City subway, shown for varying times throughout the exhibition. These allude to the architecture of SculptureCenter, which was once a trolley repair shop. My work is very quiet. It's not spectacular. What I'm thinking is that people will walk through the show and notice only a few changes.

For the project in Zurich, which opens in November, I'm re-creating a déjà vu experience, and I will materialize this phenomenon of how we perceive space, time, and memory. In the show, there will be three identical rooms with the same objects in the same places, repeated three times. The idea is to re-create a fake déjà vu; it could be completely boring, but just because a phenomenon is mundane does not mean it doesn't exist.

While in school I studied architecture and design, and my work reflects this training. However, I find that the responsibilities of an architect or designer are far more complex than those of the artist. There are, of course, many security reasons for this. There are safety concerns and restrictions in the more practical realms, while an artist is allowed the freedom to play and perhaps have a more imaginative approach. As an artist who trained in these fields, what I'm most interested in is how the environment affects you—how architecture controls your behavior, for instance, even if you are unaware of its effects.

— *As told to Gabriel H. Sanchez*