



**SELECTIVE INTUITION**



Mexican artist *Gabriel Kuri* repurposes everyday objects and materials—receipts, plastic bags—to produce work that questions both the nature of sculpture and the society we live in. ‘Ultimately what’s eloquent in art comes from choice—choosing to bring something into your work,’ he tells *Katya Tylevich*. ‘Choice is intuition.’



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**Previous pages**  
*Fire by Friction Arrested*  
 (detail), 2016  
 Stones, sanding belts,  
 metal, ø 40 cm (approx.),  
 3 parts

**Opposite page**  
*Charted Temperature 1*  
 2016  
 Pipes, hose  
 81 x 81 x 81 cm

An anonymous single-storey storefront in mid-city Los Angeles, with no windows or doorbell, gives way to Gabriel Kuri’s sparse work studio. Inside, the artist makes order out of seemingly unrelated materials—rocks, wood, paper, discount-store ‘trinkets’. Although they are works in progress, arranged in the studio as explorations and experiments, these future sculptures and installations already have the personalities of Kuri’s finished works: even if abstract, they are specific and familiar to sight and touch. They provoke a reconsideration of materials that are part of daily contact, and perhaps most satisfyingly they suggest, but do not reveal, the artist’s commentary on contemporary life. ‘When I bring objects into the studio it is another way of sketching,’ says Kuri. ‘I start to put raw materials next to one another.’

The studio extends into an enclosed outdoor space, asphalted and undefined, another place for Kuri to work and think. The indoor/outdoor layout reminds him of artist studios from his native Mexico City. After ten years in Brussels, he recently moved to Los Angeles for a change of atmosphere and a shorter flight time to MEX.

Our meeting took months to realize—Kuri is frequently out of town. ‘It’s almost a general condition for artists today to be on the move,’ he tells me. Having walked into a conversation about art cycles and fair schedules, Kuri discusses his busy calendar in pragmatic terms. ‘Cycles exist in every other occupation, starting with agriculture,’ he says. ‘They are not unnatural. I also think art fairs mark a certain pace and momentum that can be positive. They are places of a very condensed exchange.’

Exchange, experience and order are common threads in our conversation, but the ribbon on top is something more elusive. ‘I can be rational and articulate about the way I work and the things that interest me,’ says Kuri. ‘But I also value the role of intuition. Ultimately what’s eloquent in art comes from choice—choosing to bring something into your work. Choice is intuition.’

*Is your work necessarily a reflection of our times?*  
 I wouldn’t say it’s very much a sign of the times. Typical new dilemmas involve virtuality and tactile reality, whereas I’m very interested in the material world and making things. I work with things that are present. I incorporate some traditional or classic materials, and also many things that I find out on the street or in the 99 cent stores. Inevitably that speaks of the present, of

conditions of material fabrication, trade distribution, which are undeniably of right now and wherever I am.

*Your works are often tactile in the ‘old-fashioned’ sense.*

In terms of physical familiarity or uncanniness, I do like that kind of connection with the audience. Everyone knows what a plastic shopping bag feels like on the hands. That kind of physical imprint of the world is part of my vocabulary. It’s a way that I try to reach out to communicate.

*Even though you’re always travelling, do you consider yourself a studio artist?*

I consider artistic practice a way for an individual to understand one’s place in society, the world and universe. I do a lot of my visual sketching and conceive a lot of my ideas when I’m on the move, travelling, at airports and train stations, in public places. Certain aspects of the public experience are so eloquent and moving that I try to somehow recreate them with work in my studio.

I’m really not an artist whose work comes from library research or a Wikipedia search. I’m not here to illustrate theories or to justify theories. But I do have a discipline, which is a little old-fashioned, of coming to a studio and making sketches on a notepad. My system has open ends, which means I am not excluding anything by default, but I’m not interested in absolutely everything or working in every medium. Even if my work has a lot of different forms and many different materials, I would like for the audience to perceive it as being precise. Precision in communication is one of the things I value the highest.

*You sometimes refer to yourself as a ‘selector’.*

*What do you mean by that?*

I mean that I’m not someone who is a compulsive accumulator. I don’t just bring lots and lots of stuff into my life and try and make something of it. I think my process is more a method of selection. Anything that makes it into my studio or into my notebook has already been decanted. There’s something decadent about just accumulating, so I try to think of myself more as a selector than a collector or accumulator.

*Los Angeles is having an art moment right now.*

*Does that spirit feed into your work?*

Of course. It’s very encouraging and fun to be in a place that’s sought after. The energy is flowing in rather than fleeing. Every week I hear of someone

**“EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT A PLASTIC SHOPPING BAG FEELS LIKE ON THE HANDS. THAT KIND OF PHYSICAL IMPRINT OF THE WORLD IS PART OF MY VOCABULARY”**



**Opposite page**  
*The Hard Line, Hardened*  
 (detail), 2015  
 Mixed media in wood  
 and Plexiglas vitrine with  
 interior lighting  
 240 x 160 x 100 cm

**This page**  
 Portrait by  
 Alexei Tylevich



moving into town. And that's encouraging. It makes things more diverse and more fun. I spent ten years in Brussels, and I love living in Europe, but I thought it was a good idea to have a drastic change of air. LA is a city that has always attracted me. It's almost deliberately different from Europe. Different landscape, light, history. And also very different in terms of behaviour. I thought the contrast would maybe open another valve in the brain. Also, it's near Mexico. Being so far from Mexico in Europe was painful. I like to be able to go more often.

*Did you always want to be an artist?*

Pretty much. Since I was very little I knew I was interested in being creative. When I was still in my last year of high school, every Friday I started going to Gabriel Orozco's workshop with my colleagues Abraham Cruzvillegas, Damián Ortega and Dr Lakra. And then I started art school proper. When I look back, I think I was always pointed in this direction. Where I come from is not unconventional. I didn't have some strange epiphany. I was not a biologist before I became an artist.

*Do you consider narrative a part of your work?*

I don't work to tell stories. Although I can: I am the kind of person who verbally communicates a lot through stories and anecdotes. I connect things that happened in different places or different times. But as for my work—I want it to establish its own narrative. I don't think of my work as being connected to text or literature.

*Is metaphor a part of that self-established narrative?*

The way humans communicate is with metaphors. We need that reference. That's one of the great things about the plastic arts, the visual arts. You can use inert materials to create a vocabulary, to make a language and to actually say very many things. I also associate metaphor with the idea of transformation. There's the potential of something becoming something else. Somehow, I have faith in that. It takes investing metaphors into language, material, objects, situations and connections for meaning to emerge.

*How much control do you feel over the meaning that emerges?*

Well, it's a negotiation. I look around and find eloquence in the material world, in the world of exchange, in situations involving people and systems of exchange. And I try to bring them close to me and recreate them. Of course, I feel I have to make something of them, but they also speak in their own right. That's the negotiation. As a spectator, I don't like it when all of the air is choked because the artist has too much control. There has to be some room there. It's really up to the audience to make meaning in the end.

*Gabriel Kuri's work will be included in 'L'esprit du Bauhaus, l'objet en question' at Les Arts Décoratifs in Paris from 19 October.*