

## Nicolás Dumit Estévez Interviews Javier Hinojosa

**NDE:** Javier, your photographs of Melquiades Herrera with which you are participating in *Playing with Fire: Political Interventions, Dissident Acts and Mischievous Actions* always put a smile on my face. These photographs are installed right by the entrance of the galley and so, every time I visit the space I am in a good humor. Can you talk about the histories behind the production of these images?

**JH:** I am glad that they make you smile. Melquiades was an irreverent person and, as a matter of fact, his characterizations were packed with his sense of humor. These were fun work sessions in which he always surprised me with new characters. The series *Las faces de Melquiades*, *The Phases of Melquiades*, were the photographs with which I participated in the biennial of photography in Mexico in 1986, and I still remember the commentaries made by the public about the humor in the work amidst the preponderant solemnity that existed then in the photographic circles.

Melquis and I met at the Escuela de Diseño, where both of us were starting to teach. We became close friends. I still remember how our work on the portraits in the exhibition at El Museo started. I approached Melquiades about taking them for an art portfolio that was meant to showcase artists who will become well known in the future. He accepted my invitation and we walked through the center of Mexico City together with Maris Bustamante and Rubén Valencia, all of these members of the No Grupo. Melquiades pulled out a sugar skull on the spot that he was carrying in a market shopping bag that he always traveled with, which was full of tchotchkes. For him all of these were precious objects that nurtured his collections. This is when I made the first of several studies. These photographs were not published in the portfolio because Melquiades asked me to make a portrait depicting a mask made out of combs. I selected this image for the portfolio, it has become an iconic representation of Melquiades's creativity and spirit. I decided to title this image *El señor de los peines*, *The Lord of the Combs*.

**NDE:** How did the complicity between Melquiades and you emerge at the moment of creating the characters or personas in photographs such as *Melquis es amor y arte*, *Melquis is Love and Art*?

The idea emerged as a result of a graffiti that appeared in one of the classrooms of our school: *Melquiades es amor y arte,*" *Melquiades is*

*Love and Art.* I thought this graffiti would make the ideal stage for another series of portraits, and so I proposed this to Melquis. We planned the shots in advance and agreed upon a date to meet. In this case, I sought to introduce different elements, including a flying stool. We had fun!

**NDE:** Before you produced your photographs of Melquiades, did you work with other artists focused on performance art or what the Melquiades and the No Gurpo called “montajes de momentos plásticos,” to refer to their actions?

**JH:** Before this I had generated some portraits of people connected to the cultural world in Mexico, but the series that I made with Melquiades were the first ones of this kind. I must add that some these portraits embody a powerfully synthetic action enacted by Melquiades. Others portraits were characterizations of less specific actions which I considered as thematic units. Although the initial intention was to make the portraits I described at the beginning of this conversation, the work can be understood today as photo/performances. Simultaneously, with this series of Melquiades, I made some portraits of Maris Bustamante and Rubén Valencia.

**NDE:** Your contribution to the exhibition at El Museo del Barrio goes far beyond the document of a performance, at the same time it suggests a relationship with the archive of the ephemeral. What can you say about this?

**JH:** That the photographs were conceived as portraits implies an understanding of the artwork in itself that obviously transcends the documentary (this was never our intention) and that responds to the times. When one looks at the images today, one can confer on them a documentary character because they are the only registry of the actions of a performance artist. From this perspective the images acquire a character that makes them part, precisely, of what we call archive of the ephemeral. But I repeat that the intention of Melquiades, as well as mine was that of creating some portraits.

**NDE:** What project are you working on at the moment?

**JH:** Since 2001 I have been working on my project *Estaciones*, a photographic registry of protected natural areas in Latin America. *Estaciones* consists of the almost 300,000 kilometers that I have traveled through natural areas of Mexico, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Perú, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador and Brazil. Along this journey I have also incorporated into photography elements such as

video art, assemblages, and prints on non-traditional materials – metal and glass -as well as a series of artist books on the same subject.

**NDE:** I may not be able to join you in one of the amazing natural areas that you describe, but when I go back to the Mexican capital, I was wondering if we can do an iteration of the walk you undertook with Melquiades around the *Centro Histórico*, the Historic Center, when you initiated your portraits of him.

**JH:** I'd like to do that.

This interview is part of *Crossfire*, a project conceived and edited by Nicolás Dumit Estévez for El Museo del Barrio.