

kurimanzutto

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moby dick

damián ortega

3rd floor parking of la comercial mexicana, coyaocán, mexico city

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“In Moby Dick [...] Ortega consecrated a stage for his Beetle: there was a rock band with the drums as its central visual element, the space was delimited by inviolable circular spaces, and a Beetle tied with resistant ropes. When the performance started, the sound of the instrument being tuned turned into a cathartic cover of Led Zeppelin’s *Moby Dick* while Ortega and some colleagues struggled with the car to liberate –but also to control– the desired object, also lead to a transformation of the space [...] it also suggests an anti-homage to John Bonham’s famous drum solo, where despair and creation generate a transformation which involves the confrontation between ideas an object.”

(1) Pimentel, T. (2008) *The Fragmentation of Time and Space*, catalogue for the exhibition Implications of the Image, April 12 - June 29 2008, MUAC, Mexico City pp. 88.

On Thursday March 25th, 2004 at 9:30 pm, Damián Ortega engaged in a physical fight with his old white Beetle on the third floor of a Mexico City’s supermarket parking lot. This late night action was a physical struggle between artist and machine in which, with a series of ropes and pulleys, Ortega attempts to control the movements of a white Volkswagen Beetle that slides on a floor that has been covered in grease. On the background, a live band played *Moby Dick* by Led Zeppelin.

The action *Moby Dick* is a performative work in which the artist tries to tame the car as the white whale from Melville. The struggle references mythologies of man versus nature, the prodigal son, and related narratives of the heroic in the context of a contemporary urban hunt; as live musicians play John Bonham’s legendary drum solo as an accompaniment and aural text. This episode reveals a historical

continuum in Ortega's vision of contemporary mythology, the quest for cosmic identity, and how this manifests in human cultural expression.

original press release:

Ortega's work confronts us with a mythical cartoon, a domestic odyssey where heroism is found in the trivial, like starting a car downhill in second gear. The project presents a ceremonial hunting that takes place inside a pseudo-Paleolithic cavern. A sacred experience charged by the hour or fraction (and a hundred pesos fine for a lost ticket).

Music as a mythic component: the beat of the drums as a vehicle for souls, improvisation as a sound experiment and pagan ritual. *Moby Dick* pays homage to John Bonham and Led Zeppelin.

Ropes and pulleys have contained energy from the first Adam to our very days. The iron will to domesticate and tame beasts is now manifested as a bodily combat against a 1600 Beetle (taxes paid and emissions verified).

Wrestling is both the technique and obstinate rigor that covers our hands with rubber and split leather, making up as many rules and tools as there are words.

In our days, our courage is on the knife, but not in our blood.

Friction, tension, and containment are the means for this work; a series of physical and technical phenomena: take the foot off the clutch, release the break, accelerate; then, neutralize and sedate the wheels with *Roshfrans* motor oil.

(Trimming the bull's horns just so that he loses his sense of distance).

Although in many natural objects, whiteness amounts to beauty –as if white were capable to convey essential virtues to marble, Japanese camellias, or pearls– we have not yet worked out the spell of whiteness or why it attracts the soul with such power. A symbol loaded with spirituality and, at the same time, an intensifier the repelling and frightening.

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A white shark, a tiger, a bull: they all have been interpreted in mythology as demoniac animals.

He who grips the reins will face a *déjà vu*: the glove recognizes the rope, the hand comes to life as does the metal and, without a hint of nostalgia, its basic instincts crawl back as the prey is brought home: pasteurized and packaged.

Grease, wax, a conset, and some breaded fillets.

Another Wednesday sale

At La Comercial.