

¿Por qué no fui tu amigo?

Daniel Aguilar Ruvalcaba

A complex negotiation of the economic value, identity, trauma and personal history, "*Por qué no fui tu amigo?*" (Why was I not your friend?) is the inaugural manifestation of an ambitious, complex project, rooted in Ruvalcaba's on-going interest in issues of economy, production, utility and authorship. The primary point of departure for this project is the recent award of a Fundación BBVA-Bancomer/MACG grant, which is both a production and educational grant for emerging artists in Mexico.

Fascinated by the bank's philanthropic mission toward culture, Ruvalcaba elected to take this philanthropic mission and stand it on its head by linking it up with a personal family trauma. While still a child, the artist's father lost the family's home and other family properties through a series of purportedly poor investment choices. Thus, in an attempt to reenact this familial misfortune, live out and even philanthropically exercise it, so to speak, like a trauma, Ruvalcaba decided to seek out someone else who not only bore his father's same name, Juan Manuel Aguilar, but also possessed a debt with BBVA-Bancomer, and then pay off his symbolic father's debt with the grant itself.

Full of unexpected obstacles and novelistic serendipity, the manifold vicissitudes that have accompanied Ruvalcaba's quest for the homonymous debtor (which he found) and debt emancipation have yielded the formal materialization of the exhibition and the overall project itself. The exhibition at kurimanzutto is comprised of three discrete elements related to the project, which also question and challenge their own status as art objects. The first is an edition of the newspaper a.m. in which the artist originally featured the ad for the debtor on three separate dates, December 31st, 2014, January 2nd and 3rd, 2015. The example, along with eight others preserved by the artist, are themselves transformed into an edition of nine (three from each day). Given that the original print run of the paper was 16,000 per day, the designation of those preserved as an edition of art is clearly predicated on a scarcity that is not so much artificial as it is temporal. Indeed, it is precisely this temporality that distresses the validity of the three examples of the newspapers, vis-à-vis their former, comparatively unlimited abundance, as a limited artist edition.

The second element of the exhibition consists of a circumvention of Fundación BBVA-Bancomer's interdiction to directly pay the debtor's debt with the grant. As the story goes, the homonymous debtor that Ruvalcaba located possessed two debts with the bank, one of which was smaller than the other, thereby becoming known as, in the artist's assumption of the debts, "the small debt" and "the big debt," respectively. As such, given the aforementioned status of the grant as a production grant, the artist bought equipment with which to shoot and edit a video- to be exhibited later elsewhere- all of which is presented directly on the ground, as if in the form of a garage sale. Virtually new, the objects are indeed for sale not at the gallery, but on the auction website *Mercado Libre*. Therefore, in a curious twist on the readymade, the status of these objects, either as aesthetic or utilitarian, will be ultimately determined by whoever acquires them (eg., collector/institution or someone merely in search of a new iMac).

The final element of the exhibition addresses “the big debt”. For this work, Ruvalcaba has created an edition that is the literal and representative equivalent of the big debt. He has taken out on a loan from BBVA-Bancomer in 100 and 200 pesos notes, individually photographed each note, and then immediately repaid the loan. The notes themselves have been recreated as obvious counterfeits, two of which are folded and presented as “books” (due to the fact that microscopically small poems by the pre-Colombian philosopher, warrior, architect, poet and ruler Nezahualcōyotl and the 17th century Mexican baroque poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz are printed on the original bills, Ruvalcaba refers to them as books). The totality of the entire debt equivalent edition will be sold to one of the inheritors of Bancomer, who has already consented to buy it.

Ruvalcaba thus presents an exhibition so artfully encumbered with contradiction and paradox that it seems to be on the point of continual collapse. Needless to say, it is no mere coincidence that these contradictions and paradoxes reflect the nature of contemporary finance and debt itself.

-Chris Sharp

Daniel Aguilar Ruvalcaba (Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, 1988) studied at SOMA. His work, characterized by a wry sense of humor, both questions and seeks to understand the conditions of contemporary art production. He has worked with mediums to contact deceased artists and organize a contemporary art fair from beyond; he has curated hypothetical exhibitions that can be visited by endoscopy; he has bought ideas from housewives to create objects with artistic qualities, as well as uploaded videos to YouTube that range from life hacking tutorials to open source contemporary art.

Among his most recent exhibitions are *Tutoriales*, Museo Universitario del Chopo (Ciudad de México, 2014), *Made in Mexico*, Nuevo Museo de La Ene (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2014) and *El fuego y el borrego*, Ex Teresa (Ciudad de México, 2014). Founder and co-director of the exhibition space Biki Wax, Aguilar Ruvalcaba lives and works in Mexico City.

Chris Sharp (b. 1974, USA) is a writer and independent curator based in Mexico City, where he and the Mexican artist Martin Soto Climent run the project space Lulu.

Daniel Aguilar Ruvalcaba's *¿Por qué no fui tu amigo?* is the first of a series of six exhibitions to be curated by Chris Sharp for kurimanzutto. Taking place over the course of a year, the series will focus exclusively on emerging Mexican or Mexico-based artists. The intention of the project is to train a rigorous eye that sheds light upon some of the most active and challenging actors in the current art scene. kurimanzutto seeks to provide them with a unique platform within the local and international context, welcoming the development of a new generation of artists. Sharp's selection will run as independent shows parallel to the gallery's regular programming, maintaining their autonomy while productively resonating with each other.