

## **All the Calvino Books (and Other Stories)**

### **Special project by Jorge Méndez Blake**

Curated by Anna Lovecchio

Opening: Friday, November 30, 6.00 p.m.

30 November 2012 – 20 January 2013

Press Preview: Friday, November 30, 11.30 a.m. – 1.30 pm

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The Mexican artist Jorge Méndez Blake investigates the invisible relations between literature and architecture, knowledge and memory, culture and democracy, and traces the frontiers of contemporary knowledge through a poetic mapping of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. Creating subtle interplays between Borges, Kafka, Calvino, Melville –authors who reflect on the maze, the invisible, the impenetrable – Méndez Blake produces physical epiphanies of such literary canons by raising temporary monuments, installations with a strong emotional and environmental thrust that cause astonishment and uneasiness in the viewer and undermine several given expectations about the foundations of contemporary culture.

The statement *POETRY IS IRRELEVANT* introduces visitors to the Museum. Placed next to the main entrance, the neon text impairs the neoclassical building's notable façade and symbolically fractures the conception of the Museum as temple of culture. Provocatively, the language of commercial signs is appropriated to turn a poetic statement into a light sculpture while the specific color choice signals a state of alert and emergency. This process of corrosion of established forms of knowledge is pursued by the artist throughout his work.

Shortly after its presentation at the Cantoni Staircase in the Palazzo Ducale of Genova, the artist revisits the installation *Tutti i libri di Calvino* for the Museum of Contemporary Art of Villa Croce. An instance of "literary activism", this work questions public libraries as institutions of knowledge. Given its structural and functional mission, the library collects, systematizes, and catalogues a number of resources relevant to both the history and interests of its own community, therefore through the simultaneous removal of all Italo Calvino's books from the city's libraries, Méndez Blake causes the order of knowledge to crumble and collapse from the inside. By "kidnapping" Calvino from the city's library network, the artist diffuses a state of "temporary blindness", opens up a void that calls for more reflections, recollections, and, perhaps, indifference.

Whereas *Tutti i libri di Calvino* seals off the power of imagination in a crate half-buried in the sand charged with entropic and mournful implications, the work inspired by Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener" brings to the fore the "edifying" power of literature and its capacity of resistance. Almost like a trench, a concrete block wall rises in first room on the ground floor reminiscent of Bartleby himself who "like the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room". In keeping with the artist's ongoing reflection on the repositories of knowledge, the building is positioned so as to obstruct access to the Museum's contemporary art library. The dry-stone wall raised without mortar endows with physical presence and visual significance our system for building knowledge that comes through as a fragile conglomerate of relations, an unsteady balance of weights. At the same time, the wall visualizes the power of coalition and togetherness and restores material substance to Bartleby's renowned formula "I would prefer not to", ultimate token of resistance.

The exhibition **All the Calvino Books (and Other Stories)** is realized in collaboration with the Sistema Bibliotecario Urbano of the City of Genova and is supported by Palazzo Ducale Fondazione per la Cultura.

Jorge Méndez Blake (Guadalajara, Mexico, 1974) earned a B.A. in Architecture from ITESO University, Guadalajara, in 1997 and developed his research in the visual arts. His work has been exhibited in several solo and collective exhibitions such as "Resisting the Present", Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, 2012, "Crisis. America Latina: Arte y confrontación (1910-2010)", Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, 2011, "All the Poetry Books", Museum of Latin American Art, Los

Angeles, 2010, "Twenty First Century", Queensland Art Gallery, Australia, 2010, "Where Do We Go From Here?", Bass Museum of Art, Miami, 2009, "México: Expected/ Unexpected", Maison Rouge, Paris, 2008, "Isla Negra's Treasure", Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City, 2005. He has been artist-in-residence at A+D, LABORal Centro de Arte in Gijon (2009), Art Omi International Artist's Residence in New York (2007), and ArtLab San Servolo Artist Residence in Venice (2006).