

Educator Notes

Gabriel Rico: The Discipline of the Cave

March 9–June 16, 2019



About the Artist

Gabriel Rico was born in 1980, in Lagos de Moreno, Mexico, and lives and works in Guadalajara. He studied at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, Guadalajara. Rico is a sculptor and installation artist working in the Arte Povera tradition. His current practice explores relationships between humanity and the natural world. Rico's most recent exhibitions have taken place at Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, the Power Station, Dallas, Gyeonggi Creation Center, Ansan-do, South Korea, and the Fundación CALOSA, Irapuato, Mexico.

About the Exhibition

For his AAM exhibition, Rico has created two new site-specific installations consisting of carefully arranged found and fabricated materials. The title of the exhibition, *The Discipline of the Cave*, refers to a series of philosophical lectures given by John Niemeyer Findlay. Findlay suggested that all descriptions of the human condition that fail to take the mystical and transcendental into account are incomplete and misleading. Rico's two new installations respond to Findlay's lectures, the architecture of the building, and relationships between humans and the natural world.

In Gallery 2, five familiar objects from contemporary life have been re-created as ceramic sculptures and placed on the gallery floor: a Coca-Cola bottle, a steak, a bone, the letters "AE," and game die. Upon entering the gallery, visitors are required to heighten their awareness of where they walk, defying the expectation of viewing artworks on the wall by pulling their attention to the floor. This environment could be considered desertlike, because of the use of sand, and suggests the fragmentation of the human being.

In Gallery 3, a selection of taxidermy animals faces a sun made with found materials, giving an eerie sense that the human race may be extinct in this environment. The taxidermy pieces include a bear, beaver, deer, fox, and boar. The artist and museum worked with a local taxidermist to present animals indigenous to Western Colorado, which were verified as obtained through both legal means and ethical standards. Locally sourced Frasier and White fir branches have been laid on the gallery floor and circle each animal, creating a natural barrier around the objects and a walking path. The visceral presentation of taxidermy pieces in the gallery space is heightened by the inclusion and scent of fresh fir, which creates a contrasting forestlike environment to Gallery 2.

Questions for Discussion

- | What might you think if you walked into either of these landscapes in real life?
- | Define allegory, symbolism, and association.
- | What stories can you create around a single object?
- | Create a myth or folk tale to explain a contemporary phenomenon.

Suggested Activity

Mind Your Step: Everyday Landscapes

Have students begin by looking at Gabriel Rico's exhibition, encouraging them to quietly observe for at least five minutes. After giving students time to reflect mindfully on the exhibition, guide students through a conversation using questions such as, "What do you see?" and "What is your interpretation of the exhibition?"

To lead into the activity, ask students what they think about the "desert setting" and if they can find any symbolism in the objects placed in Gallery 2. Have students write and/or share with a friend at least five objects that are symbolic to their everyday lives.

After students have picked five objects, encourage them to either find materials in the classroom or bring materials from home to create their own landscape using symbolic, everyday objects. Pick a place inside or outside of your school and encourage students to work together to display the objects in a way that causes viewers to watch their steps.

Upon finishing the activity, have students quietly walk through their own installation of objects and ask them to be mindful when observing the things around them. Once students have had a chance to observe silently, encourage them to make connections between objects and develop interpretations of their landscape.



Installation view: Gabriel Rico, *The Discipline of the Cave*, 2019. Photo: Tony Prikryl