

DIZZY MAGAZINE

MEXICO EDITION PREVIEW:

Manuel Guzmán

Dizzy is a magazine publisher focusing on bridging the gap between artists of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of exposure. We feel it is important to eliminate the emphasis on these differences, while still celebrating the artists' identities. Dizzy Magazine is an annual journal curated by Milah Libin. It includes in depth conversations with artists, as well as sections, like our "Pet Page", to engage readers of all ages. Expanding upon Dizzy Magazine's "12 and Under" section, which features a young artist, we have recently launched Mishou Magazine. Highlighting work by artists age 15 and younger, collaborations between generations, and interactive sections, Mishou acknowledges the importance of early childhood education and aims to validate children's identities as individuals and artists.

We approach every issue of our magazines with the hope that they are something you'll want to put on your bookshelf, and come back to, rather than being a disposable news source. Dizzy works to represent artists in the way they want to be seen, while creating accessible content to be enjoyed by everyone!

In our last issue we featured artists all based in Japan, with all text in both Japanese and English. For our forthcoming issue, launching this Spring, we focus on artists all based in Mexico. The writing is in both Spanish and English. In the following pages you will see the first five spreads of our feature on Manuel Guzmán, who is represented by Galería MUY and showing at the Outsider Art Fair.

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Artista
Nelo, o Manuel
Guzmán

Manuel Guzmán was born in Chaná, Tenejapa: a Tseltal-Mayan community of some 50 houses nestled in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. He still lives there with his wife and children, and it often figures in his painting. He tends to the agricultural plot in the morning, and tends to paint in the afternoon. Community service is essential to life in Chaná, including rotating “cargo” offices responsible for putting on the joyful fiestas, which are also recurrent subjects in Manuel’s oeuvre.

Guzmán was an early explorer of the visual arts, in the early ‘80s in traditionalist Mayan Chiapas. Of course, the lore of the old stories are simultaneously cosmological and historic. In some cases, the TV soaps beat out oral tradition these days, which inspires many artists to resuscitate the figures of the tradition in their work, while mixing in elements of Western technology and all manner of its visual culture. Manuel is multicultural – from a Mayan point of view – in that way.

There is an intense religiosity in Manuel’s work. In terms of theology and allegory, the ancient Mayan belief system is interwoven with a Spanish Colonial-derived Catholic one into a seamless cloth. More than 500 years later, this doesn’t entirely satisfy the Vatican, but works for the shaman-healers, called j’iilol (“seers”) and many of the rest of the population.

Guzmán is not a traditional shaman but Nelo (a nickname with which he signs some works) certainly is a seer. Often he replies to an inevitable *what is this about?* query with a bashful-brash smile and: “That’s how I saw it. In a dream.” The Mayan dreamworld is replete with meanings and directed messages that, when shared, teach all. To our Freud-steeped culture, dreams work for the individual. But for the Maya, they are social-natural phenomena. And sharing them is an important function artists and other seers offer their cultural communities.

Manuel Guzmán nació en Chaná, Tenejapa, una comunidad tseltal-maya de unas cincuenta casas arropado por los altos de Chiapas, México. Aún vive allí con su esposa y sus hijos, y figura seguido en sus pinturas. Cuida la parcela agrícola por las mañanas, y suele pintar por las tardes. El servicio a la comunidad es esencial para la vida en Chaná, incluyendo oficios de “cargo,” responsables de armar las fiestas alegres, las cuales también son sujetos recurrentes en la obra de Manuel.

Guzmán fue un explorador precoz de las artes visuales, durante los años 80 tempranos en el tradicionalista Chiapas maya. Por supuesto, la sabiduría tradicional de las viejas historias son simultáneamente cosmológicas e históricas. En algunos casos, las telenovelas le ganan a la tradición oral en estos días, lo cual inspira a muchos artistas a resucitar las figuras de la tradición en su obra, mientras mezclan elementos de la tecnología occidental y su cultura visual. Manuel es multicultural – desde un punto de vista maya – de esa manera.

Hay cierta intensidad religiosa en la obra de Manuel. En términos de teología y alegoría, el antiguo sistema de creencias maya se entreteje con uno católico derivado a la conquista española en una tela sin costuras. Más de 500 años después, esto no satisface al Vaticano del todo, pero funciona para los chamanes-curanderos, llamados j’iilol (“videntes”) y mucho del resto de la población.

Guzmán no es un chamán tradicional, pero Nelo (un sobrenombre con el cual firma algunos de sus trabajos) ciertamente es vidente. Con frecuencia responde a una inevitable consulta de “¿De qué se trata eso?” con una sonrisa entre tímida y atrevida y: “Así lo vi. En un sueño.” El mundo maya de los sueños está repleto de significados y mensajes dirigidos que, cuando son compartidos, son enseñanza para todos. A nuestra cultura impregnada de Freud, los sueños le sirven al individuo. Pero para los maya, son un fenómeno socio-natural. Compartirlos es una función importante que los artistas y otros videntes ofrecen a sus comunidades culturales.

Manuel Guzmán is a master of dreamscape: cubes and hexagrams, rainbows and their colors in odd geometries, maybe with a rooster or an old-style Mayan house or a face emerging from the hallucinogenic topography. Stuff that the surrealists thought about, Guzmán, autodidact, does too, autonomously if not simultaneously.

Coming out of a three month-long coma, after a nearly fatal traffic accident while doing manual labor in Mexico City, Manuel saw Jesus, accompanied by angels. He (masterfully but not studiously) employs Mexican retablo style composition and semiotics when painting his vision. He knows little, nor cares, about neo-Mexicanism (1980s on) which wittily plays on those historic models. (Manuel was not referencing Frida Kahlo's painting of her trolley car accident when he painted his own, gloriously similar.) We're in a personal artworld, totally his own, and when we approach it from the outside, we are tempted to say "outsider art" or "ethnographic art." But those aren't his words or conceptual frame!

Manuel Guzmán paints from fierce inner freedom. He conveys an animated world through weird imagery and master dabs-and-strokes, building color fields trained artists might not dare.

Guzmán comes into the town of San Cristóbal de Las Casas about once a fortnight. He might hawk postcard-sized drawings to a tourist on the street, then visit the Galería MUY, stirring a vortex with his powerful presence. His scattershot speaking, a trait since his accident in 1992, is replete with village and world news, as well as hilarity at his own pictures materializing his inner world. The horror vacui of other greats – like Adolf Wölfl and Martín Ramírez – come to mind, as it is part of the otherworldliness of all these self-taught visionary artists.

Manuel Guzmán es un maestro de paisaje onírico: cubos y hexagramas, arcoiris y sus colores en geometrías extrañas, quizás con un gallo o una casa maya de estilo antiguo o una cara emergiendo de la topografía alucinógena. Cosas que los surrealistas pensaban, Guzmán, autodidacta, también las piensa, autónoma si no simultáneamente.

Saliendo de una coma de tres meses, tras pasar un accidente casi fatal mientras hacía labor manual en la Ciudad de México, Manuel vio a Jesús acompañado de ángeles. Emplea (magistralmente pero no diligentemente) un estilo mexicano de retablo para la composición y la semiótica cuando pinta esa visión. Sabe poco acerca de, ni le importa mucho, el neomexicanismo (1980s en adelante), lo cual juega con esos modelos históricos con ingenio. (Manuel no estaba haciendo referencia a la pintura de Frida Kahlo de su accidente de tranvía cuando pintó el suyo, gloriosamente similar.) Estamos en un mundo de arte personal, totalmente suyo, y cuando nos acercamos desde afuera, nos tienta decir "arte foráneo" o "arte etnográfico." ¡Pero esas no son sus palabras ni su marco conceptual!

Manuel Guzmán pinta desde una libertad interna feroz. Expresa un mundo animado por medio de imágenes raras y untadas-y-pinceladas maestras, construyendo campos de color que los artistas entrenados quizás no se atreverían a hacer.

Guzmán llega a la ciudad de San Cristóbal de Las Casas alrededor de cada dos semanas. Puede vender dibujos tamaño postal a un turista en la calle, luego visitar la Galería MUY, despertando un vórtice con su presencia poderosa. Su habla dispersa, una característica desde su accidente en 1992, está repleta de noticias de la aldea y del mundo, además de hilaridad sobre sus propias imágenes que materializan su mundo interno. El horror vacui de otros grandes –



Es un danzante que carga un zorro disecado, representa el animal que come la semilla del maíz, en el carnaval realizan este ritual y la mujer es una señora que lleva el incensario.

He is a dancer who carries a dried fox, he represents the animal that eats the corn seed. In the carnival they perform this ritual and the woman is a woman who carries the censer.



Son los abuelos y abuelas ancestrales, que realizan rituales de transformación y en su visión todos los objetos empiezan a tener otras formas y realidades.

They are the ancestral grandparents, who perform transformation rituals and in their vision all objects begin to have other forms and realities.

The internationally-known painter and printmaker Antún Kojtom says of his fellow Tenejapaneco, “Manuelito uses language very much his own, and his technique, rapidly executed, is highly worked, consistent, coherent and moving, realistic naturalism.” Then, employing his particularly Mayan concept of art as spiritual in nature, and using “ch’ulel” – Tselal for “immanent soul” – Kojtom concludes, “Manuel is defending the spirit of all creative beings with a kind of ‘holographic projection’ of ch’ulel.”

This has its political purpose, as it is considered by all to be an urgent mission to record and dignify the tradition of old beliefs. Guzmán frequently paints fiesta scenes. He laughs as he describes them, as though he were there in person. Dancing structures of bamboo castles on the backs of revelers, with fireworks shooting from them, religious cargo-holders with dried wolverine pelts on their backs and men in women’s garb are among the elements of Tenejapan Carnaval.

As an insider artist, Guzmán (and other Mayan artists) flip that said “urgency” to “agency,” as their visual utterances are performances of their culture. When the Maya represent themselves, grabbing, as it were, the lens from the anthropologists, the tourists, the travel writers, and even non-Indigenous artists, they enrich themselves by transforming their culture from within, through added layers of self-interpretation and (re)creation.

Guzmán’s corpus of artwork gives life to his deeply personal and community’s recondite worlds, while it is life-giving, for the sheer force of his brush and the quiet pride of participating in the cultural pluralism gaining hold in the art world today.

como Adolf Wölfli y Martín Ramírez – viene a la mente, como parte de la cualidad etérea de todos estos artistas visionarios autodidactas. El pintor y grabador de fama internacional, Antún Kojtom, dice sobre su paisano Tenejapaneco, “Manuelito usa una lengua muy propia, y su técnica, rápidamente realizada, es altamente trabajada, consistente, coherente y conmovedora, naturalismo realista.” Entonces, empleando su concepto particularmente maya del arte como algo de naturaleza espiritual, y usando “ch’ulel” – “alma inmanente” en tselal – Kojtom concluye, “Manuel defiende el espíritu de todos los seres creativos con una clase de ‘proyección holográfica’ de ch’ulel.”

Esto tiene su propósito político, que es considerado por todos una misión urgente de grabar y dignificar la tradición de las antiguas creencias. Guzmán frecuentemente pinta escenas de fiesta. Se ríe cuando las describe, como si estuviera allá en persona. Estructuras de castillos de bambú danzantes sobre las espaldas de los celebrantes, con cuetes disparando de ellas, religiosos con pelos secos de glotón en sus espaldas, y hombres vestidos de mujer son algunos de los elementos del carnaval de Tenejapa.

Como un artista perteneciente a la comunidad, Guzmán (y otros artistas mayas) transforman esa “urgencia” en voluntad; sus expresiones visuales son presentaciones de su cultura. Cuando los maya se representan a sí mismos, tomando, digamos, la lente de los antropólogos, turistas, escritores de viaje e incluso artistas no Indígenas, se enriquecen al transformar su cultura desde adentro, a través de niveles añadidos de autointerpretación y (re)creación.

El corpus de arte de Guzmán da vida a su mundo profundamente personal y al mundo recóndito de su comunidad, y da vida, por la pura fuerza de su pincel y el orgullo sereno de participar en el pluralismo cultural que está tomando fuerza en el mundo del arte de hoy en día.

John Burstein
Director, *Galería MUY*



Son personajes que siguen al toro bailador del Carnaval de Tenejapa, personajes con máscaras entran y salen en las casas, y van haciendo fiesta.

They are figures that follow the dancing bull of the Tenejapa Carnival, persons with masks enter and leave the houses, and they are celebrating.



Me tiro la pesera (I was thrown by the trolley car), 2019, Oil on canvas, 35.4 × 27.5 inches



Jesus me curo (Jesus healed me), 2019, Oil on canvas, 35.4 × 27.5 inches

El día 02 de octubre de 1992 a las 5:00 PM, en la calle Riva Palacio en la Ciudad de México, cerca de Bellas Artes me atropelló la pecera. Cuando iba rumbo al trabajo, donde se estaba construyendo la línea cuatro del metro. Mi compañero que iba conmigo me llevó al hospital, él avisó a mis familiares y fueron a cuidarme. Mi accidente fue muy grave los doctores decían que no iba a sobrevivir, porque no podía comer y tampoco caminar. Después de tres meses hospitalizado en México mis familiares me trasladaron a Chiapas en un carro del INI [Instituto Nacional Indigenista] para hospitalizarme aquí en San Cristóbal de Las Casas y duré otros seis meses en el hospital.

On October 2, 1992 at 5:00 PM, on Riva Palacio street in Mexico City, near Bellas Artes, I was run over by a trolley bus. When I was on my way to work, where Line Four of the subway was being built. My partner who was with me took me to the hospital, he told my relatives and they went to take care of me. My accident was very serious, the doctors said that I would not survive, because I could not eat and I could not walk. After three months hospitalized in Mexico, my family took me to Chiapas in a car of the INI [National Indigenous Institute] to take me to San Cristóbal de Las Casas, where I spent another six months in the hospital.

Los doctores les decían a mis familiares que no iba a sobrevivir, porque no podía comer. Entonces mis familiares buscaron otras personas que rezaran por mí para que me curara. Un día vi a Jesús con sus ángeles enfrente de un enfermo. Después que vi a Jesús mis familiares me dieron de comer y ya pude comer, me llevó varios meses para comenzar a caminar. En sus sueños de mis familiares les dijeron que me accidenté porque dejé de recibir la hostia, pero Jesús me dejó vivir.

The doctors told my relatives that I was not going to survive, because I could not eat. So my family members looked for other people to pray for me, to heal me. One day, I saw Jesus with his angels in front of a sick man. After I saw Jesus, my relatives fed me and I was able to eat. It took me several months to start walking. In their dreams, my relatives told them that I had an accident because I stopped receiving the host, but Jesus let me live.

Es un personaje que está siendo curado porque está con mucha temperatura, como que fueran serpientes que están mordiendo su cuerpo.

This person, being cured, has a high temperature, as though serpents were biting his body.



Coronavirus, 2020, Pencil on paper, 5 × 7 inches