

Maximo Gonzalez
Inflation, 2004/2010
Installation of 1000
mylar balloons 18 inch
diameter, blown up with
helium gas
Courtesy of the artist,
Photography ©
Fredrik Nilsen



closes her explanation of the work with a straightforward and arresting fact: From January through March of 2010, more than 500 people were murdered in Juarez. This piece of information is underscored by a collection of Spanish language newspapers displayed on a table underneath the artist's statement. Fluent reading knowledge of Spanish is not necessary to grasp the magnitude of the violent acts detailed in the newspapers—each cover features photos of uniformed members of law enforcement or bloody bodies. Margolles' work has a sense of desperate futility: Why irrigate a surface where nothing can grow? Yet at the same time, by depicting the remains of violent acts 250 miles away from where they took place, the work disseminates responsibility and awareness. What Margolles finally offers is a cleansing feeling—the sound of the rushing water fills the gallery as the truck moves along the highway.

Thanks in part to the brief artist statement (in addition to the graphic newspaper photographs), *Irrigación* is the most confrontational and hard-hitting work in the exhibition. Pedro Reyes' *Palas por pistolas*, which shares the south gallery with *Irrigación*, also consists of an action designed to increase awareness of violence, but without an explanation the work's effect isn't as strong. Reyes collected

weapons by offering to trade for food stamps, then melted the weapons down to create shovels. Each of the 1,527 shovels will be used to plant a tree. On display in the gallery is a wilted, potted tree next to a shovel on a pedestal.

In *Lieu of Unity*'s underlying theme of community is strengthened by the fact that, like *Palas por pistolas*, many works in the exhibition would not have been possible without the help of collaborators. In Paulina Lasa's untitled work, visitors wear rings collected in Marfa and neighboring Alpine and Ft. Davis, attached to colorful strands of yarn tethered to the gallery wall. The yarn tangles and knots together as visitors move among one another. Maximo Gonzalez's *Inflation* consists of 1,000 helium balloons featuring the design of 10 centavos coins. During the opening, balloons were distributed to gallery visitors; since then, the balloons have begun to deflate, reflecting the state of Mexican currency.

For Margarita Cabrera's *Space In Between*, a series of fiber sculptures resembling desert plants, Cabrera teamed up with nine recent immigrants from Central and South America working at Box 13 in Houston. The artist taught each woman a form of indigenous Mexican embroidery, which they used to illustrate their own immigration stories by stitching onto olive-green fabric once used for border patrol uniforms. Decorated with ominous imagery such as helicopters, tall fences and snakes, as well as happy scenes of smiling families rendered in thick stitches of brightly colored thread, the sculptures elicit both dread and contentment.

Cabrera's collaborators are listed by name in the exhibition checklist, but unfortunately *Ballroom Marfa* neglects to inform viewers that these women are telling their own immigration stories. Still, the lack of explanation allows *Space In Between* to subtly reinforce the point Ritson makes with *In Lieu of Unity*: community is not based purely on shared experience.