

Santiago Sierra

PETER KILCHMAN

Zurich

In a milieu where most every taboo topic has been rendered toothless by overuse, Spanish artist Santiago Sierra's probings of social class still have the power to provoke and disturb. Composed of photos documenting a decade of his art, this show traced Sierra's evolution from working primarily with spaces, through installations or architectural interventions, to using Western society's most marginal people—migrant and immigrant workers—in performances of sorts, which he photographs. Powerful yet elegant, these compelling pieces evoke dilemmas surrounding issues of class, culture, and privilege within the art world—and within the world.

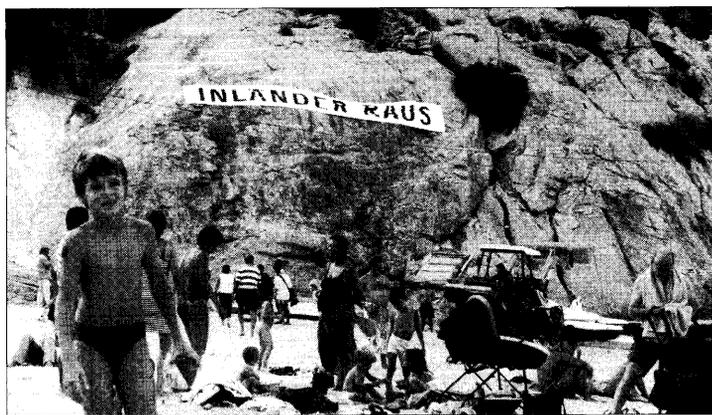
The harshest piece by far was *Line of 160 Cm Tattooed on Four People* (2000), in which four heroin-addicted Spanish prostitutes had a line inked across their contiguous backs. For this, Sierra paid them each a sum sufficient to buy one dose of the drug. In the photo, the third section of the line is being drawn; the fourth woman's back is still unmarked, and she looks over at the needle, teeth bared, her expression somewhere between grimace and desperate smile.

The other pieces have less permanent ramifications. Creating *465 Remunerated Persons* (1999), Sierra had an agency for manual laborers engage people to pack a room at Mexico City's Rufino Tamayo Museum; museum-goers were rendered unable to enter the gallery during the entire opening. For another, two immigrant men held up a long form made of wood and concrete, hinged to the wall at face level, keeping it purposelessly perpendicular for hours. Beyond merely revealing that the underclasses will do almost anything for money, the futility of the labor Sierra devises for them accentuates their disconnection from the intended purposes of the labor.

Sierra also tackles class tensions among Europeans. One large-format photo, *Banner Suspended in Front of a Cove* (2001), displays a huge German-language banner hung at a Majorca beach, reading "Inländer Raus" (Natives get the hell out). The joke here is twofold: it zings because it inverts the classic xenophobic motto "Ausländer Raus" (Foreigners get the hell out), and also because German retirees and celebrities have virtually displaced the Spanish natives in Majorca. Like Sierra's other works, the banner derives its power from taking what's demurely *de facto* and making it uncomfortably overt.

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—Marc Spiegler



Santiago Sierra,
*Banner Suspended in
Front of a Cove*, 2001,
black-and-white
photograph,
4% x 8%.

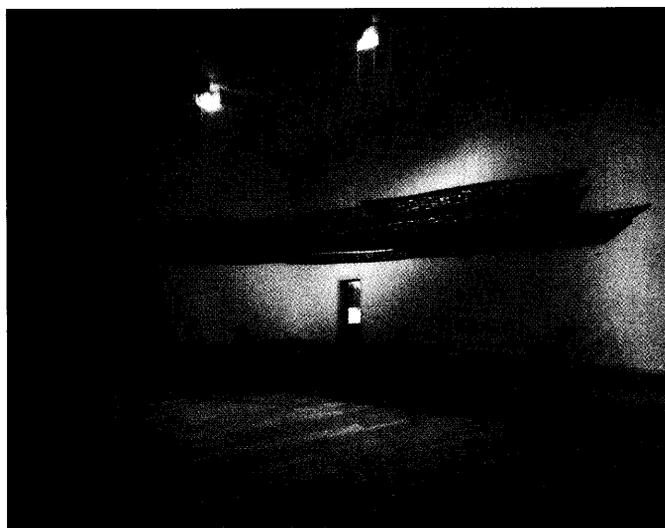
Peter Kilchman.

Spain's most prominent artists.

One of her distinguishing characteristics is the way she combines materials in unusual pairings, such as cement and tapestry or alabaster and iron. In addition, Iglesias often makes things resemble what they are not. For instance, the massive sculpture *Untitled (Hanging Tilted Ceiling)* (1997) appears to be made of heavy stone but is in fact composed of lightweight resin. In a similar reversal of appearance and reality, Iglesias photographs miniature cardboard models as to make them appear monumental and then silk-

screens them onto large, shimmering copper plates.

A recent series of untitled sculptures resembling screens were arranged in a labyrinthine manner around the exhibition space. Although they appeared to be weathered metal, they were in fact made out of wood, coated with bronze and copper powder. What at first glance appeared to be abstract geometric patterns in the lattices, turned out upon closer inspection, to be hundreds of words: quotes taken from the writings of Joris-Karl Huysmans and Raymond Roussel.



Cristina Iglesias,
Untitled (Passage 1),
2002, raffia,
dimensions variable.
Serralves Museum.

Texts were also woven into the stunning new piece called *Untitled (Passage 1)* (2002), which consisted of a set of woven mats hung from the ceiling. As light filtered through them, layered shadows of the words spelled by the mats' woven strands were cast onto the floor, skillfully incorporating the immaterial elements of light, shadow, and literature into a work of material sculpture.

—George Stolz