

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Mateo López

Play

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Casey Kaplan is pleased to open the New Year with Mateo López: *Play*, the artist's second exhibition with the gallery. With a new body of sculpture, works on paper and stop-motion film, López invites viewers to navigate the exhibition as if set within a tridimensional drawing. Objects guide us through an interactive experience. Through the principles of play and its impact on cultural progress across diverse fields - from architecture and design to education - López offers a ludic space for collective activation and improvisation.

López's move from his hometown of Bogotá, Colombia to New York City in 2014 displaced both body and practice. As his new studio became inhabited with objects and parts from previous works, López entered into a timeless space rife with potential for future making. As past and present combined, the constant that remained was his body. Increasingly aware of his own physicality, López began to imagine himself in a daily, choreographed performance with the multitude of objects that surrounded him in the studio.

A transference of energy between the body and sculpture through performance has become essential to López's work. In this movement, the body serves as a bridge between the physical and the cognitive rather than a tool that only manipulates. Expanding on his 2017 solo exhibition *Undo List* at the Drawing Center in New York, López continues his application of dance and performance in traditional forms of mark-making. Influenced by artist and choreographer Oskar Schlemmer's 1922 performance, *The Triadic Ballet*, which reduced the human form into a system of geometric shapes, López presents *I am sitting in a Room* (2017), a wood door personified. The door's 'back' leans against the wall while its 'legs' provide upright support, setting the tone for the playful experience.

For López, the act of play is grounded in a Utopian-based desire for change, equality and participation. Reflecting on the socio-political failures and geographic impossibilities in Colombia, the artist recalls Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga, who posited in "Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture" (published 1944) that play is foundational to a successful society; "it is in the game and through the game that civilization emerges and develops."

A series of six wooden benches, *Bench (Variations with 6)* (2018), are piled on top of one another like building blocks. Viewers question their role - to move the benches or not. Around the corner, the stop-motion film *Detritus* (2018) depicts a series of blocks that shift in shape, hinting at what might be with its neighboring, tangible counterpart. Form and function meet, encouraging viewer activation in works such as *Intervalos* (2018), which begs viewers to swipe the series of stacked boards in a wave of movement. And *Escaleras* (2018), wood panels bound by hand-loomed fabric can be folded and unfolded.

The geometry between the body and its spatial surroundings, an ideology bolstered by the Bauhaus (1919-1933), remains central. *Threshold* (2017), a performance-based work initially produced and staged in residency at MASS MoCA, North Adams, allows viewers to move, step onto and through large-scale "doorways" on wheels. The gateways can be paired with identically sized blocks of diluted prime colors painted directly onto the gallery walls. The process of designing, fabricating, choreographing, and performing *Threshold* calls for collaboration across disciplines.

A set of platforms positioned in a corner of the gallery exist as both pedestal and seating. With the philosophies of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) and his invention of the "Kindergarten," the artist designates a space in which viewers can sit, observe or take part. Drawing from Froebel's "gifts," a series of kits including play materials or toys for child and adult activity, López positions stationary and kinetic objects within reach. *Continuum* (2018) is comprised of four linen panels that can be stacked, folded and lain flat. A paper "galaxy," *Uyuni* (2017), is folded like the bellows of an accordion, too fragile to play with. An awareness of the geometry and recurring patterns that exist around us, in our universe, prompts us take pause - to inhale and exhale.

Mateo López (b. 1978, Bogotá, Colombia) has exhibited internationally, with solo exhibitions at Blue Project Foundation, Barcelona (2018); the Drawing Center, New York (2017); Museo de Arte Moderno, Medellín, Colombia (2014); The Jerusalem Center for the Visual Arts, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Israel (2012); Gasworks, London (2010); and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (2009). With a major presentation of works currently on view at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (MAMBO), curated by María Iovino in homage to Carlos Rojas, on view through January 27th, the artist has participated in numerous group exhibitions at institutions such as: Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (2018); Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2017); The Drawing Room, London (2015); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013); The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2013); 43 Salon Nacional de Artistas, Colombia (2013); Mercosur Biennial (2011); and 29 Bienal de São Paulo (2010). López is included in major public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Berezdivin Collection, Puerto Rico; Inhotim, Minas Gerais, Brazil; Banco de la Republica, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá, Colombia; Bienal de Cuenca, Ecuador; and CIFO, Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, FL.