



Alejandro Almanza Pereda

Within the realm of possibilities

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Exito (sign), 2007
Exit sign with lamps
Edition of 5
Courtesy of the artist and
MagnanMetz Gallery,
New York, NY

Front (detail) and
overleaf: **Just give me
a place to stand**, 2007
dimensions variable
Installation view from the
exhibition *Host*, 2007,
Soap Factory,
Minneapolis, MN
Lumber, dolly, gallon
water jugs, cinder blocks,
fluorescent light bulbs,
fish tank, vase, water, air
pump, sofa, lamp, dollies,
milk crate, fused light
bulbs, mirrors, concrete,
tables, bricks, tabletop,
cushion, plate, magazines,
desk, plant
Courtesy the artist and
MagnanMetz Gallery,
New York, NY

Right:
**White carpet
treatment**, 2009
light bulbs, porcelain sock-
ets, electric wire
Unique series
Courtesy the artist and
MagnanMetz Gallery,
New York, NY

*I mainly do sculptures using objects and
materials, trying to make relationships to make
a situation for the viewer.*

—AAP

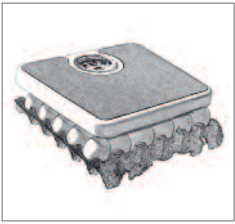
Artists re-contextualizing mass-produced objects by subverting their original use has a long history (think Marcel Duchamp's *Ready-mades*). With the increasingly global dissemination of consumer goods, such re-appropriation has become almost fundamental to the creation of contemporary art, in part because these materials are imbued with the resonance of lived lives. When harvested as a visual vocabulary, juxtaposed, rearranged, and even illuminated, such amalgamations of the everyday readily allow us to complete the connection, or circuit of the artist's intent. This is certainly true of Alejandro Almanza Pereda's art, comprised of drawing, video, and sculpture crafted from construction materials and thrift store objects.

Born in Mexico City in 1977, Almanza attended the University of Texas at El Paso where he received a BFA in 2005. His approach to art-making surrealistically merges the absurd with the quotidian to create warm, funny, yet sharp social critiques. Conceptually and physically athletic, Almanza's work pushes against the physics of gravity to ply the territory of risk, safety, and security within differing cultural contexts.

The first two pieces in the exhibition—*Exito*, 2007, and *White carpet treatment*, 2009—set the stage for ideas about cultural assumptions. The first, *Exito*, is made from a ubiquitous, interior exit sign surmounted by floodlights that is found in most if not all non-



residential buildings where, in case of a fire, smoke trips a sensor so the spotlights come on enabling occupants to find their way out. Placed above the interior door of the gallery with the word EXIT altered by the addition of an “O,” it takes a few minutes to realize that this object is not part of the intentional gallery signage. This sets into motion a series of questions, with the first probably being that since the Spanish word for “exit” is *salida*, what then does EXITO mean? For those who know Spanish, it is likely that they will immediately translate EXITO to SUCCESS. Ultimately though, meaning in this piece will always depend on the dominant language of the area or country where this work is experienced. Exhibited among a Spanish-speaking population, it will either be terribly confusing, or it might imply that immigration is perceived to be the path to success.¹ For a primarily English-speaking populace however, the word EXITO becomes a “false friend,” or a word in a foreign language that bears a deceptive resemblance to a word in one’s own language suggesting, in this context, that some assumptions that seem so right may actually be quite wrong.



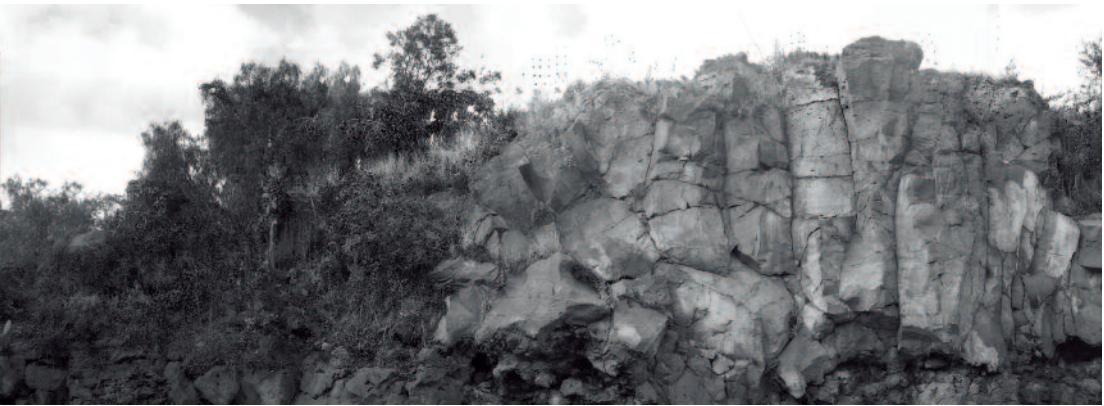
The egg and the scale, 2008
 serigraph (diptych)
 36 1/2 h x 36 1/2 w (inches)
 Edition of 12
 Courtesy the artist and
 MagnanMetz Gallery,
 New York, NY

The next work, *White carpet treatment*, 2009, is also found at the point of entry or departure. Here, Almanza’s take on the welcome mat is crafted from bulbs, some lit, some not, and arranged in a pattern that might reference *papel picado* or cut paper, or the oriental carpets which were the actual inspiration for this piece.² Placed on the floor at your feet, *White carpet treatment* engages the visceral instinct to wipe one’s shoes and then, just as quickly, negates that urge because of the glass bulbs and electrical current. In marketing language, getting the “white carpet treatment” guarantees that a treatment or cleaning will be done ever so carefully, even better than the “red carpet treatment,” and that there won’t be any unintended mess to clean up later. Together, such references raise questions about political positions on immigration, unintended consequences, commodities as status, and given the works electrification, the link between luxury goods and energy consumption. Considered with *Exito*, this work also succinctly summarizes the artist’s cross-cultural references.

Just give me a place to stand, 2007 (cover and overleaf) and *The egg and the scale*, 2008, depict different types of improbable situations.³ In the first, a myriad of materials balance, morph, and adapt to highly unusual positions, and in the latter, a scale first weighs the eggs and then the eggs support the scale, putting a humorous twist on what it means to “walk on eggshells.” This inversion of physical properties is tweakingly absurd, yet there is an elegantly balanced tension in both pieces that speak to the concepts of safety and security.

Extending this conversation about risk further, Almanza’s 2010, *If you say something, see something* series (both a sculpture and drawings), frames in rope a box that is not there. The title reverses

the TSA's (Transport Security Administration) slogan "If you see something, say something," to ask whether or not the security theatre routinely encountered in airports and at the border is real or not. As the author and technology "security guru" Bruce Schneier has said, safety is always an economic trade-off, and often people respond to the feeling and not the reality of danger because cognitive biases about risk tend to exaggerate the spectacular and downplay the common. Those that seem the most imminent and threatening become so mostly because they are named and appear repeatedly in the media.



Untitled, 2011
wallpaper
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and
MagnanMetz Gallery,
New York, NY

What happens then, when security becomes such a driving force within a society that it becomes a filter for making government policies? And is it possible that security theatre actually creates more danger by calcifying us to the "other"? In his work, Almanza does not presume to offer answers to such timely and serious questions. Instead, he places familiar materials and objects into unusual situations to ask that these ideas be considered and debated in a world where borders, people, and economies are simultaneously fluid and rigid.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster Art Museum



If you say something, see something, 2010
rope, resin
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and
MagnanMetz Gallery,
New York, NY

Notes

1. *Exito* was initially made for El Museo del Barrio's Bienal. Even though the work was curated into the exhibition, the museum elected not to show the piece because, in the event of a fire, visitors would become confused as 90% of their audience are Spanish speakers.
2. *Papel picado* is a Mexican art form of cut tissue paper squares strung together to commemorate feast days and celebrations.
3. *Just give me a place to stand*, 2007, is not in this exhibition. It was shown at The Soap Factory in Minneapolis, MN, and is used here as an example of a similar work created by the artist specifically for The College of Wooster Art Museum.





THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER ART MUSEUM

Ebert Art Center / 1220 Beall Avenue / Wooster, Ohio 44691-2363

T 330 263 2495 / F 330 263 2633 / artmuseum.wooster.edu

About the artist

Alejandro Almanza Pereda was born in Mexico City, in 1977, and received his BFA in Sculpture in 2005 from the University of Texas at El Paso. The recipient of a Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation Grant in 2008, and a Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Summer Residency in 2004, his work is represented in The Goetz Collection (Munich); El Museo del Barrio (New York); and the MALI-Museo de Arte de Lima (Lima), among others. Recent solo exhibitions include those at MagnanMetz Gallery (New York); Chert (Berlin); Kenny Schachter Rove (London); and the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery (Los Angeles). Recent group exhibitions include those at: the Dublin Contemporary (Dublin); the Curtiba Biennial, Curtiba, Brazil (Curitiba, Brazil) and the Moscow Biennale for Young Art (Moscow); and the Museo de Arte Moderno (Mexico City). Almanza lives and works in New York, NY, and Mexico City, and is represented by MagnanMetz Gallery (New York).

Acknowledgments

As one of three exhibitions organized by The College of Wooster Art Museum in association with the 2011 Wooster Forum, *The Americas: Contact and Consequence*, Alejandro Almanza Pereda's *Within the realm of possibilities*, speaks with great eloquence to this theme of cause and effect.

All projects have unique trajectories, and this one even more so because Alejandro created a new piece specifically for Wooster. I thank the artist for sharing his energy and vision, and Lisa Friedman, Assistant Director at Magnan Metz Gallery, New York, for attending to the many questions and details that arose throughout. Additionally, I would like to thank Alberto Magnan for this collaboration. At Wooster, Doug McGlumphy, Art Museum Preparator contributed yet another a stellar installation design, and Rose Seling, Art Museum Administrative Coordinator, provided valuable and timely support. Additionally, we thank Steve Plant of the College's Scot Lanes for contributing vintage bowling balls to the exhibition. Finally, I would like to thank the Burton D. Morgan Foundation, Hudson, Ohio, for their continued support of The College of Wooster Art Museum exhibition program.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster Art Museum