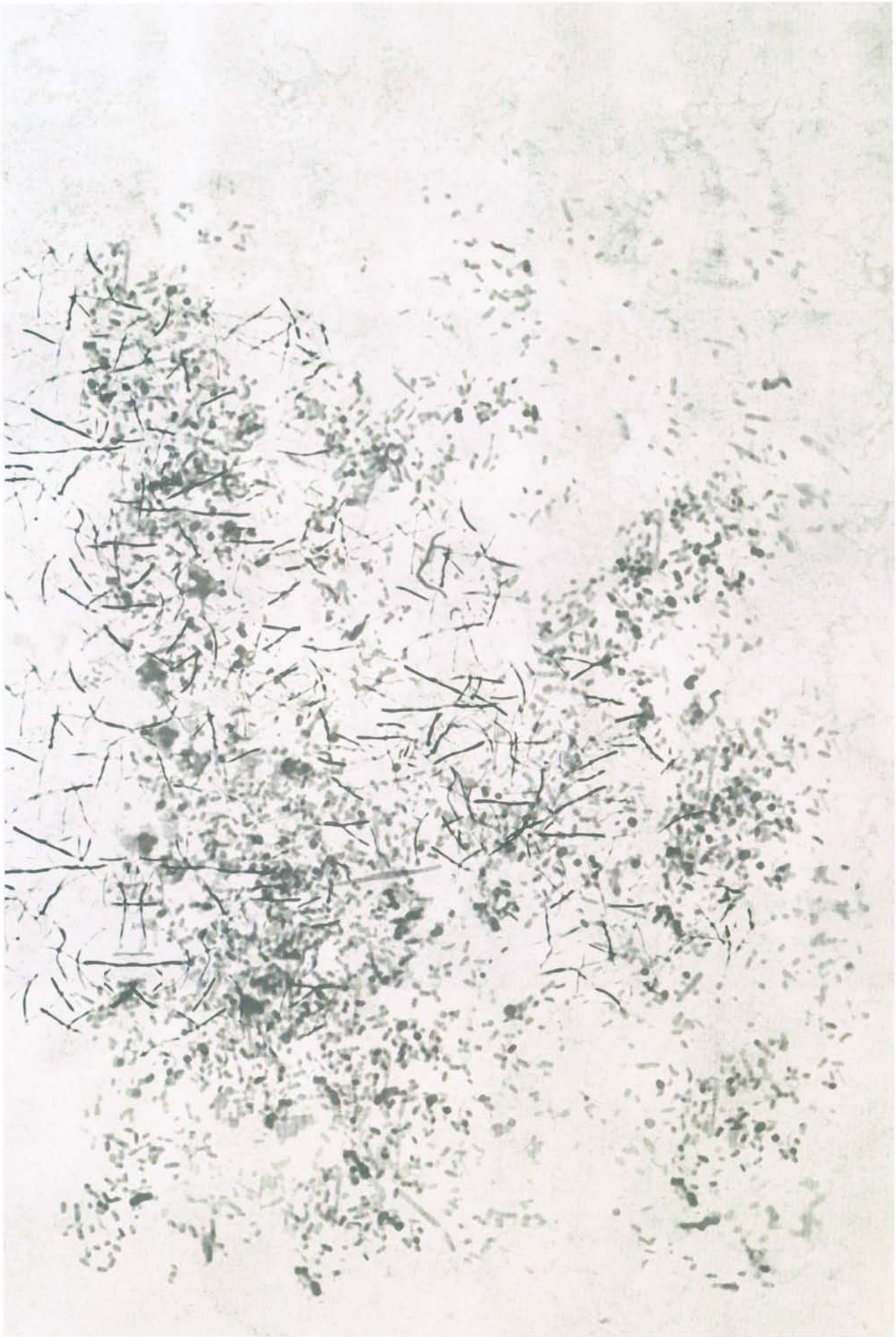
Gatsby Magazine
Fall/Winter 2009
Page 142-149

TOMÁS OCHOA

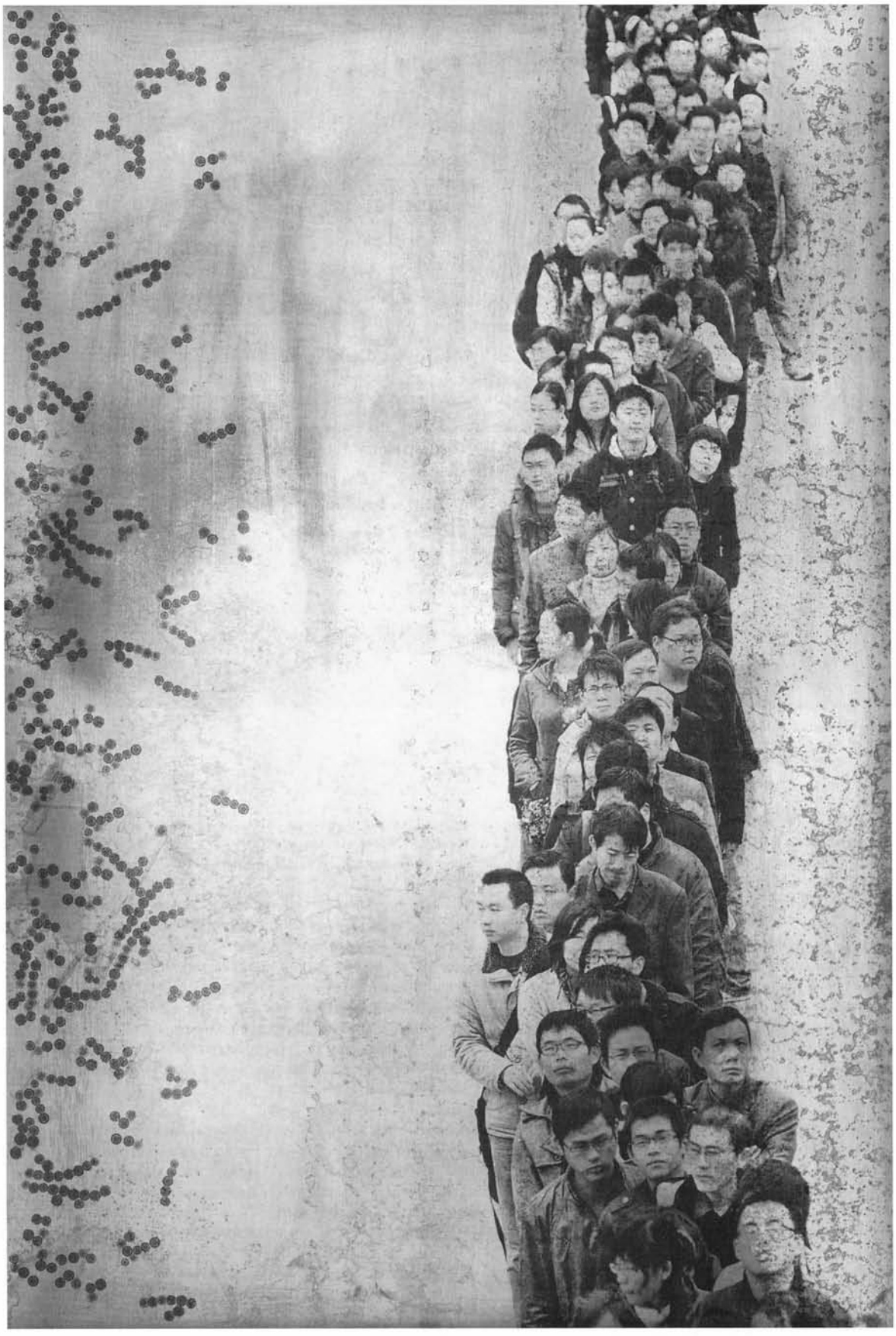
Words | **Trevor Hoppen**



Previous Page: **Eukaryote I**, 2009, Mixed media on canvas, Diptych (each panel 150 x 100 cm) 150 x 200 cm

Above: **Irreducible**, 2009, Mixed media on canvas, Polyptych (6 pieces, each panel 150 x 70 cm) 150 x 420 cm

Eukaryote V, 2009, Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 100 cm



Eukaryote II, 2009, Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 100 cm

La Casa Ideal, 2008, Video Installation

Hailed as one of South America's most significant figures in the present contemporary art scene, Ecuadorian-born artist Tomás Ochoa faces the conceptual challenge of today's extant artistic expression through his very own concept of *multitudes*, transcending the sphere of relativity on various complex levels. Triumphing in an arena that ostracises art from the so-called *Third World* countries, Ochoa proves that passion and talent are the base for the success of any discussion and the ideal route to descriptions of his feigned realities. Making use of an array of articulate visual elements, he searches for a collective memory, the reconstruction of subjectivity and the conceptual scaffoldings of power. All these topics are then contrasted by the question of progress in relation to the individual in society. Ochoa expresses an intense desire to portray reality, although his is not your average day-to-day reality, but rather a fictitious one, where human conflicts are discussed and authoritative ideas are challenged.

Ochoa believes in the ideal of a committed artist, which is why he rejects the notion of pure abstraction or merely aesthetic representations on any given subject. His poetic constructions, multimedia works of various shapes and forms, video installations and conceptual pieces, strive to bring art closer to this reality. In order to understand this attainment, Ochoa works as a researcher, conducting interviews, recreating stories and investigating his motifs.

His earlier work was often marked by an intense desire to discern from the common perceptions of intrinsically devaluated art, due to his cultural heritage and the lack of recognition attributed to South American artists at the time. Emerging from this conceivably subconscious battle for appreciation, Ochoa furthered his search for truth expressing it in the form of visual inferences, following extensive research, analysis and thought. By picking themes to work with that could almost be misinterpreted as simplistic or even abstemious, the artist astutely uses them as a pretext to venture deeper into their very meaning, exploring their inner structures and drawing conclusions that then become part of his ever-evolving body of work.

Transcending the worlds of words, imagery and meaning, Ochoa creates a parallel identity to the truth. Not a quickly conceived, loosely backed or simply demiurgic reality, but one that is effectively backed by research and a progress that embodies various channels of expression. This is why the artist works with painting, video installations, conceptual objects and drawings; it becomes a necessity, not a choice. The truth of any given reality is far more complex than the formulated versions of it that we are fed by various levels of power and perception, decision makers and manipulators.

For his latest solo exhibition "Virus", Tomás Ochoa brings to life a comprehensive dialogue on social anxiety with a wide-ranging discussion of macro- and microcosms. The virus itself, serving as a possible organic component, representing this fickle fringe between live and death. In his new series, he explores poetic and metamorphic possibilities of this frontier area. Expressed through complex mixed media techniques, repetitions become an important part of his body of work displaying the demeanor of micro-organisms and setting a parallel to human behaviour based on their composition in space.

The concept of *multitudes* reappears in this current series as a collective of people driven by a cultural codex in relation to a specific environment on one hand, and in association to the notion of a virus, lead by a given genetic predisposition that it follows unequivocally on the other. Bringing these two patterns together, juxtaposing them and analyzing their scope is what ultimately leads Ochoa to produce this series of incredibly stimulating discussions. Curiously it is also a very timely affair, closely related to recent viral outbreaks that have changed our perceptions of security and our social behaviour as part of a greater socio-demographic context.

Literature also plays an important role in Ochoa's works, often finding its way into the actual pieces and serving as an additional element for reflection. In a way, it also represents his transition from literature to the art world, counting his former professors, writers Jorge Dávila and Efraín Jara, amongst the first to appreciate and foster his work as an artist. Throughout his work, words, images and sounds can be articulated in one single piece. Strategically defining the way of articulation thus becomes paramount to his thought process, as the writings during the conception of a new work and those that appear after it is completed, form an important part of the creative development of his pieces. Further, the use of silvery-grey shades give Tomás Ochoa a signature thread, an aesthetic detail that brings his works together visually, allowing the viewer to focus on what is actually happening beneath the surface and drawing us into the artist's passionate debate and his intense desire to push the limits between art and reality through his work. Tomás Ochoa's poetic constructions cross the boundaries between factual and fictitious realities by means of documentary analysis, adding countless layers of depth to each of his captivating pieces. Almost like a continuous story, every one of his series represents a new chapter in this search for Ochoa's absolute aphorisms.

www.tomasochoa.com | www.katzcontemporary.com

All images courtesy of Katz Contemporary, Zurich | www.katzcontemporary.com