



# galería

## metropolitana 1999-2007

luis alarcón and ana maríe saavedra

**The Chilean visual arts scene is living a moment new to its history, characterised specifically by the democratic transition of the last seventeen years. This is a moment marked by State support of arts and culture; the explosive appearance of art schools (caused by the expansion of the private tertiary education); the good management of the Museum of Contemporary Art; the recomposition of art schools in both the University of Chile and the Catholic University; the work of Chilean artists living overseas, like Alfredo Jaar, Juan Castillo, Catalina Parra, Juan Dávila and others; the work of artists within Chile, like Eugenio Dittborn, Gonzalo Díaz, Lotty Rosenfeld, Arturo Duclos and others; the work of theoreticians and curators like Nelly Richard, Justo Pastor Mellado, Adriana Valdés, Sergio Rojas, Guillermo Machuca, Cecilia Brunson and others; a greater international circulation of young artists, like Iván Navarro, Mario Navarro, Mónica Bengoa, Felipe Mujica, Diego Fernández, Johanna Unzueta, Patrick Hamilton, Claudio Correa, Claudia del Fierro, Leonardo Ortega and others.**

Within this context, it is pertinent to remark upon the appearance of new exhibition spaces that come to modify, strengthen and extend the local art system. Among the state-run spaces: Gabriela Mistral Gallery, Balmaceda 1215, Matucana 100 and BECH and in the alternative scene, Galería Chilena, Murosur, Hoffmann's House, Galería Metropolitana, Die Ecke, H10 and Espacio G. Although this situation can seem quite positive, it's important to highlight that the conditions of this scene, apart from the evident advances, continues to be difficult and precarious. This is reflected in aspects such as the absence of art collecting, the weakness of state policies on visual arts, the lack of committed support from the private sector and the lack of interest from the political class, among many other factors.

Galería Metropolitana is an independent and self-sustaining art space, allocated at a working class and semi-peripheral commune<sup>2</sup> in the Southwest side of Santiago of Chile. Given the characteristics of this project – a contemporary art gallery set up in a metal shed, connected to its director's residential house – we choose to operate from the only possible place of freedom: the domestic space. This project involves curatorial, production and management tasks, which entail a radical challenge, consisting of collective collaboration – between art space managers, artists and neighbours or organisations – to gather the necessary elements in order to accomplish the different shows and other projects. The financial resources – always restricted to one specific project, are acquired, in some cases, from small private sponsorships or, in other cases, making application to state funding and, when none of these attempts work, the war cry is to complete the projects using whatever is at hand. The key is actually in *working* the deficit, the lack, the precariousness; in this is rooted our only tool to face the daily difficulties: not to elude the fragility but, in basic terms, to make this reality become productive.

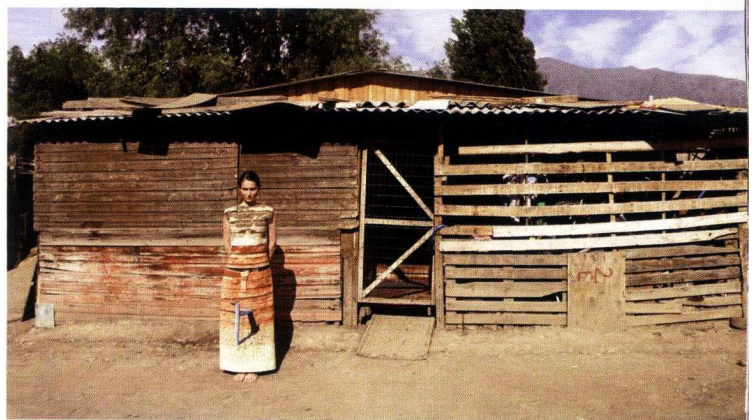
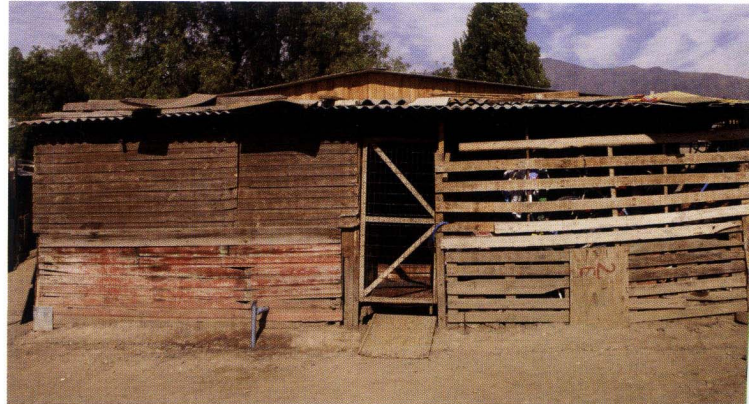
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As a composition of place, we think we have been able to articulate a discourse of our own, while we have developed and amended a model of management and curatorial praxis that has been validated as much by the local art system as by the network of social organisations at the commune where the gallery has its operations centre. This has turned Galería Metropolitana into a sort of local 'institution of the alternative', and its culmination is having become a common thesis subject at universities. The process of institutionalisation has become a subject of in-house analysis, since the gallery defines itself as thinking. We ask ourselves nowadays how to escape from this normalising process? In response, we have thought and acted leading to the following directions: to make self-criticism into a mechanism of permanent analysis, based on avoiding rigidity and stagnation, and not stopping to bet on the artworks, the artists and the experimentation. This, in our case, has to be understood as mixed with the social and the political. We understand, therefore, the gallery project as unfinished, a permanent work in progress.

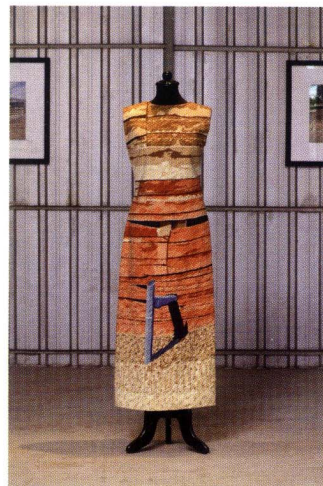
In political-cultural terms, we have achieved a working network, as much at local as at global level; as much within the art system as within the network of social organisations in our commune. Therefore, today we can define the gallery as a hybrid between experimental art gallery and basic social organisation. This strategy – and double challenge at the same time – has been possible, in artistic terms, coming in and out from the art system; in economic terms, operating without stable budget and choosing primarily to be self-sustaining as a support base; and finally, in political terms, choosing to set up a network of relationships and cooperation where the key is on a personal level, as a form of permanent action.

The gallery is also a self-reflexive space, which should not be separated from its context. Defined by its programme, it works with art history (local-international), neighbourhood history and city history as its key concepts, permanently activating these coordinates into multiple meanings, which are materials as much for the gallery as for the artists who exhibit there. Hence, we can say that our specialised gallery project is also a contemporary form of citizen initiative, directly linked to what we could call 'social movements' and, thereby, also to new discursive ways to try to rebuild and reconnect artistic, political and social discourses. For this reason, we understand curatorial practice as a permanent challenge, an exploration field. This is complemented by the existence of a 'stable model' that serves or has served as a basis for the configuration of exhibition proposals. Such a stable model is based on three fundamental aspects: a compelling theme and context; dialogue between artists, curators, theoreticians and neighbours; and the inclusion of a sound concept, as necessary aspects for every artwork project.

Finally, Galería Metropolitana defines itself as a micro-political space with a definable political-cultural strategy – read from the art perspective. More specifically, it is a space that aims to modify the art system through criticising the art market and its multiple edges, and trying, with this operation, to contribute to a greater critique of the prevailing neo-liberalism. This criticism is activated through the mixing, crossings and usage of a language as much global as local, arising from a misplaced centre. 🗨️



Carolina Ruff *TOMA* 2006, Photo-  
Performance-Installation, November-  
December.



#### Translator's notes

1 The two main and 'traditional' Universities in Chile belong to the State and the Church, respectively.

2 'Working class' in the original appears as 'popular' which in Chilean usage means roughly: 'very populated, lower class and poor'. The Communes of Santiago are its political divisions (i.e. cities or municipalities).

Translation by Leonarda Ortega.

Luis Alarcón and Ana María Saavedra are the directors of Galería Metropolitana.

[www.galmet.org](http://www.galmet.org)