

RAIMOND CHAVES uses drawing in the way that many Conceptual artists in the 1960s and 1970s used photography: to document the social conditions in which artworks are received and circulated. Conceptual artists chose photography because it was a mechanized medium devoid of an artistic aura; Raimond Chaves, in contrast, has chosen drawing, a hand-crafted medium, only to subvert its aura by transforming it into a vehicle for conveying information.

According to Walter Benjamin, one measure of an artwork's aura is its accessibility. Auratic works could only be seen by a few, while non-auratic ones, like photography, were accessible to a large number of viewers. Chaves makes drawings accessible to a larger audience, as we see for example in *El dibujo 24 hs* (24-hour Drawing), a project first presented in Barcelona in 2000. The artist set up a booth on La Rambla, one of the city's busiest streets, and displayed a sign announcing that free drawings would be made on demand and around the clock by a team of volunteer artists. The only rule: the works had to result from an active exchange between the artists and models. Far from being passive, the portrait sitters contributed ideas—or even sketches—in a truly collaborative process. Once finished, the drawings were displayed on the booth's walls until the project concluded (usually after two to ten days). After the shed came down, Chaves mailed the drawings to the models.

This project not only makes drawings accessible to a large, non-art-world audience, but also transforms the act of sketching from a solitary enterprise into a collective activity. It is an ingenious experiment designed to give drawing a more relevant, community-building function in today's often alienating urban societies.

In other projects, Chaves experiments with ways of dismantling boundaries separating art from everyday life. In 2000, he read an article in the Colombian press describing the theft of a truck carrying dynamite by a trio of rebels—one of the many acts of violence linked to the guerrilla war that has ravaged the country since the 1950s. Chaves began to make a series of drawings about the theft, focusing on the relations amongst the rebels, and eventually he published them as the comic book *Los ladrones de dinamita* (The Dynamite Thieves). This would be one successful example of what Jean-Paul Sartre called “engaged” work—art that does not turn away from the problems of the world in which it was created.

Chaves has also experimented with ways of integrating his work into the realm of Latin American popular culture. In a series of stencils (which Chaves calls “drawing with a knife”) titled “La marqueta”—the Spanglish name given to supermarkets in New York's East Harlem—he illustrates the lyrics of an anti-consumerist pop song by Tego Calderón. “The things I have with me,” sings Calderón, “are not for sale in la marqueta.” This project suggests another of Chaves's effective creative strategies to de-sublimate drawing, strip the medium of its aura, and bring it closer to a broader public.

—Rubén Gallo

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(2)



- (1) *El dibujo 24 hs* (24-hour Drawing), April 2000, street shed, Barcelona
- (2) *El dibujo 24 hs* (24-hour Drawing), October 2000, main coach station, Bogota
- (3) *Stop, You Must be . . .*, from the series “The Dynamite Thieves,” 1998–2000, photocopy and ball-point pen on paper, 11 x 17 inches, 27.9 x 43.2 cm
- (4) *Notebook Drawings*, 1999, ball-point pen on paper, each 6 x 4 inches, 15.2 x 10.2 cm
- (5) *She*, from the series “La marqueta” (The Market), 2004, stencil on PVC, 19 x 27 1/2 inches, 48.3 x 69.9 cm

