

Time Out
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Time Out

London

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Art

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Just say no

Art won't stop drug wars or homelessness but it can shame us into thinking about the unthinkable. **Ossian Ward** waves a flag for Mexican artists

Away from the crowds coming down the Turbine Hall ramp or funnelling up the escalators, Tate Modern's Level 2 gallery has been quietly hosting some of this modern art behemoth's most studied and provocative exhibitions of recent years. Ironically for a space dedicated to showing art from far-flung parts of the world, Level 2 is also somewhat marginalised from the institution as a whole, having only a discreet entrance and precious little signage. Still, at least Tate has one eye trained on the wider global scene, even if the current offering is enough to scare off any visitors straying from the mothership.

'No Lone Zone' is a small survey of current Latin American art co-curated by a gallery in Mexico City and takes its ominous title from a military term for a region deemed too hostile to be patrolled by a single soldier. The implication is that there are still places in the world where contemporary art has no business poking its nose, seen in two films of uncomprehending audiences in a Peruvian hilltown and a Mexican backwater. The viewers are unsure what to make of either a performing interloper or a concrete slab of public sculpture deposited in their neighbourhood, the latter being brilliantly repurposed as a platform for workers' rallies, somewhere to store building materials and even an impromptu hairdressing salon.

This show also ponders the truly menacing connotations of the army's 'No Lone Zone' – so you might want to take a friend along. For starters, the limp rag hanging from a pole inside the door is actually a horrifically potent banner, 'Flag I' by Mexican artist Teresa Margolles. Its ruddy colour comes from real blood soaked up at execution sites in her country's ongoing, self-inflicted drug wars,

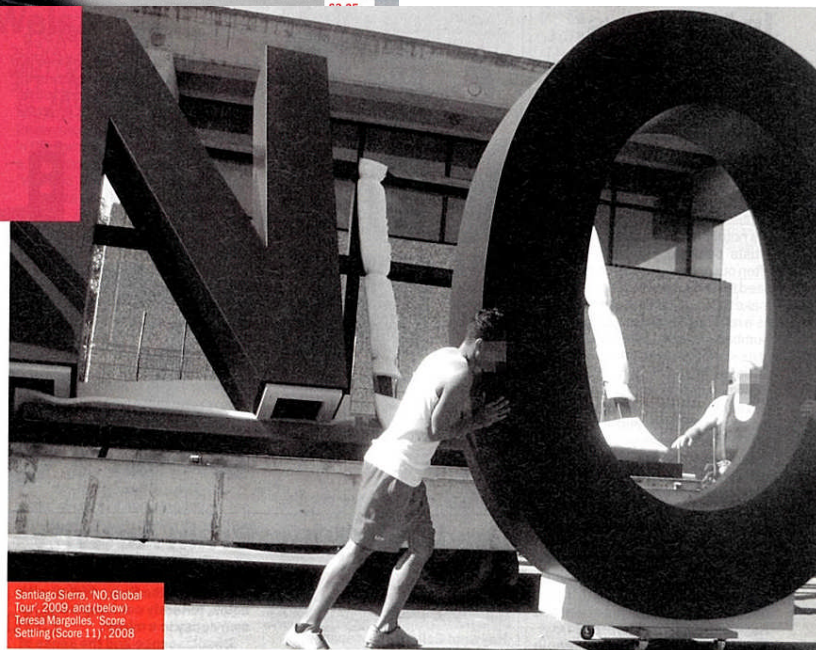
being fought between rival cartels of *narcotraficantes*, or *narcos* for short. A sign on the floor reads 'Please do not touch', but the cloth exudes such an antagonistic aura that you couldn't pay me to lay a hand on its gruesome surface, covered in nodules of earth and the stain of human remains.

Accompanying this dye-of-the-dead fabric is a display of her jewellery, custom-made and inlaid with shards of broken glass collected from the scenes of drive-by shootings. The gleaming trinkets resemble either the kind of ostentatious bling favoured by *narco* gang-bangers or else a Mayan treasure worthy of museum display. At the Mexican Pavilion in the 2009 Venice Biennale, Margolles presented these powerful objects alongside a performance in which relatives of the slain continuously mopped the floors, again using a solution tinged with the blood of their loved ones. Although absent here, the image comes flooding back when watching Brazilian artist Cinthia Marcelle's video projection, which focuses on eddies of muddy water being furiously swept into the middle of a room by some unseen hands.

At the Lisson Gallery we see that such futile acts of manual labour are the

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Santiago Sierra, 'NO, Global Tour', 2009, and (below) Teresa Margolles, 'Score Setting (Score 11)', 2008

stock-in-trade of another artist based in Mexico, Santiago Sierra, who pays his 'performers' for much more extreme activities than simply cleaning the floor. Across three rooms, a retrospective of 53 films by the Spanish artist reveals a panoply of traumatic 'artsploitation' scenarios including minimum-wagers, homeless people and junkies being

remunerated for holding up walls, being tattooed, living in a ditch, having their heads shaved or being smuggled in the hold of a ship – collectively titled 'Dedicated to the Workers and Unemployed'. Anyone unfamiliar with Sierra's unforbearing frontality should spend an hour in front of some of these shaming, humbling films. Here the two-man rule doesn't apply: these are necessarily lonely, if never less than frightening, experiences.

In many ways, Sierra's crude, monochromatic aesthetic of friction has become a model for much of the heavily politicised work coming out of Mexico, but he will never be content to dwell in a geographical ghetto for hot-tempered Latin artists. Since 2009 Sierra has been towing a half-tonne public sculpture to some 40 towns and cities around the world, simply spelling out the word 'NO' in giant, black letters

(now sat forlornly in the gallery covered in scratches and graffiti). The message is clear: 'no' is not just a negative force but also a call to arms. *No más*, no compromise, no sell-out, no retreat, no surrender.

'No Lone Zone' is at Tate Modern until **May 13** (see Major spaces). 'Santiago Sierra: Dedicated to the Workers and the Unemployed' is at Lisson until **Mar 3** (Galleries North). www.timeout.com/art



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Custom-made jewellery is inlaid with glass from drive-by shootings



RADCLIFFE RECOMMENDS

Lucian Freud, National Portrait Gallery

'I'd see him at the Wolseley all the time. I said hello and he had no idea who I was, but I didn't care – I'm a huge fan. My mum was hoping he'd ask to paint me and would say, "Dan, move your chair so he can see you!"'

Collecting art

'You're young and come into a shillad of money, what do you do with it? I went to Frieze Art Fair and saw a painting by Jim Hodges. The guy said, "No, we're waiting for a more prestigious collector to take that." I was like, thanks, thanks a lot.'

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