

# Flash Art International

The World's Leading Art Magazine

## Robert Punkenhofer and Haydeé Rovirosa Co-directors, Art & Idea

*Robert, you are the commercial attaché of the Austrian Embassy in Mexico. How did you go from being a diplomat to directing an independent gallery?*

Art & Idea was a project that began before I moved to Mexico City in 1994. For several years, I had been planning to open a not-for-profit exhibition space that would focus on establishing dialogues between local and international artists, between the Americas and Europe. In the summer of 1996, I found a space in downtown Mexico city and, along with two partners, jumped at the opportunity. In a period of less than a year, we have had over ten exhibitions of renowned Mexican, American, and European artists. The great majority of these have been theme exhibitions, for example "En route to MEX," a project about nomadism organized by Jade

Dellinger, or "Video Nudes," a historical video show curated by Heidi Zuckermann. We also presented the first exhibition of Viennese Aktionismus in Mexico, as well as installation projects by Latin-American artists like Luis Felipe Ortega and Angel Ricardo Ríos.

*Haydeé, before you became the director of Art & Idea in September 1997, you had already been involved in other independent spaces. Could you talk about your work in these spaces?*

I was very involved in Temístocles, a space that involved a group of very young artists who were interested in conceptual art. It began in 1992 when a group of artists decided to meet regularly to discuss art history and theory. I got involved in this group through Abraham Cruz Villegas, whose work I had been following, and



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who brought me to one of the meetings. We found a temporary meeting space in an empty house on Temístocles street in Mexico City. Eventually, the discussions were expanded, and some of the artists began to install their work in the house. But the main purpose of the space was to house these discussions and exchange, not to organize shows. Eventually, the discussions and shows drew a larger audience, and many critics and art writers began frequenting the space. Many important artists were involved in Temístocles: Melanie Smith, Damián Ortega, Eduardo Abaroa, Pablo Vargas Lugo, and also some foreign artists like Jeffrey Vailance.

*How did you become involved in Art & Idea?*

When I heard that Robert was going to be leaving Mexico, I contacted him: we met, got along well, and decided that I would administer the space after his return to Europe. Even after his departure, the program will continue the line that Robert established.