

*Method and Matter*

Abraham González Pacheco arrived in Rio de Janeiro in the middle of a cold front. He tells me the first thing he did was walk to the beach at night, where he was greeted by a frosty wind blowing in his face. So began his fieldwork. In line with his interest in countering rote metaphors, clichés and romantic notions concerning place, as the stage in which material history and sociopolitical vectors converge, González Pacheco's first dismantled stereotype in Brazil was the weather.

I use the word fieldwork, above, in a specific sense: that of a person encountering history and social life, through a situated interaction with archival, geological or archaeological matter, and reprocessing it into an object, a text or an idea. What one brings to the field is crucial, and in Pacheco's case, such conceptual equipment includes a critique of progress as it relates to the constitution of Mexican identity, an appetite for metal scraps sourced from junkyards and a speculative framework he likes to call the "archaeology of the future." As I understand it, this archaeology consists of rendering an object, an artifact, that, through its already weathered appearance and the cryptic quality of the images covering its surface, places us before a strange kind of ruin: what might a future community do with this? These forms have a way of shifting meaning according to the situation in which they find themselves. How might this object be interpreted when their context has shifted? In other words, the "archaeology of the future" is a fictionalization of the past through the present, aimed toward a speculative future. The artist's tools for carrying out this complex investigation are rather straightforward: some kind of smooth surface, pigments, graphite, salvaged metal grids, and concrete.

Pacheco's process was arrived at through an "unlearning" of painting, articulated with his training in engraving. He begins by pooling pigments on a flat surface in shapes and forms (which we will come to later). Once these are decided upon, he places bottlecaps around the composition, which serve to hold the metal structure at a distance, creating a thin, empty space. Finally, he pours the concrete into the recess between picture and grid. While setting, the concrete absorbs color and form. These fractured objects on the wall aren't painted after all; their form is acquired through the physical exchange of mineral properties, which can, and usually do, lead to configurations the artist had not intended for. The concrete surface then becomes a membrane that operates with heterogenous materials, not a passive surface receiving inscriptions or layers of color. In this specific procedure, matter can be said to organize itself, and González Pacheco can be considered one of the agents in the construction of a collective object, not the single individual controlling all possible outcomes. His works are built through volatility, harnessing visual

noise, fractures, imperfections and accidents: they acquire form through a meandering path, not linear progress.

In the artist's practice is a critique of progressivism as it was understood and implemented in South and Central America. Concrete, in Brazil to name but one example, was the Promethean substance that allowed for the vertiginous development of public infrastructure, frequently at the expense of traditional land uses and ways of building. Summarily, the specificities of site were passed over for the general application of industrial technology in service of progress. The Mexican muralists in the 1930s, likewise, envisioned a forward-facing history, developing a public, monumental art that was anti-aristocratic, modernist and epic in scope, providing a new reading of pre-Columbian Mexico that could fuse with post-industrial revolutionary concerns. Both the progressivist ideologies of the early 21st century and the aspirations of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros have become relics –which means they can be idolized, reinterpreted, misunderstood or destroyed– of a past time. But as time passes, new fictions are required, and new futures must be invented, even if they remain a remote possibility. Moving between archive and excavation, González Pacheco at once materializes the substance of ruins and materializes the fictional substance of history.

We have taken the detour above in order to return to Pacheco's "archaeology of the future" with a better understanding of his supplies, procedures and the critical-historical reach of his project. While in Rio, the artist wandered through junkyards and scrap metal shops, rummaging through discarded debris for forms and structures to be used for new works: fencing, grills, bird cages, and assorted metal grids: some of which he had not previously seen in Mexico. To get to know a place and its history through material remains encountered in the field is the archaeological procedure in its clearest form. González Pacheco is not exactly concerned with the past lives of these fragments, but in their potential uses and the connections they can trace in the future. That his works may crack, decay and transform with time is an inbuilt feature, not a flaw. An unexpected site-specificity emerges in his encounter with Brazilian concrete, which he tells me is more durable, less prone to cracking than the one he usually works with in Mexico. This is not a version of "antiquarian history," a collection and preservation of arbitrary, de-contextualized artifactual curiosities, but a critical recomposition of dormant matter into a reconfigured object that draws from and sheds new light on its context.

*Ventilador de Espinas* (2025), marks the first time Pacheco has used a fan grill as a support for one of his works. Its title alludes to the harnessing of the wind's energies. A circular, emblematic form hangs off the wall like a planetary diagram with its orbits. At the center, a plantlike configuration of thorns branches out. Above this motif, a bottlecap remains encrusted in the concrete, as a shell is held in sediments over centuries, or like a gold

tooth in an exhumed grave—a reminder of past forms and ongoing processes. Works like *Máscara* (2025) and *Ídolo Frio* (2025) bear the most resemblance to archaic hieroglyphs and sculptures, but their textures and figures seem blurred, melting or shifting before our eyes, as if defying us to place them in some remote time period. *Enyerbado* (2025) enacts the very effort it takes to piece together a historical fiction: encounters with fragments (discarded metals) become materials in themselves, and the artist conjures his own subjective visions out of their original environments. For González Pacheco, this means impressing a layer of turbulent figures, partial body parts, gestures and textures over a shifting ground.

Pedro Köberle

Essay written on the occasion of *Machintla, La Sombra Eléctrica de Las Cosas*, Abraham González Pacheco's first solo show in Brazil.

October/November 2025