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Pablo Helguera: Librería Donceles

Opening Reception: Saturday, October 4, 5pm

Dates: October 4 – November 1, 2014

Bookstore hours: Wednesdays – Saturdays 2-7pm, or by appointment

Pablo Helguera: Librería Donceles is an itinerant, functional Spanish-language bookstore of used books on a variety of subjects. To create the installation, artist Pablo Helguera assembled donations of books from individuals and groups in Mexico City and elsewhere, when available, producing an Ex Libris for each donor that acknowledges the particular provenance of every volume.

Librería Donceles—whose title is inspired by the old bookstores that line Donceles Street in Mexico City's historic center—will foster the intimate environment that draws people to used-book stores, where customers enter without a particular title in mind and instead

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browse the shelves with the hope of spontaneously discovering a book that calls to them. Visitors to *Librería Donceles* — Spanish-speakers and non-Spanish-speakers alike — will be welcomed in this spirit of community interaction and invited to a brief conversation with the attendant. Once their interests and “bibliological profile” (as Helguera has described it) have been assessed, visitors will be given suggestions on where to look to choose their book. Each visitor is permitted a maximum of one book per visit, in exchange for a pay-what-you-wish donation. All proceeds from these transactions will be donated in support of local charities.

The first iteration of *Librería Donceles* was presented in September 2013, at Kent Fine Art in New York, when it became the only Spanish-language used-book store in the city. It has since been presented in Arizona State University’s downtown Phoenix gallery. The decision to travel the bookstore to San Francisco’s Mission district is another context-specific choice to engage with the Spanish-language community in the area. Like its previous iterations, the San Francisco store draws attention to the fact that despite the large number of Spanish speakers in San Francisco, there remains a scarcity of books available in Spanish. The project also responds to critical and rapid transformations in publishing more generally, with the rise of e-books and the demise of bookstores of all sorts— in particular, the used bookstore.

By promoting visibility to the Spanish language in an American city, *Librería Donceles* affirms the importance of the cultural dimension of the language and raises questions about how Spanish might be reconnected to its diaspora, as well as integrated into the broader cultural life of New York. For Helguera, the idea of the “double removal” of a book, indeed of any object, is an important one, with both personal and historical resonances. Conjuring the spirit of L.P. Hartley when he wrote “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there,” the books of *Librería Donceles* are messengers from other times, places, and lives. With their public and private histories, the books await new lives, new meanings, through the possession of a new owner.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Pablo Helguera (b. 1971, Mexico City) is a visual and performance artist whose work weaves together personal and historical narratives in the context of socially engaged art and language. Helguera’s work focuses in a variety of topics ranging from history, pedagogy, sociolinguistics, ethnography, memory and the absurd, in formats that are widely varied including the lecture, museum display strategies, musical performances and written fiction. His work as an educator has usually intersected his interest as an artist, making his work often reflects on issues of interpretation, dialogue, and the role of contemporary culture in a global reality. Previous itinerant projects include the Instituto de la Telenovela (2002–04) and The School of Panamerican Unrest (2001–11). He is also the author of eighteen books. His work has been seen most recently at CIFO in Miami, the 2012 Havana Biennial, and the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid.

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ABOUT KADIST:

Kadist Art Foundation encourages the contribution of the arts to society, conducting programs primarily with artists represented in its collection to promote their role as cultural agents. Kadist's collections and productions reflect the global scope of contemporary art, and its programs develop collaborations between Kadist's local contexts (Paris, San Francisco) and artists, curators and art institutions worldwide. Each year Kadist hosts international artists in San Francisco and Paris for extended residency periods. While traditional residency programs are organized in the style of a retreat, removing the artist from the commotion of urban life, the Kadist residency places artists squarely within the heart and history of the urban experience. Each resident is assisted in the production of a new work for public presentation. Exhibitions take place either at Kadist's own venues, or in partnership with another area art institution. Kadist residencies seek to bring international perspectives into conversation with local audiences, histories and culture.

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