



The Value of Weaving

by Jennifer McCabe

Mexico City-based artist Máximo González gives new meaning to the term “old money” with weavings made from foreign currency.

Born in Argentina, Máximo González’s interest in contemporary political issues and popular culture provide the unifying themes throughout his impressive bodies of work, which range from watercolor and video to sculpture and performance. The accomplished multimedia artist has worked with currency as an artistic medium for over fifteen years, recently turning his attention to the traditional textile technique of weaving.

The currency González works with is mostly pesos from the 1970s that were taken out of circulation during the oil crisis that caused the Mexican economy to suffer a period of instability. In his earlier works, he used these pesos to create detailed narrative murals directly on the gallery wall. These large-scale collages, reminiscent of political paintings by Mexican muralists of the early twentieth century, express the complications of a consumer culture that exploits natural resources, produces waste, and ultimately bankrupts developing nations. González carefully trimmed objects, faces, ornamentation, and icons of Mexican culture from the bills, transforming the individual items into complex and politically charged storyboards.

For the exhibition *Volver: Mexican Folk Art into Play*, presented last fall at the Museum of Craft and Folk Art in San Francisco, González showed a new iteration of works woven from currency. Made with a traditional backstrap loom, the artist went from making layered drawings that narrate a story to



LEFT: Weave in Progress J4787905 (with detail, above), 2010; 118" x 40". All works are hand-woven and made with discontinued Mexican currency. Photos by María Juliana González.

weaving strips of currency into wall hangings that beautifully maintain their political edge. The transformation of cash into art challenges the viewer to consider how value is attributed to craft, traditions, and art itself. At a time when we are constantly bombarded with consumerism, González reminds us to slow down and question our systems of value.

The artist deftly explores the old adage “bigger is better” in *Magma*, his most recent series of large-scale weavings. Constructed on a custom loom capable of producing works over six feet in width, the new woven pieces are monochromatic and densely patterned. Perhaps his most abstract work to date, these colorful wall hangings attain a physical presence, undulating and curling along the wall to form peaks and valleys of shadow and relief. In order to achieve the rich, uniform colors, González obtains remnants from the bill-cutting process directly from the Bank of Mexico. The color of each piece is determined by the specific value and denomination of the bills. The artist leaves the interpretation of this work to the viewer, since they can be appreciated for their formal qualities as well as for their political commentary. As new patterns are produced, González creates a wealth of new meanings by weaving unlimited value into old currency. 🌱



ABOVE: Máximo González with his large-scale custom-made loom in his Mexico City studio. BELOW: *Magma C1* (with detail), 2010; 75" x 75".

The artist's website is www.maximogonzalez.info. González's solo show *Something Like an Answer to Something* will be on display at Artane Gallery in Istanbul, Turkey, (March 18–May 28); www.artane.org. His work is also included in Mexico: Politics/Poetics at San Francisco State University's Fine Arts Gallery in San Francisco (through March 24); www.gallery.sfsu.edu.

