Francis Aly's Politics of Rehearsal
Francis Alÿs: Politics of Rehearsal

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frontispiece: study for Rehearsal, 2007
DVD (back cover): Politics of Rehearsal, 2007
Video
30 minutes
Courtesy David Zwirner, New York
It is a great pleasure to bring the work of Francis Alÿs to the Hammer Museum. There is no doubt about the importance of his projects, or the extent of his influence. While everything Alÿs creates has a simplicity that makes it instantly accessible, his work also offers a complexity that continues to resonate long after it has first been seen.

This exhibition’s framework of rehearsal and related themes evolved from many conversations between the artist and Russell Ferguson, adjunct curator at the Hammer Museum, over several years. To date, exhibitions of Alÿs’s work have emphasized issues of place, particularly connections to Mexico City, his adopted home. In contrast, “Francis Alÿs: Politics of Rehearsal” focuses on concepts of rehearsal and repetition, failure and success, storytelling and performance. The exhibition and this publication explore how these ideas inform his varied practice, and how they reflect in particular the imposition of a certain concept of modernity onto Mexican and Latin American cultures.

Over a number of years, Alÿs has developed an approach to his art that has focused less on definitive conclusions and more on strategies of repetition. This has resulted in the creation of a group of works that can be brought together around the idea of rehearsal. This is by its very nature an open-ended process that always remains profoundly open to the emergence of new incarnations for each project. Key elements retain the possibility of being changed. Even the works in this exhibition that have been seen before are subject to reconfiguration by the artist for new spaces and new contexts.

Our sincere thanks go to Eugenio Lopez and the Fundación/Colección Jumex as well as Heidi and Erik Markoff for their generous support of this project. In addition, I extend our gratitude to the Peter Norton Family Foundation and the David Teiger Curatorial Travel Fund, which also made the exhibition possible.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to Russell Ferguson. Russell was chief curator at the Hammer until earlier this year, when he became chair of the Department of Art at the University of California, Los Angeles. As was the case with the exhibitions he previously organized for the museum on the work of Christian Marclay and Wolfgang Tillmans, this is the first major museum show in the United States of the oeuvre of a highly influential artist. I am thrilled that he will continue to organize thoughtful and significant exhibitions such as these for the Hammer Museum.

Ann Philbin
Many people were instrumental in helping to bring this exhibition to fruition, and I offer my sincerest thanks to everyone involved with the project.

Without funding from generous donors, the exhibition would not have been able to move forward. I join Ann Philbin in thanking Eugenio López and the Fundación Colección Jumex, longtime supporters of Francis Alÿs’s work, as well as Heidi and Erik Murkoff for their generous support of this project. In addition, I extend our gratitude to the Peter Norton Family Foundation and to David Teiger for making this exhibition possible. Their generosity is deeply appreciated.

My colleagues at the Hammer Museum deserve enormous thanks. Ann Philbin, director, provides continued passion and support for challenging exhibitions at the Hammer. I am also thankful for the support of my curatorial colleagues Gary Garrels, James Elaine, Ali Subotnick, Cindy Burlington, Allegra Pesenti, and David Rodes, a dynamic group of people with whom it is a pleasure to work.

Jenée Misraje, exhibition coordinator, has handled myriad details connected with the organization of the exhibition. Curatorial Assistant Claire de Dobay Réfeî provided invaluable help in countless ways with both the exhibition and this book. And without the constant support of administrative assistant Emily Gonzalez, I cannot even imagine having been able to complete this project.

Jennifer Wells Green, director of development, worked to secure funding for the exhibition with her usual tirelessness, along with her staff Megan Kissinger, Alison Perchuck, David Morehouse, and Laura Suls. The communications department headed by Miranda Carroll, with assistance from Sarah Stifter, Morgan Kroll, Julia Luke, and Keith Bormuth, did excellent work in publicizing the exhibition. James Bevley, director of public programs, along with Aimee Chang, Cole Akers, and Darin Klein, organized an exciting array of lectures and discussions around the show.

Portland McCormick, senior registrar, with Julie Dickover and Kate Bergeron, handled the loans and shipping with their ever-impressive precision. As usual, Peter handled every complexity with tact and precision.

My colleague at the Hammer Museum also deserves thanks for their continued support: George Barker, Lynne Blakie, Paul Butler and his staff, Tiffany Daneshgar, Stephen Foley, Andrea Gomez, Jenni Kim, Mo McGee, Michael Nauyok and his staff, Catherine O’Brien, Becky Perez, Janine Perron, Maggie Sarkissian and her staff, Mary Ann Sears, Deborah Snyder, Sally Suchul, and Billy Taylor, and Kate Temple.

This book looks as good as it does thanks to my longtime collaborators at Green Dragon Office. My deepest thanks go to Lorraine Wild and Leslie Sun for their dedication to the project. Jane Hyun copy-edited the book with her usual care and skill. I am also grateful to Gerhard Steidl and his team, the publishers and printers of the book.

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Rafael Ortega was Alÿs’s collaborator on many of the works shown here. He was more than generous with his time on my visits to Mexico City and was also willing to lend us his indispensable expertise on technical aspects of the installation. I very much appreciate his help.

In addition, I would like to thank Brian Butler, Lynne Cooke, Agustin Coppell, Alfonso Cornejo, Michael Darling, Julien Devaux, Mireya Escalante, Craig Garrett, Alejandro González Itzárittu, Bob Gundersman, Lucero Gutierrez, Yoko Hasegawa, Karin Higa, Frances Horn, Enrique Huerta, Atsuko Koyanagi, Gabriel Kuri, James Lingwood, Michael Mack, Ramiro Martinez, Cusumáñoc Medina, Ivo Mesquita, Abaseh Mirvadi, Tobias Ostrander, Estella Provas, Emilio Rivera, José Roca, Michael Rooks, Lisa Rosendahl, Eugene Sadowoy, Guillermo Santamarina, Kitty Scott, Melanie Smith, Randy Sommer, Angel Gustavo Toquy, Rose Velony, Lourdes Villagomez, and Christopher Waterman.

And finally, I extend my deepest appreciation to Francis Alÿs for his work and for his openness to exchanging ideas and plans for this exhibition. It has truly been a pleasure to work with him in putting the project together.

Russell Ferguson
FRAncis Alÿs: Politics oF ReheARsAl

We know the conventions of the masterpiece: it is a work of art that is totally resolved, that leaves nothing to be added. As Virginia Woolf put it, “A masterpiece is something said once and for all, stated, finished, so that it’s there complete in the mind.” Comparably, Michael Fried has influentially argued that in a successful work of art,

\[
\text{at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest}. \ldots \text{It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief incident would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.}
\]

Francis Alÿs, despite making some of the most compelling art of recent years, has an ambivalent relationship to this idea of complete resolution. He certainly wants his work to remain in the consciousness of those who see it. He seeks the clearest possible articulations of the premises that he wishes to explore. In that sense he is looking for the quality of instantaneous presentness that Fried identifies. Yet he is at the same time highly reluctant to bring any work to an unequivocal conclusion. Certain ideas and motifs are kept open, always available to be pushed in new directions, reconfigured for new situations. In addition, he has consistently embraced a durational element in his work. Indeed, he has explicitly described his work in these terms, as “a sort of discursive argument composed of episodes, metaphors or parables, staging the experience of time in Latin America.”

Study for Song for Lupita, 1998
Pencil on tracing paper
13 3/4 x 11 1/8 inches
From the beginning of his career as an artist, Alÿs has adopted a way of working that tends to reject conclusions in favor of repetition and recalibration. He has, that is, put the idea of rehearsal at the heart of his practice. As the celebrated theater director Jean-Louis Barrault put it, the rehearsal is “the creative period. For the actor it is the specifically artistic moment. He sketches out, he effaces, he repents, he conjures up.” This process means that the moment of completion is always still to come. Each completed rehearsal opens the door to a further rehearsal, one more iteration in which things can be improved, simplified, or deleted. If a work is still in rehearsal, then it can always be changed. The moment of completion is always potentially delayed. For Alÿs, then, the final work is always in some sense projected into the future, a future that is always advancing just ahead of the work. In the interim it can constantly be revisited, and its presence can be constantly shape-shifting, not just in the form of documentation through photographs or video, but also through written descriptions or oral accounts passed from person to person.

The refusal of closure is true not just of performance-based works, but also of the paintings, drawings, and sculptures in Alÿs’s studio, which often remain there for years, picked up and put down again, sometimes worked on, sometimes destroyed, or sometimes used as starting points for new work. Each delay in letting them leave his hands increases the potential for them to be reconfigured in some newly productive way. His drawings in particular bear the traces of endless revision. In the end they are palimpsests of overlaid scraps of paper, held together with tape. Works that are performative can constantly be tested out in new situations, different countries, even. Does a premise that works in Mexico City still work in Europe? In Los Angeles? And does it work in the same way, or differently? Some turn out to work the same; others are radically changed by their context.

Alÿs’s emphasis on process and response does not, then, tend towards the immaculate resolution of the masterpiece. The idea of rehearsal does, however, contain within it an ideal of what the finished work might possibly be, even if its incarnations continue to flicker and change in the light of the fire in the Platonic cave. For Alÿs, that flickering, the movement back and forth and around an idea, is as productive as a determined path towards a fixed and identifiable goal. In some cases, there may well be no goal beyond the process, which is almost always a series of more or less tentative moves towards an idea.

Perhaps this idea is most explicit in A Story of Deception (2003–06). This film was shot in Patagonia, almost as the by-product of another project. Originally Alÿs went there to film the ostrich-like birds called nandus. The impetus for that project was a story that the Tehuelche people used to hunt nandus by walking after them for weeks, until the birds collapsed from exhaustion. The relationship of the role of walking to his own work was fascinating to Alÿs, but in the end he felt that his film stayed too close to a conventional nature documentary. What he did find, however, when looking at his footage were the mirages that would appear down the dusty roads along which he was traveling. In the end, the work became this footage, an endlessly shimmering mirage that is always retreating down the road just ahead of the viewer. As he has said of this work:

Without the movement of the viewer/observer, the mirage would be nothing more than an inert stain, merely an optical vibration in the landscape. It is our advance that awakens it, our progression towards it that triggers its life. As it is the struggle that defines utopia, it is the vanity of our intent that animates the mirage, it is in the obstinacy of our intent that the mirage comes to life, and that is the space that interests me.¹

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¹ A Story of Deception, 2003–06
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega and Olivier Delcroix
16mm film
4:20 minutes
The artist’s unwillingness to bring a decisive closure to a work is evident even in his titles. Anyone who has tried to study Alÿs’s oeuvre rapidly comes up against the fact that the very concept of “title” is exceptionally fluid for him. Unsurprisingly, there are Spanish and English titles. But titles also change over time. The same title might be given to different works. Some seem to have multiple titles. A number have formal titles, but also nicknames. Dates are also sometimes quite slippery and can be extended by a number of years, as Alÿs continues to make new interventions into apparently completed works.

Even his activity as an artist began tentatively. Only when he was in his early thirties, after he had trained and practiced as an architect and had moved from Belgium to Mexico, did he begin to experiment with art. He began, in the early 1990s, with a series of attempts to address his overwhelming experience of Mexico City. As he described it, “The first—I wouldn’t call them works—my first images or interventions were very much a reaction to Mexico City itself, a means to situate myself in this colossal urban entity.” One of the earliest consisted of three pieces of red, white, and green chewed gum, stuck to a wall in the sequence of the Mexican flag (Flag, 1990). For Alÿs, an increasing fascination with the various ways in which resistances to Western modernity were played out in Mexico went hand in hand with his own inclination to avoid definite conclusions. In Mexico City, the rebar that sprouts from roofs everywhere sometimes suggests a whole city in a state of rehearsal for a presentation that may or may not be completed.
Parallel walls, parallel cues always be early in soft color, the more moving incremental sights. The rays are really being scanned in environment.

Alain

Aperçu de
"A story of deception"

Patajona, Nov 24, 2004

(19 Aug 2003)
The first body of his work to draw international attention, the series of paintings he made beginning in 1993 in collaboration with the sign painters (rotulistas) of his Mexico City neighborhood, are predicated on a potentially endless series of revisions and recapitulations. As he described the process, "I commissioned various sign painters to produce enlarged copies of my smaller original images. Once they had completed several versions, I produced a new ‘model,’ compiling the most significant elements of each sign painter’s interpretation. This second ‘original’ was in turn used as a model for a new generation of copies by sign painters, and so on, ad infinitum.” They are an endless rehearsal, in other words, with multiple finished performances (paintings), none of them definitive, none of them truly final.

With this work, Alÿs took on board another aspect of the rehearsal process: collaboration with others. In theatrical or musical rehearsal, an essential part of practice is the degree to which the different impulses and talents of the various participants operate alongside and against those of the others. No matter how determined or dictatorial an author, director, or composer may be, there is always an element of collaboration that is integral to the passage from initial rehearsal to finished work. Within a year of beginning the rotulista project, Alÿs could say of his collaborations with the sign painters Emilio Rivera, Enrique Huerta, and Juan Garcia that "by now it doesn’t matter whether you are looking at a model, a copy, or a copy of a copy.” The collaborative element was integrated into the authorship of the works themselves. At the same time, the rehearsal process remained ongoing. Each set of paintings would be complete in itself, yet the series would remain permanently incomplete.
In Turista (Tourist, 1994), Alyss simultaneously included himself among the people of the capital and acknowledged that he remained an outsider. Standing alongside workers with signs advertising their availability as plumbers, electricians, or painters, Alyss offered himself as a turista, a tourist. A tourist, obviously, would not normally be considered a worker of any kind. As Cuauhtémoc Medina has pointed out, however, there is more than self-deprecating irony at work here: “In his attempt to pass off his work as ‘professional observer’ of other people’s everyday life as a professional activity, he is reflecting on his status as a foreigner and also on the ambiguity of the idea of his ‘work’ as an artist.” “Tourist” is not a job. Is “artist”? By claiming the debased title of tourist, Alyss is also, characteristically, delaying his assumption of the role of artist. He is still just looking:

At the time I think it was about questioning or accepting the limits of my condition of outsider, of ‘gringo.’ How far can I belong to this place? How much can I judge it? By offering my services as a tourist, I was oscillating between leisure and work, contemplation and interference. I was testing and denouncing my own status. Where am I really standing?

In one of a number of works titled Set Theory (1996), a tiny figure sits alone in an upturned glass of water, again an image of isolation. Later in 1996, however, just around the corner...
from the railings where he had advertised himself as a tourist, an unexpected incident introduced a change in Alÿs’s role as observer, and the precise moment is documented. If you are a typical spectator, what you are really doing is waiting for the accident to happen (1996) begins with the artist in quintessential observer mode, videotaping the movements of a plastic bottle as it is blown by the wind (and occasionally kicked) around Mexico City’s main square, the Zócalo. After about ten minutes the action comes to an abrupt end when Alÿs unthinkingly follows the bottle into the street and is hit by a passing car. In a moment he goes from observer to protagonist. The endless irresolvable rolling of the bottle had in fact led to a conclusion. For once, there could be no more delay: Suddenly it seemed that all the observation had been leading up to this moment. In fact, it is not possible to observe an action without affecting it. The observer is always involved, always implicated. From here on, there would be not simply rehearsal, but also a politics of rehearsal.
To put it that way, however, suggests more of an overarching schema than Alÿs would acknowledge. Another way in which he separates himself from Woolf’s completeness or Fried’s instantaneous presentness is in his attraction to fragments rather than wholes. One of his avatars is certainly The Collector (1990–92), a little dog-like object on rubber wheels, its body magnetized, that Alÿs led through the streets to pick up metallic bits and pieces as it went. Here we can see a developing predilection for the random, for the leftovers of the city in preference to the all-encompassing modernist rationalism that had informed Alÿs’s earlier training as an architect. Further, in this apparently simple piece, we can see the origins of Alÿs’s future as a creator of rumors, of urban myths—the man who led a magnetic toy dog on a string through the streets of the city.
For an indeterminate period of time, the magnetized collector takes a daily walk through the streets and gradually builds up a coat made of any metallic residue lying in its path. This process goes on until the collector is completely covered by its trophies.
These stories, however, are themselves fragments, moments snatched in media res, the way they might be experienced by a passerby. I once asked Alÿs whether he had ever considered making a conventionally structured narrative film. ‘I rarely deal with more than one idea at a time,’ he replied. ‘In that sense, paradoxically, I am not a storyteller. Except if you look at a story as a succession of episodes. But if I were to make what you call a ‘more complete story,’ I would not start at the beginning or the end. I would need to work from some middle point, because the middle point, the ‘in between,’ is the space where I function the best.’

Re-enactments (2000) may be the closest thing Alÿs has produced to a conventional narrative. After buying a 9mm Beretta handgun in a downtown Mexico City gun shop, he proceeded to stroll around the streets with the loaded gun in his hand, apparently without attracting much attention, until the police finally arrested him. Alÿs’s longtime collaborator Rafael Ortega filmed the walk. This narrative has a clear beginning and ending, and in between it has great suspense, as the viewer waits for the inevitable denouement. The following day, Alÿs repeated the action with a replica gun, again filmed by Ortega. Astonishingly, even the policemen who had arrested Alÿs the day before agreed to reenact their roles. While the repetition of the action might seem to imply that this work is itself a form of rehearsal—the real incident as a kind of rehearsal for the reenactment—the clear closure of the narrative means that Alÿs sees it somewhat differently. The first performance was not a rehearsal for the second. The second was a reenactment of the first. The difference is crucial. For Alÿs, Re-enactments is less about rehearsal than it is about how actions that take place in real time are always susceptible to being recuperated by their own documentation.

Study for Re-enactments, 2000
Pencil and pen on paper
8 1⁄4 × 11 inches
Re-enactments, 2000
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega
Two-channel video
2-30 minutes
I wanted to question the rapport we have today with the medium of performance, the ways in which it has become so mediated by other media, film and photo in particular, and how they can distort and dramatize the immediate reality of the moment, how they can affect both the planning and the subsequent reading of a performance. What is supposed to be so unique about performance is its underlying condition of immediacy, the imminent sense of risk and failure, etc.

Re-enactments is shown as a double projection, with the two performances taking place simultaneously and side by side. Which one shows Alÿs with a real gun and which with the replica, however, is not necessarily clear. Alÿs had heightened the risk factor immensely, not to make a spectacular performance but primarily to explore the degree to which the documentation of the performance itself would dissipate that element of risk. By risk here I mean not only the real danger to which Alÿs exposed himself, but also the sense of unpredictability and potential disaster that is inherent in all live performance.

The real issue with Re-enactments really emerged for him only later, when the piece was shown outside Mexico. At that point it tapped into stereotypes about Mexico City as a hotbed of crime and violence. The work seemed to have become about crime rather than performance. "I forgot a basic rule," Alÿs says now. "When a work is produced within a very local context, it can easily acquire a totally different reading abroad, so the parameters for the piece need to take into account its possible life as an export. I had a similar problem with the sign-painting project. It was often reduced to an exotic exercise of style."

Re-enactments itself remains a fairly basic snatch of narrative, but most of Alÿs’s stories are even more episodic, broken up into little pieces like those The Collector draws to itself. As Michel de Certeau put it, "Stories about places are makeshift things. They are composed with the world’s debris." But out of such debris things do come. In 61 out of 60 (1999), sixty plaster figurines of Zapatista fighters from Chiapas were broken into pieces; the pieces were then combined to create sixty-one guerillas. Of nothing comes something. Out of these fragments came another fighter. All the figures are now a little incomplete, missing something, yet somehow something greater than the sum of the parts has appeared.

61 out of 60 is unusual for Alÿs’s work of the 1990s in that it is easy to read a quite specific political meaning into the work, although it is certainly not alone in this. Both Housing for All (1994) and Cuentos patrióticos (Patriotic tales, 1997) make overt political references too. In Housing for All, Alÿs constructed a kind of tent made from election banners, some of them bearing the title’s slogan, and installed it in the Zócalo on election day: the tent was held aloft by the hot air blowing from a subway vent. Cuentos patrióticos referred to a political demonstration of 1968.

61 out of 60
1999
Plaster figures
More typical, however, is the animated film *Song for Lupita* (1998), the action of which consists entirely of a woman pouring water from one glass to another and back again. Alÿs has described this work as "a kind of demonstration of the Mexican saying ‘el hacerlo sin hacerlo, el no hacerlo pero haciendolo,’ literally ‘the doing but without doing it, the non-doing but doing it,’ staging a kind of resignation in an immediate present, inducing a complete hypnosis in the act itself, an act that was pure flux, without beginning or end.”

Even simpler is the video *Perro pelota* (2000), which documents throwing a ball for a dog that returns it, over and over again. The motif expressed here in its most straightforward form is one that Alÿs has made use of in many different ways: going in one direction, then returning, then repeating. *Caracoles* (1999), a precursor of *Rehearsal 1* (1999–2004), shows a young boy kicking a bottle up a steep street, only to let it roll back to him. An equally simple work, but with a quite different form, is *Déjà Vu* (1996–the present): a painting and its exact copy installed separately in an exhibition, so that the viewer sees the painting once, but then unexpectedly comes upon it again a little later.
opposite:

Song for Lupita, 1998
Video
12 minute loop

above:

Song for Lupita, 1998
Installation at Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
Perro pelota, 2000
Caracoles, 1999
Betacam SP transferred to video
4.20 minute loop
One of Alÿs’s fascinations has been with the action, sometimes enormously protracted, that produces no identifiable result. Paradox of Praxis 1 (1997) is the record of an action carried out under the rubric of “sometimes making something leads to nothing.” For more than nine hours, Alÿs pushed a block of ice through the streets of Mexico City until it completely melted. On one level, this was, as Alÿs explained, “a settling of accounts with Minimalist sculpture.” Like many artists of his generation, perhaps most notably Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Alÿs felt the need to (literally) work his way through the powerful legacy of the dominant art movement of the previous generation. And so for hour after hour he struggled with the quintessentially Minimal rectangular block until finally it was reduced to no more than an ice cube suitable for a whisky on the rocks, so small that he could casually kick it along the street. His hours of labor were themselves distilled into a video only five minutes long.

Both the work that is apparently political and that which is apparently not, however, are informed by a broad interest in the repeated attempts to impose a Northern concept of modernity on Latin America. In the speech given at his inauguration as President of the United States in 1949, Harry Truman announced that he would “embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.” It was a sincere version of that impulse that, in some respects, led Alÿs to Mexico in the first place. But the Northern program of modernization and growth has met consistent resistance, even as it has been enthusiastically embraced by elite sectors. Carlos Monsiváis has described this tendency as pursued with an almost religious intensity: “The Utopia of this century—that which has been desired above all else, and desired most deeply—has been the modernization of body and soul…. Efficiency and productivity become not only the requirement of industrial survival but a call for the rescue of the new Holy Grail, Growth, now in the hands of the faithless whose major heresy is unproductivity.” As Medina has described the results of this crusade, however:

Southern countries’ economies are the constant expression of failed modernization. It is no accident that they seem to be under the curse of an eternal return: to start a process of development over again every five or ten years and leave it incomplete after coming across new obstacles. When this happens in conditions of inequality, degradation, and coercion, the economy never manages to gain ground. There are more than enough reasons: the wounds left by exploitation make it impossible for people to believe in an ethics of work and the neo-colonial extraction of wealth does not generate markets activated by the seduction of consumerism—not to mention that northern capital and investment actually find the periodic breakdowns quite profitable.

This context—social, political, economic, and psychological—underlies and informs the whole structure of repetition and rehearsal with which Alÿs works. Against the dogma of modernity, progress, and efficiency, he has placed anecdotes, gestures, and parables. In this context, the pouring back and forth of the water in Song for Lupita can be, as Alÿs described it, “a reflection on the struggle against the pressures of being productive.”
Beyond the specific relationship with Minimalism, though, there is also something casually insouciant about Alÿs’s performance. Gritty as the context is, there is something of the dandy in his willingness to put hours of effort into producing a result that is almost literally invisible. As the great theorist of dandyism Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly wrote, “A Dandy may spend ten hours a day dressing, if he likes, but once dressed he thinks no more about it.” The dandy, that is, may put an enormous amount of energy into an activity, but if it should ever appear that he did, or that he was in any way concerned with the result, then the effect will be lost. Much of Alÿs’s practice reflects a comparable desire to downplay the results of his intensive labor. Sometimes making something leads to nothing.

Alÿs’s most recent activity in making something that leads to nothing, Rehearsal 3 (2006–07), is actually related to the ancient idea of generating something from nothing. In his studio, Alÿs and his collaborators have been working on models for perpetual motion machines, so far without success. The utopian idea of a machine that would produce energy without consuming it has been a dream of scientists and engineers for centuries, rather like alchemy. For Alÿs, as sincerely as he produces the wooden models based on drawings in old texts or from designs of his own invention, this work is also a continuation of the critique of modernity in its utopian aspect as the panacea that is supposed to cure all ills.
Alÿs’s main vehicle for the exploration of doing something while producing nothing, however, has been the act of walking. “Walking,” he offered, “in particular drifting, or strolling, is already—within the speed culture of our time—a kind of resistance. But it also happens to be a very immediate method for unfolding stories. It’s an easy, cheap act to perform.” For many years, he kept in his studio a polyurethane board (“As Long as I am Walking...”, 1992) that bears the following text:

As long as I’m walking, I’m not choosing
  * * * * “”, I’m not smoking
  * * * “”, I’m not losing
  * * * “”, I’m not making
  * * * “”, I’m not knowing
  * * * “”, I’m not falling
  * * “”, I’m not painting
  * * “”, I’m not hiding
  * * “”, I’m not counting
  * “”, I’m not adding
  “”, I’m not crying
  “”, I’m not asking
  “”, I’m not believing
  “”, I’m not talking
  “”, I’m not drinking
  “”, I’m not closing
  “”, I’m not stealing
  “”, I’m not mocking
  “”, I’m not facing
  “”, I’m not crossing
  “”, I’m not changing
+ + + “”, I will not repeat
+ + + “”, I will not remember
There are a number of elements that are significant in this text. The first thing that Alÿs declares he is not doing if he is walking is choosing. By walking he can put off a great many things, but the first of them is having to make any decision, any commitment at all. As in a rehearsal, there may be a plan in mind, but its final resolution is indefinitely delayed. Indeed, walking itself could be thought of as a kind of preliminary rehearsal, a time when ideas are sorted, impressions and images gathered up for potential use, not in a systematic way but as part of an integration of ideas with environment.

It should also be noted that in this relatively early work, Alÿs is still in the role of observer, not actor. None of these activities or non-activities are specific to any particular place. As Alÿs said of his early years in Mexico, "I think that my status as an immigrant freed me of my own heavy cultural heritage, or my debt to it if you like." But he was not yet quite ready to engage with the new culture in which he now lived. In "As Long as I am Walking..." he is still the uncommitted outsider, a position to which he has a tendency to revert, even as over the years his work has become steadily more explicit in its social and political engagement. There still remains somewhere in the work a desire to keep the world at arm’s length. This renunciatory quality cannot help but remind us of the artist’s namesake St. Francis of Assisi, who gave away all his worldly possessions. It was St. Francis, after all, who said that "it is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching," a sentiment that could not but resonate with Alÿs. And of course, the saint was famous for his affinity for animals, a trait that the artist also shares (we need only think, for example, of Sleepers [1999–2006], in which men and dogs are treated with equal sympathy, both stretched out asleep in the street). But, on the other hand, Alÿs is scrupulous about not preaching. He does not walk to instruct.

Is he then, in his walking, a flâneur? In Baudelaire’s well-known characterization of "The Painter of Modern Life," he wrote that:

For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures.16

If we can see in Alÿs the holding oneself apart, the pleasure of being an outsider, especially early on in his work, he never has the aristocratic, aloof quality that Baudelaire ascribed to the flâneur: "The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito." 17 For Alÿs, "the flâneur is a very nineteenth-century European figure. It goes with a kind of romanticism which does not have much space in a city like Mexico City." The closest Alÿs has come to the role of a true flâneur is through his stand-in, Mr. Peacock, the real peacock that Alÿs sent to represent him at the 2001 Venice Biennale (The Ambassador). Alÿs himself stayed away. In large part, the trajectory of his work has been to get beyond the isolation of the flâneur, to feel at home not in the sense of the "man of the world" who feels at home everywhere, and not to remain simply an observer, but to be at home enough with his own role in specific settings actually to intervene.
Towards the end of Alÿs’s list, he promises not to repeat. Of course he will repeat; he does repeat, but each repetition makes something different. And he will not remember, he says. But he will. And it is the repetition that enables the remembering, not only for the artist but for his audience, as the pattern of circulation continues. In 1995, Alÿs performed The Swap, for which he stood in a Mexico City metro station all day long swapping one object for another with passersby. Beginning with his sunglasses, he acquired and disposed of a variety of objects, including shoes, a flashlight, a hat, and a bag of peanuts. Obviously this is an action that potentially could be extended indefinitely. It is a version of Franciscan renunciation for the market economy, in which each object disposed of reappears in another form. Comparably, in The Seven Lives of Garbage (1995), Alÿs dropped seven small bronze sculptures of snails into the garbage. He later found two of them for sale in the streets, discarded but brought back into circulation regardless. He bought one of them back. The others continue their slow journey through the market.
Related to the idea of circulation as a way of delaying completion is *The Loop* (1997). For the exhibition “inSITE,” held in San Diego and Tijuana, Alÿs’s contribution was a journey that started in Tijuana and ended in San Diego. Alÿs made the journey, however, without crossing the border between Mexico and the United States that divides the two cities. Instead, he embarked on a five-week-long trip that took him from Tijuana to San Diego, but only after passing through Mexico City, Panama City, Santiago, Auckland, Sydney, Singapore, Bangkok, Rangoon, Shanghai, Seoul, Anchorage, Vancouver, and Los Angeles, circumnavigating the globe to arrive a mere hundred yards away from his starting point on the other side of the fence. A global version of a walk around the neighborhood, the journey was an enormously elaborate way of producing an absolutely minimal result, the transit between Tijuana and San Diego. Given the fraught nature of American debates over the immigration of undocumented Mexican workers in the United States, however, this piece inevitably took on a politically charged set of connotations. Although Alÿs himself made a point of not articulating any of these, they were nevertheless inescapable. Between the long series of refusals documented in 1992 in “As Long as I am Walking…” and the apparently rambling but politically loaded project of The Loop five years later, Alÿs had learned how to give his endless procrastinations a politics.
Cuentos patrióticos uses the idea of circulation, but this time it takes place around the flagpole in the center of the Zócalo in Mexico City. Alÿs walks in a circle around the pole, followed by a sheep. With each turn around the pole, another sheep joins in, until he is trailed by a long line of them, forming a circle. Once the chain is completed, the first sheep that entered leaves the scene, followed by the second, the third, and so on, until Alÿs finds himself following the last sheep around the flagpole. This work uses the kind of repetitive structure Alÿs has found useful elsewhere, but here, again, there is now a specific political reference. In 1968, as Pablo Vargas Lugo described it, “Thousands of bureaucrats were herded into the Zócalo to demonstrate in favor of the government. Showing their frustration in an act that was both rebellious and ridiculous, they turned their backs on the official tribune and began to bleat like a vast flock of sheep.”

Cuentos patrióticos (Patriotic tales, 1997)
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega
Video
24:40 minutes
In the late 1990s, Alÿs specifically began to examine the mechanisms of rehearsal as such. His film *Rehearsal 1* shows a red Volkswagen attempting to reach the top of a steep hill in Tijuana. At the same time a soundtrack plays, featuring a brass band rehearsing a danzon, recorded in Juchitan by Alÿs a few months earlier. The two elements are in fact synchronized. Alÿs listened to the recording on headphones as he drove. While the musicians are playing, the car goes up the hill. When the musicians lose track and stop, the car stops. And while the musicians are tuning their instruments and talking among themselves, the car rolls back down the hill. As Alÿs has described this work, "The stubborn repetition effect hints at a story that is constantly delayed, and where the attempt to formulate the story takes the lead over the story itself. It is a story of struggle rather than one of achievement, an allegory in process rather than a quest for synthesis." The actual rehearsal of the band turned out to be the perfect vehicle through which to articulate a process that inevitably involves endless repetition. "There was a very physical way of rendering this constant pushing away of the final moment, or climax, or conclusion." At the same time, however, it manifests the overt collaboration of a number of people that results in small but incremental changes towards a better performance.

The focus on rehearsal keeps process itself foregrounded, and any conclusion deferred. Alÿs has been explicit about the driving force behind this work: "The intention behind these short films was to render the time structure I have encountered in Mexico, and to some extent in Latin America. It also recalls the all-too familiar scenario of a society that wants to stay in an indeterminate sphere of action in order to function, and that needs to delay any formal frame of operation to define itself against the imposition of Western Modernity."
Rehearsal I, 1999–2004
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega
Video
29:25 minutes
The political nature of the question of time in Mexico is made clear by the Chiapas guerrilla leader Subcommandante Marcos, who said of his conflict with then-President of Mexico Vicente Fox that it was "a struggle between a clock operated by a punch card, which is Fox’s time, and an hourglass, which is ours. The dispute is over whether we bend to the discipline of the factory clock or Fox bends to the slipping of the sand." Marcos also commented, on his unwillingness to actually take power in Chiapas, that "what we have to relate is the paradox that we are. Why a revolutionary army is not aiming to seize power, why an army doesn’t fight, if that’s its job." Well, perhaps one might say, "Sometimes, doing nothing leads to something," the principle that Alÿs used in Looking Up (2001), an action in which he drew a crowd simply by standing in a public square, looking intently upwards.

Rehearsal I was the first in a series of works under the rehearsal rubric, but Alÿs’s use of real rehearsal has not by any means been limited to that series. His 2001 collaboration with film director Alejandro González Iñárritu was the first work to use the title Politics of Rehearsal (in full, Politics of Rehearsal (or what makes the traffic move at 6pm on a Friday in Mexico City)). This work used as its raw material rehearsal footage from González Iñárritu’s movie Amores Perros (2000). In Alÿs’s subsequent Essay on the Movie “Amores Perros” (2003–07), a single brief scene is acted out from multiple viewpoints, all of which are visible through successive steps: from the first rehearsal with the actors reading their parts around a table in the director’s office, then standing up, then on location, then later in costume and going through the multiple takes of the final shooting. The only thing missing is the scene as it finally appeared in the director’s cut of the film. Everything except the official fiction is included.

Politics of Rehearsal (or what makes the traffic move at 6pm on a Friday in Mexico City), 2001
Installation at Kunst-Werke, Berlin
Alÿs has in fact developed an entire repertoire of ways to repeat. His animation The Last Clown (2000) features endless repetition: the work is a loop with no beginning and no end. Cantos patrióticos is a loop that advances, overlapping itself and creating interference. Rehearsal 1 is based upon a pendulum movement: “Like a pendulum swaying at the end of its swing, then returning to the center, regaining speed along the way, the stuttering melody governs the period of the car, inducing its driver into a quasi state of suspension, hypnotized in the repeated act, conveying a state of resilience, of patient or frustrated absorption.” 22 R.E.H.E.A.R.S.A.L. (2000) shows an animator working on the word “rehearsal” itself. It follows a pyramid structure that slowly advances letter by letter to the whole word, then steps down again. In Rehearsal 2 (2001–06), a stripper performs a zig-zag stepping backwards and forwards through her constantly delayed performance. For Alÿs, “It is a metaphor of Mexico’s ambiguous affair with Modernity, forever arousing, and yet, always delaying the moment ‘it’ will happen.” 23 Unlike Rehearsal 1, Rehearsal 2 does finally reach its climax, albeit after apparently endless delays. The video Politics of Rehearsal (2007, included with this book) shows raw footage for this work—essentially a rehearsal for a...
The Rehearsal - II

- Soundtrack: Franz Schubert's lied der Mignon.
- Performers: a stripper artist, a soprano singer and her pianist.
- Mechanics: the stripper listens to a rehearsal session of the soprano with the pianist.
  - While the pianist plays and the soprano sings, the stripper undresses.
  - When the soprano or the pianist lose track over a musical phrase and stop, the stripper holds her act.
  - While the soprano and the pianist discuss the musical phrase in question, the stripper dresses up again.

The rehearsal session will go on until the stripper completes her act.
En el acto

- El ensayo del ensayo

& Tempor:
- Cast: 
- repetido
- Action

- Reaction
rehearsal—while the soundtrack consists of a conversation between Alÿs and Medina on the issue of modernity in Mexico. The structure of When Faith Moves Mountains (2002) is that of a moving wave pattern. Tornado (2000–present) is an expanding spiral. All are potentially extendable and repeatable.

Alÿs is very circumspect about any direct political impact his work might have:

Political could be read in the Greek sense of polis, the city as a site of sensations and conflicts from which the materials to create fictions or urban myths are extracted. I think being based in Mexico City, and functioning in Latin America or other places where you find yourself confronted with ongoing economic, social, political, or military conflicts, the political component is an obligatory ingredient in addressing these situations. But it would be very hard to say to what extent your act can have a real echo in those kind of situations, and even more to what extent there is any relevance for a poetic act to happen.
In this regard it is worth comparing two versions of what in some ways might be thought of as a single work. In *The Leak* (1995), Aly’s walked the streets of São Paulo holding a punctured paint can that left a thin wobbly line of blue paint behind him as he passed. That work was a simple gesture, a way of converting the act of walking into something physical, more lasting than the walk itself. When Aly’s revisited this work in 2004, it was for a very different context. This time he walked the so-called Green Line, the pre-1967 border between East and West Jerusalem. And he used green paint, thus literalizing not merely the fact of his passage but also the idea of the Green Line itself, originally so named because in 1948 Moshe Dayan used a green pencil to draw the border on a map of Jerusalem. The green line does not really exist any more in practice, but it is constantly referred to by the different parties of the ongoing dispute. There could hardly be a clearer example of the infusion of new meaning into an old piece. While *The Leak* remains a work complete in its own right, it is also now reconfigured into a rehearsal for the new version. Aly’s acknowledges the change in the title he gave the new work: *Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic* (2004). As he has said, “I had reached a point where I could no longer hide behind the ambiguity of metaphors or poetic license. It created a personal need to confront a situation I might have dealt with obliquely in the past.”

Clearly, the original “poetic” version of the work has become “political” by virtue of the highly charged context into which it has been inserted. It is important, however, to recognize that this is not just a matter of politicizing an earlier work. The second half of the title is equally important: the insertion of an essentially poetic gesture into a situation that is almost always seen through the lens of politics. “I am not a militant,” Aly’s insisted. All the “poetic” gestural elements of *The Leak* are preserved in the latter version. The work has, however, become more complex, as he has added layers of additional meaning to the original action. Always, however, Aly’s avoids didacticism. As he asks in a text that accompanies *Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political*, “How can art remain politically significant without assuming a doctrinaire standpoint or aspiring to become social activism?”

The answer, it seems, to that question is for it to take on an existence as a story. Aly’s always wants there to be a kind of ideal version of each piece that contains within it a kernel that is coherent enough, simple enough, and relevant enough that it can potentially con-
continue to circulate far beyond the orbit of the realized action itself. As he put it, “I’ll try to always keep the plot simple enough so that these actions can be imagined without an obligatory reference or access to visuals...so that the story can be repeated as an anecdote, as something that can be stolen, or travel orally and, in the best-case scenario, enter that land of minor urban myths or fables.” In this context, Alÿs cited the early performances of Chris Burden as examples of works that circulated as much by word of mouth as by any image or document. Burden, the artist who had himself shot, or Burden, who had himself crucified on a Volkswagen: these are actions that many people know of only through having heard about them, and for that reason are fascinating to Alÿs. Is the potential story good enough to sustain itself in this way? “If the story is good enough,” he explained, “it will get back to you or reach its shape by itself. If it isn’t, better it dies away.”

The model of the story passed on from one person to another is of course an oral one. As de Certeau described the ever-more threatened oral traditions, these are the “fragile ways in which the body makes itself heard in the language, the multiple voices set aside by the triumphal conquista of the economy that has, since the beginning of the ‘modern age’ (i.e., since the seventeenth or eighteenth century), given itself the name of writing.” Yet it is in stories passed informally from person to person that a great reservoir of resistance to power persists. “That’s a fundamental aspect of a political strategy in making art,” suggests Alÿs, “because the institutions and the power structure always try to play down the anecdotal. Yet anecdotes weave the fabric of our social existence.”

Alÿs’s stories are not histories, because histories tend towards resolution. The events of narrative history lead towards some conclusion that, it is implied, was the inevitable result of the actions described. In some ways his stories more resemble the older tradition of the chronicle,
a series of events that may or may not relate to each other, passed on from one person to another. In the chronicle, no end is implied, because there are always further potential events to be added.

There is also a difference, however, between the idea of the chronicle and the idea of rehearsal. A chronicle is always in the end a series of consecutive events. There may be no final resolution, but one thing unequivocally follows another and exists prior to the next. The mechanism of rehearsal proposes a nonconsecutive chronological structure. No conclusion is necessarily reached, but nor is the rehearsal a rigidly sequential process. Instead, the performers, and we as the audience, can go back and forth in time, starting and stopping and beginning again.

The persistence of an oral culture is often related to the survival of old myths. For de Certeau, “These voices can no longer be heard except within the interior of the scriptural systems where they recur. They move about, like dancers, passing lightly through the field of the other.” Alÿs is interested less, however, in the persistence of old myths and more in the generation of new ones. This requires convincing the audience for his work to engage in a genuinely interactive relationship with it. “Myth is not about the veneration of ideals—of pagan gods or political ideology—but rather an active interpretive practice performed by the audience, who must give the work its meaning and social value.” The work of the artist can only go so far, that is, before the response of the audience enters into the action. It is through them that the work continues into the future, its narrative rehearsed again and again for as long as the story continues to circulate, changing a little in each telling but retaining a core of meaning. The work needs to be sustained through an interactive process that keeps it alive and in circulation. Alÿs expressed this idea very simply in the painting

La Leçon de musique, 2000
Oil on canvas on wood
23 × 27 inches
tension and an emerging movement of resistance. This was a desperate situation calling for an epic response: staging a social allegory to fit the circumstances seemed more appropriate than engaging in a sculptural exercise.”

The principle that drove When Faith Moves Mountains was “maximum effort, minimal result.” The most apparently minimal change was effected, and only by means of the most massive of collective efforts.

In a formal sense, just as Paradox of Praxis has a relationship to Minimalism, with When Faith Moves Mountains Alÿs had in mind the tradition of Earthworks and other interventions into the landscape.

When Faith Moves Mountains is my attempt to deromanticize Land art. When Richard Long made his walks in the Peruvian desert, he was pursuing a contemplative practice that distanced him from the immediate social context. When Robert Smithson built the Spiral Jetty on the Salt Lake in Utah, he was turning civil engineering into sculpture and vice versa. Here, we have attempted to create a kind of Land art for the landless, and, with the help of hundreds of people and shovels, we created a social allegory. This story is not validated by any physical trace or addition to the landscape.

This rumor is certainly one of the most extreme examples of Alÿs’s ability to put a story into circulation. In this case, it is clear that the story was enough. Even in some cases in which a fairly elaborate action was carried out, the story might have been enough. "In the case of the trip around the world, The Loop," Alÿs said, "many people suspected that I’d never fulfilled the contract, that is, made the trip." But, he insisted, "The work would have existed just the same; it didn’t really matter whether I did or didn’t go around the world.”

In the case of When Faith Moves Mountains, however, one of Alÿs’s most ambitious works to date, the work did have to be performed. Its physical reality was crucial to its future existence as something that really, indisputably, happened. Five hundred volunteers with shovels gathered at a huge sand dune on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, and over the course of a day moved it by several inches. Alÿs developed the idea after first visiting Lima in October 2000. The political context was inescapable: “This was during the last months of the Fujimori dictatorship. Lima was in turmoil with clashes on the streets, obvious social

La Leçon de musique (2000), in which two men sit at a table. Suspended between them is a sheet of paper, which they keep upright by blowing on it from either side. The sheet is fragile, and sustaining it requires a constantly rebalanced cooperation.

In one unusual case, Alÿs was able to generate an object, a poster, by creating the story, a rumor, first.

In 1999 I went to stay in a small town south of Mexico City, and, with the help of three local people—the agents of propagation—we started asking around about “this (fictitious) person who had left the hotel for a walk the night before and had not come back.” Alongside the questions and suggestions made by the interviewees, people would naturally start drawing a portrait of the missing (sex, age, physiognomy, clothing, reason or cause for his disappearance, etc.) and little by little this invented character became more and more real through the public rumour, until, after three days I think, the local police issued a poster with a “photo-fit portrait” of the missing person. At that point, as the rumour had produced a physical trace of evidence of its existence, I considered my involvement in the project concluded and I left town.39
The action itself, as documented in photographs and video, is extraordinarily impressive, but in the end the “social allegory” takes over from the work’s undeniable formal presence. The action was completely transitory. The next day, no one could recognize that the huge sand dune had been moved. The true aftermath of the work lies in the ripples of an awareness, “a Deception,” said Alÿs. “And it did, maybe just for a day, provoke this illusion that things could possibly change.” In that sense, When Faith Moves Mountains is a true rehearsal for events that still remain potential, things that may or may not happen in the future. Looking at the video of the hundreds of volunteers shoveling together across the dune, we might also think that the slipping of the sand.

Following spread:
When Faith Moves Mountains, 2002
In collaboration with Cuauhtémoc Medina and Rafael Ortega
(16mm film transferred to video 36 minutes)

3 Francis Alÿs, interview with the author, Mexico City, 2002. An edited version of the interview appears in Francis Alÿs (London: Phaidon, 2007). All further quotations from Alÿs are drawn from this interview unless otherwise indicated.
6 Alÿs, quoted by Carmen Delao, “Lo Coor des Miracles,” in Francis Alÿs: Stilling Distance from the Studio (Wallingford: Kunstmuseum, 2004), 139.
7 Alÿs, in Francis Alÿs, The Last Complete Copy of the Last Granddame Anna, and Guna García- Galán, Francis Alÿs: Stilling Distance from the Studio (Wallingford: Kunstmuseum, 2004), 43.
13 Alÿs, in Died cuatro adalides del ocaso, 68.
15 Juliette Bayley of Austerlitz and Sunday, (1843), trans. Douglas Atkinson (New York: Perennial, 1980), 13. Note: the dandy may not be the first figure that comes to mind in connection with Alÿs, who is never overdressed. But then it is Bayley herself who states, “One may be a dandy in creased clothes... Incredible though it may seem, the Dandies once had a fancy for torn clothes”: (11, note) Baylela is said to have scuffed up his shoes lest they look too new: See Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays,” in trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Da Capo, 1986), 27 n 2.
17 Ibid.
18 Pablo Veiga, in Alÿs, Diesz cuatro adalides del ocaso, 34.
20 Ibid.

“Francis Alÿs,” Museo de Arte, Lima

2006
“A Story of Deception,” Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany (exh. cat.)
“Black Box: Francis Alÿs,” Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
“Diez cuadros alrededor del estudio,” Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City

2005
“Francis Alÿs: (to be continued) 1992–,” Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand
“Seven Walks,” Artangel and National Portrait Gallery, London (exh. cat.)

2004
“Walking Distance from the Studio,” Kunstmuseum, Wolfsburg, Germany; traveled to Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy, France; Museu d’Art Contemporani, Barcelona, Spain (exh. cat.); and Museo de San Ildefonso, Mexico City (exh. cat.)
“The Prophet,” Lambert Collection, Musée d’Art Contemporain, Avignon, France

2003
“Francis Alÿs: La obra pictórica, 1992–2002,” Centro nazionale per le arti contemporanee, Rome; traveled to Kunsthalle, Zürich, Switzerland; and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (exh. cat: Francis Alÿs, The Prophet and the Fly)
“The Leak,” Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris

2002
“Matrix 2,” Castello di Rovili, Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Turin, Italy
“Walking a Painting,” The Project, Los Angeles
“When Faith Moves Mountains/Cuando la fe mueve montañas,” 3 Bienal Iberoamericana, Lima (exh. cat.)
1998
"Le temps du sommeil," Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada; traveled to Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, Oregon

1997
"Francis Alÿs," Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Oaxaca, Mexico

1996

1995
"The Thief," screensaver website project, Dia Center for the Arts, New York

1994
"The Liar/The Copy of the Liar," Galería Ramis Barquet, Monterrey, Mexico; traveled to Arena Mexico Arte Contemporáneo, Guadalajara, Mexico (exh. cat.)

1993
"Le temps du sommeil," Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada; traveled to Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, Oregon

1992
Galáxia Peter Kilchmann, Zürich, Switzerland

1991
Salón des Artesas, Mexico City

1990
"Francis Alÿs," Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City

ACME, Santa Monica, California

"El explorador," Galería Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil (exh. cat.)

Jack Tilton Gallery, New York

1989
"La era de la discrepancia," Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte, Mexico City

"A Show of Prints," James Kelly Contemporary, Santa Fe

"Ideal City/Invisible Cities," Zamosc, Poland; traveled to Potsdam, Germany

"Snafu: Medien, Mythen, Mind Control," Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany

"Watch Out," Beaumontpublic, Luxembourg

"Raconte-moi/Tell me," Casino Luxembourg, Forum d'art contemporain, Luxembourg

"Faces of a Collection," Kunsthalle, Mannheim, Germany

"Dark Places," Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, California

"MODERNITE # II," Le Grand Café, Centre d’Art Contemporain, Saint-Nazaire, France

"Satellite of Love," Witte de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; traveled to TENT Center for Visual Arts, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

"Die Zeit," Nieuwe Museum Wiesoerburg, Bremen, Germany

"Tokyo Blossoms: Deutsche Bank Collection Meets Zaha Hadid," Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

"Bin Becdaulb," Gesellschaft für aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany

"Sixteen anima," Centre pour l’image contemporaine, Geneva, Switzerland

"Printemps de septembre 2006," Les Abattoirs–Fonds Regional d’Art Contemporain Midi-Pyrénées, Toulouse, France

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2007
"The Eventuali," FRAC Bourgogne, Burgundy, France

"Mapping the City," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

"Dibujos animados," Fundación ICO, Madrid

"Commitment," Cultural Center, Strombeek, Belgium

"Doppelgänger," Marco Museum, Vigo, Spain

LII Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (exh. cat.)

"Idyllle," National Gallery, Prague; traveled to Domus Artium 2002, Salamanca, Spain

"A Show of Prints," James Kelly Contemporary, Santa Fe

"Idylle," National Gallery, Prague; traveled to Domus Artium 2002, Salamanca, Spain

"Commitment," Cultural Center, Strombeek, Belgium

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"Raconte-moi/Tell me," Casino Luxembourg, Forum d’art contemporain, Luxembourg

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"Sixteen anima," Centre pour l’image contemporaine, Geneva, Switzerland

"Printemps de septembre 2006," Les Abattoirs–Fonds Regional d’Art Contemporain Midi-Pyrénées, Toulouse, France

"Stephie," Musée des Arts Contemporains Grand Hornu, Hornu, Belgium

"Small Pictures," The Cantor Collection, Hartford, Connecticut

"Monopolis–Antwerp," Witte de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands


"Rock; Dawn Latin American Collection," Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

"Growth/Meet Fckenberg: Works from the Goetz Collection and the Fckenberg Collection," Sammlung Fckenberg, Hamburg, Germany

"Early Work," David Zwirner, New York


"Ecstasy: In and About Altered States," The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (exh. cat.)

"Strass. Difference and Repetition," Fondazione Diocesi, Haléon, Milan, Italy

"Wir Ist Oevert 1945–2005: The Freedom of Art from Picasso to Warhol and Cattelan," Galería Arte Moderna, Bergamo, Italy (exh. cat.)

"Crowd of the Person," Contemporary Museum, Baltimore


"Roaming Memories," Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany

"Here Comes the Sun," Magasin 3, Stockholm Konsthall, Stockholm

"Desenhos: A–Z," Porta 33, Madeira, Portugal

Glasgow International, Glasgow, Scotland

"Irreducible: Contemporary Short Form Video," Miami Art Central, Miami
"Commune 1+2," Institut d’art contemporain, Villeurbanne, France
"On Reason and Emotion," 14th Biennale, Sydney, Australia
"Die zehn Gebote," Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden, Germany
"Hypermedia," Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California

"Revolving Doors," Fundación Telefonica, Madrid; traveled to Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City
"2 Million Mexicans Can’t Be Wrong," South London Gallery, London; traveled to John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, England

2005 "Time Zones: Recent Film and Video," Tate Modern, London
"Global Cities: Cities in the 21st Century," Indianapolis Museum of Art and Contemporary Art, Southbank, Australia

2006 "Die zehn Gebote"—"Die zehn Gebote," Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden, Germany
"La Colección Jumex," Colección Jumex, Mexico City
"Mexico: Sensitive Negotiations," The Institute of Mexico and Contemporary Art, Southhampton, England

"Bibliothèque"—"Bibliothèque," Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Bogotá, Colombia
"Elsewhere, here," Musée d’art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris
"Moving Pictures: A Video Installation Survey," Antico/ Ricky Haddad Projects, Toronto, Canada
"Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values," P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York; traveled to Centro Cultural Conde Duque and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid, Spain

2007 "Museum of Modern Art, Shangai," Shanghai Biennale 2002, Shanghai, China
"Facas em a Crisol: Image of Modern Life from Manet to Today," Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; traveled to Castello di Rivoli, Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Turin, Italy

"Revolving Doors," Fundación Telefonica, Madrid; traveled to the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California
"Museum of Modern Art, Shangai," Shanghai Biennale 2002, Shanghai, China

2005 "In Light," Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada
"Imágenes en movimiento/Moving Pictures," International Center of Photography, New York

"20 Million Mexicans Can’t Be Wrong," South London Gallery, London; traveled to John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, England

2007 "Bibliothèque"—"Bibliothèque," Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Bogotá, Colombia
"Elsewhere, here," Musée d’art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris
"Moving Pictures: A Video Installation Survey," Antico/ Ricky Haddad Projects, Toronto, Canada
"Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values," P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York; traveled to Centro Cultural Conde Duque and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid, Spain

2008 "Hello There!," Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zürich, Switzerland
"Casa Museo Luis Barragán, Mexico City
"Mixing Memory and Desire—Wunsch und Erinnerung," Tout le Temps/Every Time, Biennale, Montréal, Canada
"Drawings," ACME, Los Angeles; traveled to
"Painting at the Edge of the World," Walker Art Center,
"Do You Have Time?," LieberMagnan Gallery, New York
"Cuentos patria (Multiplication of the Sheep)," Sammlung
"Da Aversida de Vivemos, Lateinamerikanische Künstler," Black Box, Kunstmuseum, Bern
"Squatters," Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal; traveled to
"Francis Alÿs/Rafael Ortega, Pierre Huyghe, Beat Streuli,
"Looking at You: Kunst Provokation Unterhaltung Video," The Big Show, New International Cultural Center,
"The Big Show," New International Cultural Center,
"Höhere Wesen befahlen: Anders Malen!," SMART
"A Walk to the End of the World," The Foksal Gallery
"Unexpected Encounters," Galleria Prisma, Bolzano, Italy
"Videoserie in der Black Box: 6 Künstler–6 Positionen," 7th International Biennial on the Run, Istanbul
"Reality and Desire," Fundación Joan Miró, Barcelona, Spain
"This Is My World…," ACME, Santa Monica, California
"Asi está la cosa," Centro Cultural Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City
"Drawn By," Metro Pictures, New York
"Thinking Ahead," Hayward Gallery, London
"Stimulz," Wите de Wîlh, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
"go away: Artists and Travel," Royal College of Art Galleries, London
"Rewriting the City," Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
"Stimuli," Witte de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands;
"Thinking Aloud," Hayward Gallery, London
"Asi está la cosa," Centro Cultural Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City
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"Witte de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands;


Oil and pencil on tracing paper

16 in. × 11 3/8 inches


Rypel, Emmanuelse. "La beige de Mexico." Accrochage, no. 46 (22 April 2005).


———. "Francis Alÿs." Bilderwelt, no. 12 (July 2004).

"Teach Don and Francis Alÿs at Schaulager." artaily.com (18 May 2006).

Tappern, Maria. "Francis Alÿs." Kulturzeit (September 2004).


"Unter Menschenjaehrig." Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, 10 February 2002.


"Video Work." Frieze, no. 54 (September–October 2002): 128.


