

**SITAC
ART AND CITY**

**URBAN AESTHETICS
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In a certain way, this symposium's presentations, as even their titles indicate, assume the difficulty of dissecting the superimposed network of public practices that constitute the urban environments' complex flux. *Urban aesthetics* -the subject of this first round-table discussion- aims to broaden our understating of the field of discussion, perhaps in a merely reactive manner in that it could spark critical response to institutional or corporate models that it could spark critical response to institutional or corporate models that insist on limiting the associations between visual art and public space to a beatification plan overseen by the public works department together with some cultural authority. This mistake has been made in many different and yet always surprising ways: landscaping aimed at guaranteeing political control based on an image of economic progress, the conversion of some of the city's historical areas into tourist theme parks: or a corporation's or municipality's charitable donation or a monument to a public space snatched from pedestrians. We have all witnessed (above all recently) countless sculpture-lined boulevards, traffic circles with commemorative statues, medians with horrifying "signature" monuments, open calls and contests to tame the past of space that authorities deem awkward, or speculative real-estate-mega-projects thinly disguised as urban restoration projects that do not include any options for the economic reinsertion of low income residents who have occupied these urban sectors for over a century.

Given all of the above, Mexico City is an enviable location for hosting this debate, given how complex the experience of the city's public space is for those of us who live

here. A city whose civil society is still shaky and that lacks a representative body or public consensus about projects that, under the title of "cultural policies" or "social rehabilitation" involve public space and take decisions about its uses.

Faced with this reality, this round-table might attempt to direct its questions at what we understand as "the city" and at what art strategies either obstruct or lend power to the flows of the urban social fabric and public domain as a source of power and as a way of legitimizing non-institutionalized models of representation and mobility.

An interesting point of debate in this session might be to question to what extent many contemporary art practices have taken advantage of and supported similarly instrumental perspectives on the constituent phenomena of urban life and of its social inequities to what extent has art practice managed to maintain (or not maintained) a critical, contextualized distance *vis-à-vis* the boom in city-planning projects, architecture, interior design and a gamut of new formalisms that end up turning the city into a virtual scale-model of high design? To what extent have mega-cities been considered mere purveyors of exotic icons within the global consumer market for local repertoires? Surely, the panelists' interventions will fuel the debate about which art operations or cultural strategies will allow us to contribute to public spaces' greater vitality and their inhabitants' increased political mobility, as we continue to search for models of erosion, exchange and urban coexistence based on art's de-alienating potential.