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Vancouver Art Gallery to use artwork made from guns to plant tree in Strathcona
Acclaimed Mexican artist Pedro Reyes to take part in planting ceremony

VANCOUVER, BC – The **Vancouver Art Gallery** will plunge an artwork featured in its exhibition ***The Tree: From the Sublime to the Social*** into the soil of a Strathcona park on **Friday, April 4th at 10:30 am**. The artwork, a spade created by Mexico City artist **Pedro Reyes** for his installation ***Palas por pistolas (Guns into Spades), 2007***, is one of more than 1,500 fabricated by the artist from guns collected in an amnesty in Culiacán, Mexico. Envisioned as a way to turn implements of death into tools to create life, Reyes intends each of his works be used to plant a tree.

For *Palas por pistolas*, Reyes and the Culiacán Botanical Garden, which is funded by a local philanthropist, encouraged people to exchange firearms for food stamps. As a result, 1,527 guns were recovered and became the raw material to create 1,527 spades. The guns were crushed with a steamroller, smelted and refashioned to create the horticultural tools. The process of collecting and repurposing the guns was captured by Reyes and filmmaker Raphael Ortega in a documentary film which is shown in a multi-screen video installation accompanying the spade in the exhibition.

While 1,500 of the spades are being distributed to the Culiacán community, Reyes has produced a limited edition of 27 – each inscribed with a letter from the Spanish alphabet – for sale to avid collectors of his work throughout the world. To fulfill the artist's intent, each exhibitor or recipient must plant a tree. The Vancouver Art Gallery will be the first to use one of the 27 artworks for a planting, and collaborated closely with the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation to determine an appropriate location and tree species. Using the Board's resources and knowledge, a snake maple will be planted in Strathcona's MacLean Park in a ceremony to be attended by the artist.

Pedro Reyes' life-long association with Mexico City has shaped his practice and his social conscience. His work challenges the bureaucracies that influence urban geography as well as the differences between sprawling environments, such as the ever-growing Mexico City, and more "controlled" cities in Western Europe or North America. Trained as an architect, Reyes often employs architectural and design strategies to question the use of public space and resources. He has a growing international career with solo exhibitions at the Seattle Art Museum and Yvon Lambert Gallery in New York. His work was also included in inSITE_05 in San Diego and the 2003 Venice Biennale.

The exhibition *The Tree: From the Sublime to the Social*, on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery until April 20, 2008, provides a provocative exploration of the tree's significance in art spanning time, cultures and media. Comprised of 95 works by nearly 40 local, national and international artists, the exhibition incorporates historical images of the forest that evoke the grandeur and power of the natural world and includes works by contemporary artists who use the tree as a device to question humankind's relationship with the natural environment.

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