

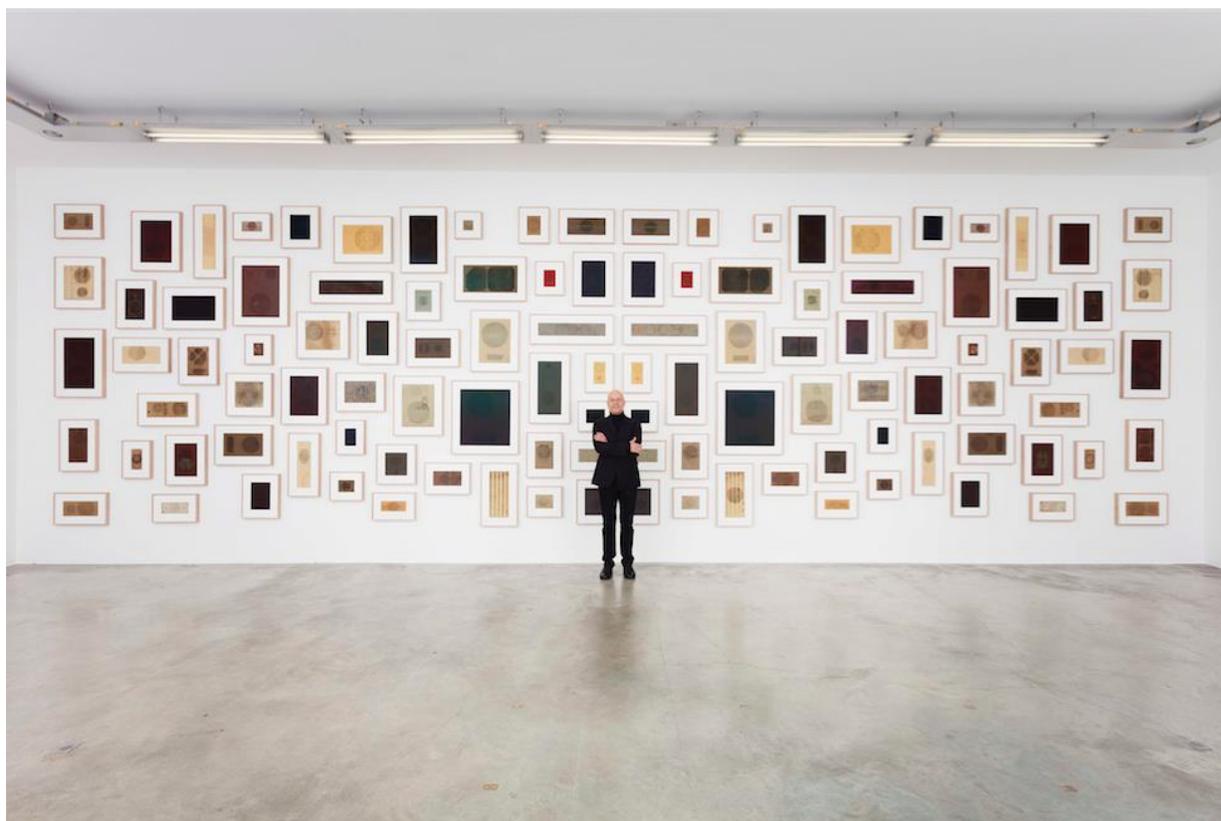
**Gabriel DE LA MORA**

*Gabriel de La Mora: "Art Is Not Created or Destroyed, It Is Just  
Transformed."*

*October 2019*

# Gabriel de la Mora: “Art Is Not Created or Destroyed, It Is Just Transformed.”

BY DAISY SAINSBURY | OCTOBER 22, 2019



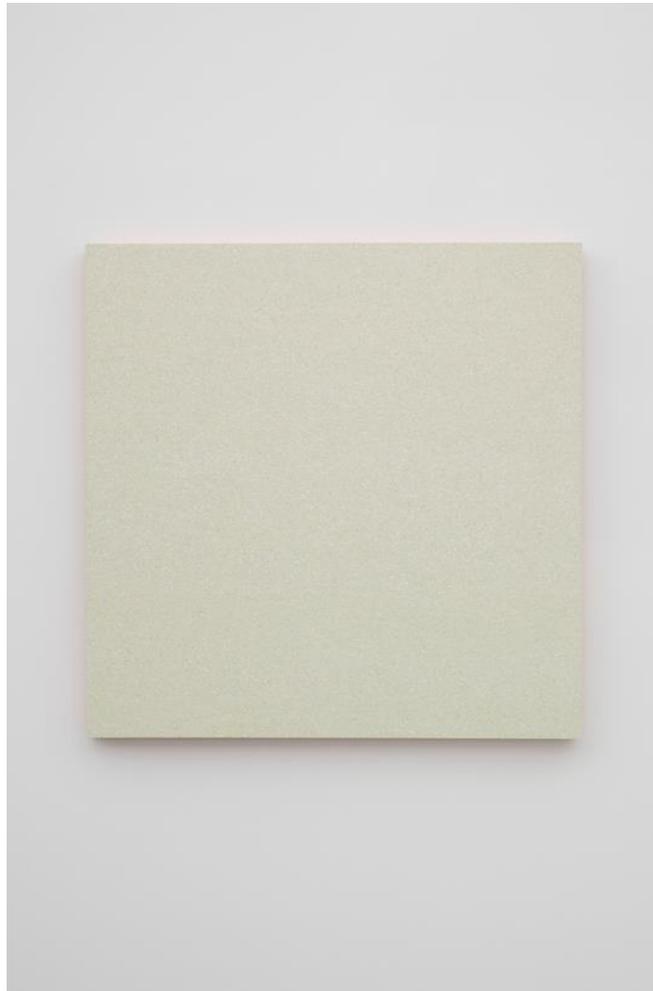
The artist Gabriel de la Mora in his "ECHO" exhibition at Perrotin, Paris.  
(© Photo: Claire Dorn)

If art history has taught us one thing, it's that a white square is never just a white square. In Gabriel de la Mora's work, the apparent simplicity of a monochrome composition or the material immediacy of a display of found objects belies the complex compositional processes that precede them, as well as the rich conceptual dialogues they engender.

In one recent and characteristic work, “127,687” (2019), tens of thousands of minute shards of egg shells are sorted by hue and then painstakingly fitted together. The result – a monochrome that de la Mora describes as a combination of painting, sculpture and drawing – reflects on nothing less than the barriers of organic life forms, the passage of

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time and the muddled boundaries between media. From his workshop in Mexico City, the artist adopts a scientific approach to his work; collecting and cataloguing, sifting and sorting, in the pursuit of something new. Following the success of "TNTR AA," a solo show at the Perrotin Gallery in New York earlier this year, a second exhibition of de la Mora's work opened on October 12 at Perrotin in Paris. As the final works were being hung, the artist spoke to Blouin Artinfo about the ideas underpinning his practice.



Gabriel De La Mora, 127,687, 2019. Eggshell, wood. 90 x 90 x 4 cm | 35 7/16 x 35 7/16 x 1 9/16 inch

©Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin



Detail from Gabriel De La Mora, 127,687, 2019. Eggshell, wood. 90 x 90 x 4 cm | 35 7/16 x 35 7/16 x 1 9/16 inch

©Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

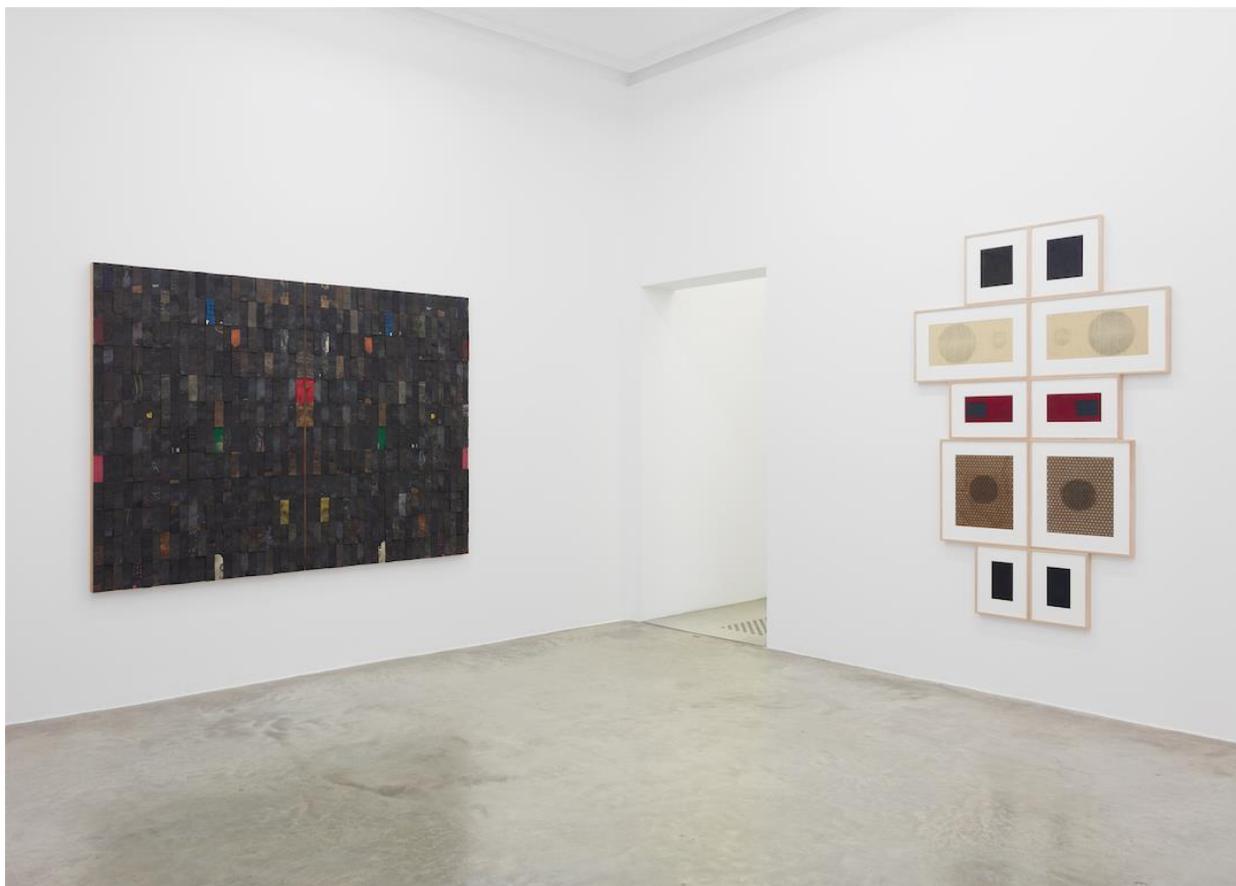
### **Can you tell us about this new exhibition, “ÉCHO”?**

I really like the idea that everything is a repetition in a way, but always with a difference. An echo is the repetition of something, but the repetition is not identical because there will always be a difference. Every day has 24 hours, but there are no identical days, even if you do the same actions, eat and buy the same things. The word “echo” itself is almost the same in English, French (écho) and Spanish (eco): they are comprised of similar characters, but with slight differences, and the way you say it is the same but different.

In this first exhibition at Perrotin in Paris, the idea was to create a dialogue between four different series. Two involve no control of the artist; they are found elements, like

shoe soles and fabrics from speakers. The other two series use egg shells and feathers, but involve the control of the artist. They are all connected by the protection of something: the shells protect birth, the feathers protect birds' bodies and skin, the soles protect the feet, and the fabrics protect the speakers. Another connection between the four series is the circle. With the speakers, the circle is the most repetitive geometric image. In the shoe soles, they are the natural holes created by walking and the perfect or near-perfect circles created by dancing. The white spots in the feathers and the filaments of the artificially dyed feathers are circles, and the egg has two shapes — an ellipsis and a perfect circle.

So, there are various connections: the circle; control and non-control; the monochrome as an image or image as a monochrome; the appearance or disappearance of something. And there are many others!



View of the exhibition ÉCHO at Perrotin Paris October 12 – December 21, 2019. Photo: Claire Dorn © Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

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**Is this interplay between appearance and disappearance, or visibility and invisibility, a significant theme in the exhibition?**

Yes, for example, in the shoe soles, each of the holes is created naturally by one person in their unique way of walking, leaving their information and erasing or losing part of the shoe sole that now creates an image. That invisibility of the lost material, through the weight or friction of walking, through time, is so beautiful... Part of the leather is lost, but that loss leaves an emptiness of something. Everything has a duality. For me, visibility and invisibility are the same, in a way.

For many years, I tried to take photographs of energy. I would photograph cleansings by psychics or blessings by priests. I tried to photograph the same place before and after the cleansing or blessing and see the difference in between, which has to be through energy. The first impact of any artwork is through the eyes, through vision. I really wanted to push the boundaries and try to see with something besides the eyes. That's why I contacted psychics and blind people, because they have different ways of seeing things, by sensation and emotions and energy.

My definition of art is a parallel of the definition of energy: Art is not created or destroyed, it is just transformed. Transformation is something that is very important. You cannot come from nothing, you always come from something — a shoe sole, a speaker, an egg shell, or a feather — even a white sheet of paper has a process.

That particularly comes across in the works with the shoe soles, because you have a real sense of the presence of the past behind them. For every shoe sole you're thinking about the person who wore them, why did they buy this brand, why is there this marking... There is a social aspect to it too. Some of the brands are expensive, and some of the shoe soles have extremely big holes, because clearly someone needed to wear the sole to the very limit.



Gabriel de la Mora, 576 - I / Pi, 2016. Leather, wood. 180 x 240 x 6 cm | 70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 2 3/8 inch.

©Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

**Can you tell us more about the systematic, classificatory dimension of your work? It seems quite defiant of the conception of art as free, creative expression or pure inspiration.**

Sometimes people tell me I'm obsessed! But, as someone who came to the studio once said, obsession isn't the right word because many obsessed people suffer, but I really enjoy this. Instead of accumulating things that I never use, I collect things to classify them and to use them to create something new or transform them into something else. So maybe if I had to define in one word what I do it would be transforming.

In terms of the inspiration and the freedom that you talk about in art, I always knew that I was an artist, but I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to survive doing what I most love in life, which is art. That's why I chose architecture. But at one point I had to decide between becoming an architect and becoming an artist, and I decided to become an artist because, even though I love architecture too, art has this kind of freedom. Freedom is connected with limitations. Art has fewer limitations, just the limitations that you put on your work.

I was really concerned because I had a lot of friends who were artists who had crises of creativity and didn't know what to do. So, my approach in the studio is that work and

ideas are connected: work generates work, work generates ideas, ideas generate more ideas and more work.



View of the exhibition ÉCHO at Perrotin Paris October 12 – December 21, 2019.  
Photo: Claire Dorn © Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

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**In your monochrome works, you're taking a form that is often seen as the most minimalist or simple expression, a white square, and then complicating it. Could you talk about the relationship between simplicity and complexity in your own practice?**

A monochrome, or a white monochrome painting, is like the furthest that painting can go. But I'm trying to push the boundaries and go in the opposite direction, from the easiest to the most complicated, from nothing to everything. Approaching a simple thing through the most complicated process, taking many months or years to create a nothing or a piece, to me, is something amazing. You can sense it, because it's not just a white surface. You can tell that there are hundreds or thousands of different whites.

I think the most interesting thing for an artist is to know who you are. Knowing who you are sounds like the easiest thing but is actually the most complicated thing. It's like Francis Alÿs's piece about the problem on the border in Mexico; his project was to cross the border from Tijuana in Mexico to San Diego in the US, but instead of going the obvious way, he travelled all around the world. I like to see myself like that. I love Francis Alÿs, and I love not taking the easiest or shortest way, but trying the longest or most complicated way to go in the same direction. It's interesting to see life like this.

**Is that because you think that in taking the long way around you'll make new discoveries or have new ideas?**

Yes. I've learnt all sorts of things through these processes, like the fact that we put more of our weight on our right foot if we're left-handed and more of our weight on our left foot if we're right-handed, which I learnt from the work with the shoe soles. I don't know if people know these things? Art is like philosophy in that it asks questions.

As an artist, a question is maybe connected with an idea, and the work of art might be the answer to that question, but the interesting thing is what is in the middle: the process. The process is something you never see but it is really important. That's why each of the pieces from the series have archives and photographs and a lot of information that is quite interesting for research or lectures or publications in the future.

People come to my studio expecting to smell oil paint and see easels, but it's completely different: it's like a laboratory. I feel more of a connection to a scientist than to a painter.

There were these works that I put on the roof; I was trying to question why museums and collectors want to preserve paintings in perfect conditions and what happens if the artist simply initiates something. I painted 12 layers of enamel paint on a linen stretched on an aluminium canvas and put it on the roof of the studio with the exposure of sun, heat, cold, day, night, rain, hail... I looked every day to see what was happening, and kept records, photographs and texts. One day I found the painting was cracked with these perfect circles and spirals. It was amazing! The night before was the first hailstorm – it was May 23, 2013. The canvases created this crack with a perfect circle, it was the same as when you see drops of rain falling into water... It was a painting done by nature and the record of a hail storm formed in the perfect circles and spirals that are the structures of any human or living system.

*"Gabriel de la Mora. ÉCHO" runs from October 12 through December 21 at the Galerie Perrotin in Paris.*