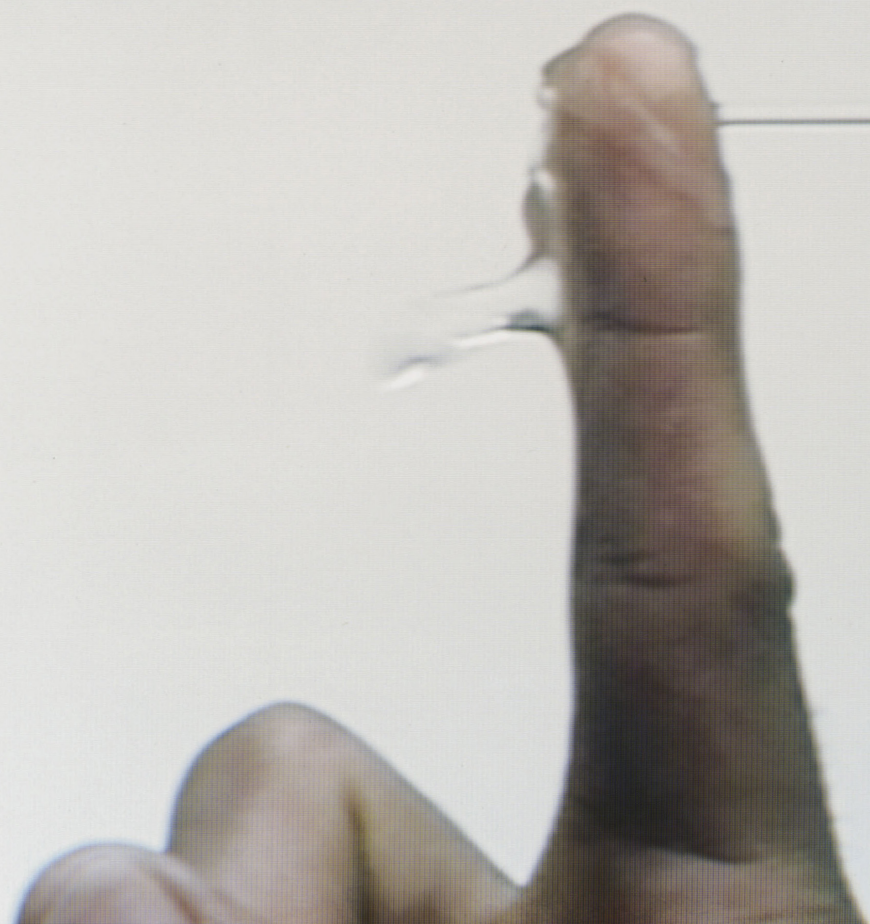


MAUR
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KATRIN STEFFEN: Your videos tell short, surprising stories set in everyday life. What specific situations attract your interest?

MAURICIO ALEJO: Hard to tell. I think what triggers my interest are these little physical happenstances that for some reason have the power to transcend themselves as mere physical phenomenon. Nothing wrong with mere physical phenomenon; I love physics, but I'm interested in situations where power, tension, displacement and precarious equilibrium have the ability to resonate with someone's memory, perception, and physical experience of the world.

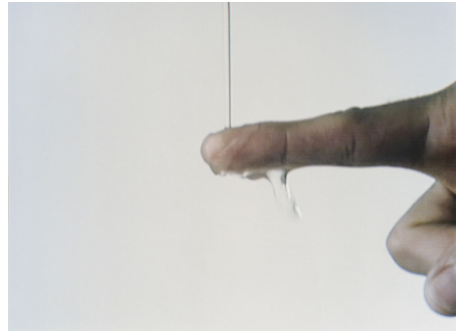
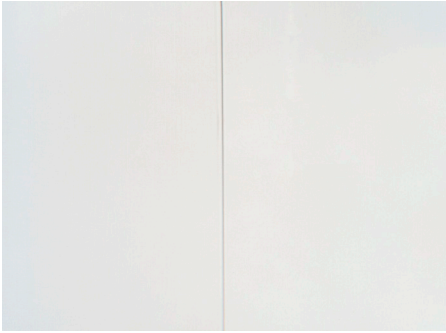
KS: In the short sequences, things are not always what they appear to be at first glance. In *Line* (2002), for instance, a minimal intervention from your side reveals that the presumed line is in fact a jet of water. It almost appears as if you are carrying out pseudo-physical experiments using different materials and textures. An insight based on direct experience that you're passing on to the audience? What role does optical illusion play in this?

MA: You're right, these specific videos are almost all about optical illusion, but I have to say that the verbal also plays an important role. The title is not just a description but an instruction on what to see. That's the reason for the existence of titles in pieces so short, which shouldn't really have spare parts. The verbal has a structure and authority that the visual

lacks. When a certain point in the plot is reached, there's a fracture that goes from the verbal to the visual, leaving the viewer vulnerable and open to relate in a less prejudiced way with the materials. Once that happens, I like how basic the experience becomes. Let's take the video *Line* as an example. You have the title and then you have the image of a line, but once the action happens you are confronted with a line that is less of a concept and more of a thing. The line is actual material, water in this case, but I think the big shock to our perception comes from something more basic, something that has to do with phenomenology—the sudden realization of movement in stillness.

KS: You have created a unique universe of everyday objects and situations. The banal thus gains a poetic touch. Are surreal humor and wit a significant part of this?

MA: That's actually funny because I'm purposely trying not to be humorous, and at the same time I know I'm being humorous. What I think is happening is that I'm mixing some ingredients and presenting them with the same mechanism with which humor works. That is, a break in a narrative that all of a sudden brings an unexpected element. Even if the new proposition is absurd, the very break in the continuum promotes laughter. I like that psychological engagement with my work. I think the break I propose is in the unspoken narrative that objects have in everyday life. What I consider subversive is a twist



Line, 2002
Single-channel video
0'29" / color / sound

in a narrative that most of the time we are not even aware of, and we are even less aware how subjected we are to that narrative. As for the surreal part, after a while I have unwillingly to admit that there is a surreal component to my work, probably "à la Magritte" as in "This is not a pipe", which I like very much (as oppose to "à la Dalí", which I dislike; too spectacular for me). Anyway, I'm not trying to open a door to the unconscious world but to a more obvious and factual world that is still surprising because it actually exists and is just hidden in plain sight.

KS: Your work is based on photography and, since the early 2000s, also on the medium of video. Your earliest video work includes *Crack*, *Line*, *Twig*, *Red*, and *Hole*. Time, movement and action have gained a different quality and relevance due to the new medium. How did this transition come about, and what possibilities has it opened up?

MA: I moved into video from pure necessity. I didn't have any specific agenda to do video work, it just happened that what I wanted to say needed movement; that's why some of my videos could be thought of as photographs in which something happens. I was trying to be as efficient with the medium as possible partly because I was inexperienced and partly because I had a very specific thing to say. Those two elements turned out to yield elegant little pieces. After that, working with the very feature that photography lacks, I mean time, made me understand the nature of both mediums even better.

I came back to photography with a better grasp of how time works in photographic representation.

KS: From today's perspective, how would you characterize the videos in the context of your artistic work?

MA: That's very difficult to answer because the way I see my previous works keeps changing. I like them, I guess, in the way anyone could like them. I can still be an audience to those videos, which could be considered an achievement. It rarely happens, but when it does it means that there's enough openness in that work to keep it meaningful. As an artist, those videos probably set up a way of working for me. They taught me to be as truthful to my intuition as possible throughout the process, from conceiving an experience up to delivering it in the right medium.

Interview conducted by e-mail, July 2014.

Born in 1969 in Mexico City, Mexico. Lives and works in New York, USA.