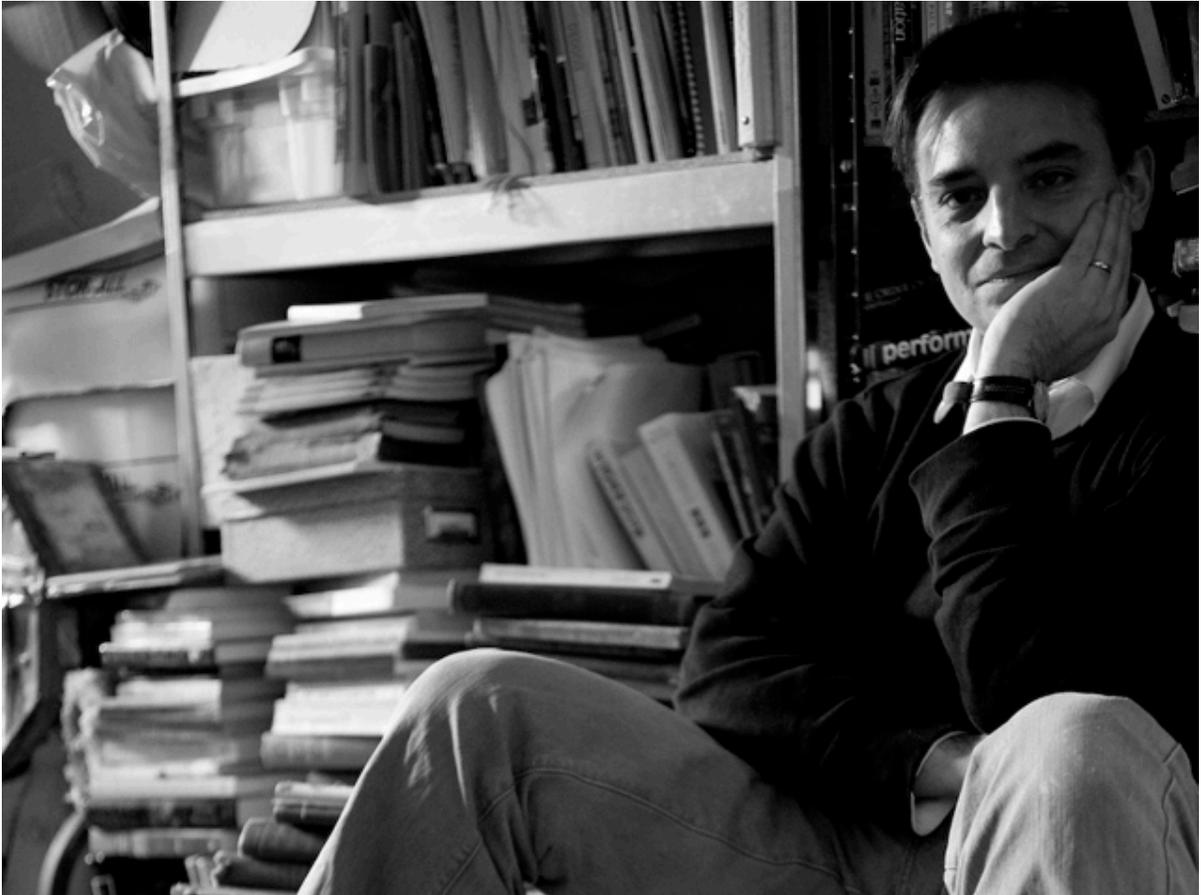


Mexican artist creates only Spanish-language second-hand bookstore in NYC

by Claudio Iván Remeseira, @HispanicNewYork



Pablo Helguera

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Pablo Helguera loves books. He grew up among them, in the sheltered environment of a literary household, under the inviting presence of his parents' vast library. When he became old enough to buy his own stuff, he would start roaming the bookstores in search of novels and art books. He was particularly fond of second-hand bookstores, those magical places where serendipity



reigns supreme. In Mexico City —Mr. Helguera’s hometown— second-hand bookstores are gathered on an old street with a Chivalric name: Donceles, the Spanish word for the medieval office of page.

After moving to New York, **Mr. Helguera** —a visual and performance artist who is the Head of Public Programs at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) — missed terribly the availability of books in Spanish. “New York is home to more than 2 million Spanish speakers, but it is very hard to find Spanish-language books here,” he says. The situation turned even more critical with the technological changes experienced by the publishing industry and the demise of bookstores in general.

That’s why Mr. Helguera came up with the idea of creating an itinerant second-hand bookstore. It was a very simple idea: he would request Spanish-language books in exchange for his own artwork— an original Ex Libris for each donor that acknowledges the particular provenance of every volume. As for the name for the new venture, there was one natural choice: Donceles, a tribute to Mr. Helguera’s book-loving hometown.

In May of 2003, he suggested the idea for the first time to some friends. They were delighted and started to send books immediately. A few weeks later, the local daily **La Jornada** published an article on the project, and books began to rain in from all parts of Mexico.

Just one month after that, Mr. Helguera had to stop asking: he had already amassed a motley collection of 7,000 volumes on every imaginable subject, including literature, poetry, art, history, biology, medicine, anthropology, and politics, as well as children’s books.

He reached an agreement with his New York gallerist, **Kent Fine Art**, to showcase the books in New York. But he still had to get them into the US, and that proved to be expensive—an average cost of 1 dollar per book. Since this is a not-for-profit project, the transportation expenses had to be covered by donors.

A vertical poster with a gold background and a black border. The text is arranged in several sections, separated by decorative horizontal lines with a central flourish. The top section features the name "PABLO HELGUERA" in bold black capital letters. Below this is a decorative line. The next section contains "LIBRERÍA" in large blue capital letters, followed by "'DONCELES'" in the same style. Below that is a quote in italics: "Su única librería de viejo en español en Nueva York". Another decorative line follows. The next section says "GRAN INAGURACIÓN" in white capital letters, followed by "12 DE SEPTIEMBRE" and "KENT FINE ART" in large blue capital letters. A final decorative line is at the bottom, above the address and contact information: "210 ELEVENTH AVENUE", "SEGUNDO PISO", "NUEVA YORK, NY", "TELÉFONO (212)365-9500", and "WWW.KENTFINEART.NET".



Librería Donceles opened on September 12th, , 2013, the only Spanish-language used-book store in New York City. For Mr. Helguera, this is a work of love, but it is also an artistic project. In a few weeks, the bookstore will begin travelling around the Five Boroughs. The books will be exhibited on tables along the street and sold at a small cost. The revenue will be channeled into Spanish-reading programs administered by the **Mexican-American Cultural Institute**.

Despite the rise of e-books, Mr. Helguera firmly believes that the physical object is irreplaceable. “You have an emotional connection with a book that you simply don’t have with an e-reader or a tablet,” he says. “I still treasure books that were owned by my grandparents, as my grandchildren, I hope, will one day treasure mine.”

Pablo Helguera is embarked in a mission of cultural preservation that is also a passionate defense of language and of its old, cherished vessel.