

Pablo Helguera

Librería Donceles

September 12—November 8



Bookstore, Donceles Street, Mexico City

For Immediate Release

Kent Fine Art is proud to present *Librería Donceles*, Pablo Helguera’s latest project. *Librería Donceles* is an itinerant bookstore of ten thousand used books, in Spanish, of virtually every subject—literature, poetry, art, history, science, medicine, anthropology, economics, and politics, as well as children’s books. While it is installed at Kent, *Librería Donceles* will literally be the only Spanish-language used-book store in the city. Its New York venue draws attention to the fact that there are nearly two million Spanish speakers in New York and nonetheless a great scarcity of books in Spanish. The situation has been made more critical by rapid transformations in publishing, with the rise of e-books and the demise of bookstores of all sorts. The used-book store in general is becoming extinct. Only a handful remains in the city, none of which is Spanish.

To create *Librería Donceles*, Helguera assembled donations of books from individuals and groups in Mexico City and elsewhere, offering his artwork in exchange for boxes of books and producing an Ex Libris for each donor that acknowledges the particular provenance of every volume. *Librería Donceles*—whose title is inspired by the old bookstores that line Donceles Street in Mexico City’s historic center—will foster the open-ended and unhurried environment that draws people to used-book stores, where customers enter without a particular title in mind and instead roam the shelves with the hope of spontaneously discovering a book that beckons them. Visitors to the *Librería Donceles*—Spanish-speakers and non-Spanish-speakers alike—will be welcomed in this spirit and invited to a brief consultation with the artist or an associate. Once their interests and “bibliological profile” (as Helguera has described it) have been assessed, they will be given suggestions on where to look. But visitors ultimately make their own choices. Only one book per customer will be allowed, in exchange for a pay-what-you-wish donation. Proceeds from these transactions will be donated in turn to local Spanish reading programs for immigrant communities.

By rendering visibility to the Spanish language in an American city, *Librería Donceles* affirms the importance of the cultural dimension of the language and raises questions about how Spanish might be reconnected to its diaspora, as well as integrated into the broader cultural life of New York. For Helguera, the idea of the “double removal” of a book, indeed of any object, is an important one, with both personal and historical resonances. Conjuring the spirit of L.P. Hartley when

he wrote “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there,” the books of *Librería Donceles* are messengers from other times, places, and lives. With their public and private histories, the books await new lives, new meanings, as they pass on to new owners.

Also on view are *Rogaland* (2012) and *Canon* (2013). *Rogaland* is a project triggered by a book written in Norwegian that Helguera found in a used-book store. Helguera was drawn to the book for its particular feel and for its photographs and diagrams, which to the mind of a twenty-first-century artist, suggest depictions of land art. Titled *Gale gårdsanlegg i Rogaland*, written by archeologist Jan Petersen, and published in 1936, the book is an account of the excavations of several medieval farms in the Rogaland region of Norway. Helguera, who neither speaks nor reads Norwegian, mistranslated the explanatory captions for its sixty-three plates into English by conjuring phrases and statements suggested by the image and imagined sound of the printed words.

Canon is a two-channel video inspired by the legendary Italian tenor Enrico Caruso (1873–1921). As a musical term “canon” refers to a melody that repeats itself successively in an overlapping pattern, and Helguera’s *Canon* reflects on processes of reproduction—both mechanical and biological—as overlapping mechanisms that further a particular narrative, story, or myth. One channel of *Canon* shows interiors of the Enrico Caruso Museum of America, an obscure and idiosyncratic homage created by a first-generation Italian-American, Aldo Mancusi, in his house in the Sheepshead Bay section of Brooklyn. Caruso’s career paralleled the early development of recoding technology, which he embraced, becoming the first global recording star and the first artist to sell a million records. That a museum dedicated to Caruso, in an outlying Brooklyn neighborhood, even exists is evidence of the mythology created around his persona. *Canon*’s second channel shows a contemporary video portrait of Riccardo Caruso, Caruso’s great-grandson and a singer in his own right, who bears an uncanny resemblance to his great-grandfather. After learning of the existence of Riccardo from his photograph in the Caruso Museum, Helguera traveled to Florence to meet him and create the portrait.

Pablo Helguera (b. 1971, Mexico City) is a visual and performance artist whose work weaves together personal and historical narratives in the context of socially engaged art and language. Previous itinerant projects include the *Instituto de la Telenovela* (2002–04) and *The School of Panamerican Unrest* (2001–11). He is also the author of eighteen books. His work has been seen most recently at CIFO in Miami, the 2012 Havana Biennial, and the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid.

For further information please contact Orlando Tirado (ot@kentfineart.net) or Jeanne Marie Wasilik (jmw@kentfineart.net). Hours are Tuesday–Saturday, 10–6.