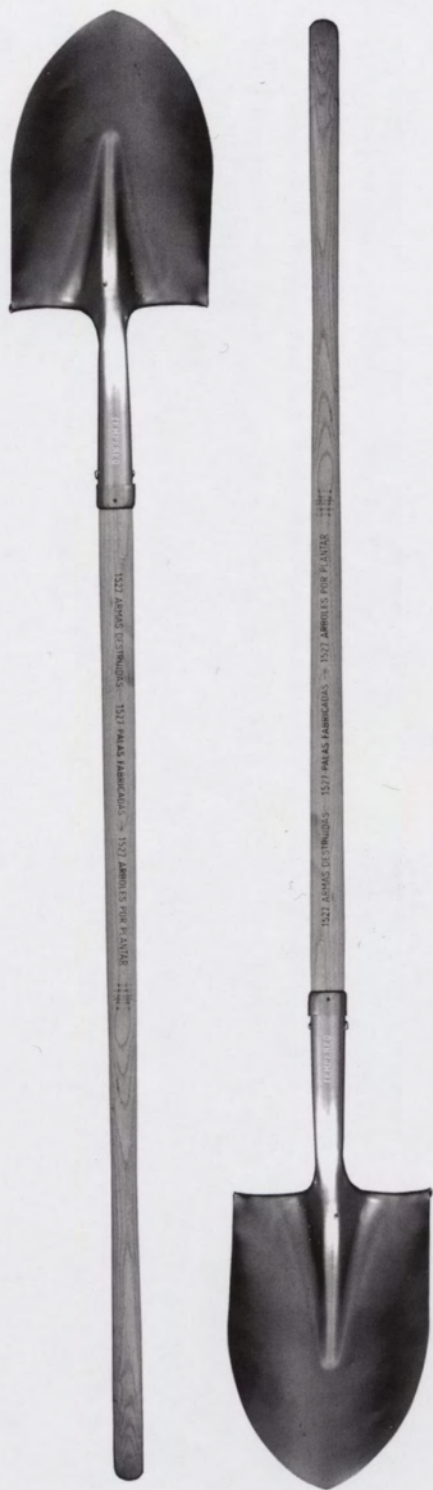


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PEDRO
REYES





Exhibition organized by Professor Jo Anna Isaak and her students Theodora Austin, Asa De Sal, Anna Devine, Kathleen Emerson, Andrea Esobedo, Dylan Katz, Claire Fields, Karina Krainchich, Shauna Ling-Choung, Carolina Maestre, Sarah Mastrangelo, Michael McMenamin, Allison Pflingst, Audrey Remmert, Julian Rifai, Candace Shacklette, Shi-Anne Shakes, Jenieze Shields, Nina Synnestvedt, Amalia Yavala, Elizabeth White, and Eduardo Zayas Avila.

We students of Fordham University are pleased to be participating in Pedro Reyes' ongoing project *Palas por Pistolas*—the conversion of firearms into shovels intended for tree planting, a modern version of the Biblical directive to convert swords into plowshares. Reyes is an artist with a strong belief in the possibility of conversion. He cites among his sources of inspiration Saint Ignatius Loyola and the artist Joseph Beuys, who also held Saint Ignatius as his model. The conversions he is effecting extend to the roles of the audience, the art patron, the collector, the artist, and indeed art itself.

Reyes has said that "the purpose of art is to come up with ways to transform the most negative instincts into creative instincts" and that he wants his work to be "useful for social and psychological transformation." A catalyst for artists all over the world who are rethinking the role of the artist and the function of the work of art, Reyes has coined the term *ad usum* to describe what he regards as the desirable role of art: "There is art and there are applied arts, which are functional objects that have a special degree of craftsmanship. There should be a third category, *ad usum*, that is, an art to be used. An art to be used is slightly different from a useful art, since its uses can be an entirely subjective enterprise. But even if they are subjective, the piece or the artwork operates as a tool, a device or a tactic. A resource."

Palas por Pistolas began in 2007 when Reyes was invited to make a work of art in the botanical garden in the city of Culiacán, Mexico, a city where incidences of gun violence were among the most frequent in Mexico. The country's gun violence and its rapid rate of deforestation (the result of clear-cutting to plant opium and marijuana) have both resulted from the drug trade with the United States. As Reyes points out, two exchanges take place in drug trafficking: "We may send drugs to the US, but they don't kill us as fast as guns. This is all connected to the unregulated gun market in the United States. All the guns are smuggled into Mexico. This is the biggest threat to democracy and economy and the well-being of everyone. The idea for this artwork was to connect guns to deforestation—to turn an agent of death into an agent of life." This, then, was the genesis of *Palas por Pistolas*.

After speaking with community leaders and the relatives of victims of gun violence and drug crimes, Reyes decided to undertake a large-scale, citywide campaign for voluntary donations of weapons. He collaborated with Agustín Coppel, owner of a local store that sells electronics and household appliances, who was on the board of the botanical garden and had long been a patron of the arts. In exchange for guns, people were given coupons that could be redeemed at Coppel's. Reyes thus altered the role of the collector or patron, explaining, "I wanted to engage with a collector, not as a client who acquires a finished work of art but as a co-producer of social change. Rather than purchase a work of art, they purchased a social good. They were very excited about it."

The townspeople were informed of the gun buyback through public-service TV ads that took the form of short stories depicting ordinary people. For example, a father finds a gun in his son's room and doesn't want his son to shoot someone, or a mother doesn't want a gun in the house near her children. The viewer then sees a worker at City Hall accepting the gun and handing out the store coupons in exchange, no questions asked. The ads demonstrated the process in a non-threatening way and reassured people that they would not get into trouble for having the guns.

So, the guns poured in—brought in principally by women who preferred to have a new fridge rather than a gun in their house. Reyes collected 1,527 guns, 40 percent of which were high-power automatic weapons. At the end of the collection period, the Mexican military publicly crushed the guns with steamrollers, and the metal pieces were then taken to a foundry, melted down, and transformed into shovel heads. For the duration of the exhibition, the shovels were hung on gallery walls; engraved on the handle of each shovel was the story of its creation. Afterward, the trees and shovels were distributed to art institutions and public schools where adults and children engaged in planting the 1,527 trees. A special planting invitation was extended to those whose loved ones had lost their lives because of a gun.

Palas por Pistolas has become a do-it-yourself kit, a kind of artwork franchise, easily adapted to various communities. We are bringing this project to Fordham University in observance of our own Jesuit tradition, which includes "the protection of human rights and respect for the environment" and in the hopes of furthering Reyes' initiative to ameliorate the effects of gun violence and to engage the community in an art practice that is *ad usum*, useful to humans and their environments. Tree planting will take place on Earth Day.



PALAS POR PISTOLAS / SHOVELS FOR GUNS

PEDRO REYES

Born in Mexico City in 1972, Pedro Reyes received formal training in architecture and uses a variety of media in his work, encompassing design, film, architecture, and pedagogy. He seeks to suggest solutions to social problems by engaging the audience and the community in collective action. Other installations of *Palas por Pistolas* have taken place at the Vancouver Art Gallery (2008), the San Francisco Art Institute (2008), La Maison Rouge, Paris (2008), Lyon Biennial (2009), Marfa, Texas (2010), Denver, Colorado (2010), and the Guadalupe Plaza Park in Houston, Texas (2013). His most recent project, *Disarm*, transformed 6,700 weapons into musical instruments.



Fordham University
Ildiko Butler Gallery
Lowenstein Lobby
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Opening Reception: March 25, 6 - 8 pm

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For more information visit fordham.edu/universityart

1527 ARMAS DESTRUIDAS — 1527 PALAS FABRICADAS — 1527 ARBOLES POR PLANTAR

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