

GALLERY TOUR

# Something Special

An architectural marvel in Mexico finds new life as both a gallery and a restaurant promoting sustainability



A Brutalist structure in Mexico City conceived by architect Alfonso Ramírez Ponce in 1964 gets an update as the restaurant-gallery concept Lago/Algo.



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The dramatically sloping ceiling frames the cultural center's restaurant, Lago. BELOW: Lago/Algo's entrance hall with a site-specific chalk mural by local artist Yann Gerstberger.

**A**s a 24-year-old fresh out of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, where he studied under legendary Spanish Mexican architect Félix Candela, Alfonso Ramírez Ponce designed a Brutalist cement and glass restaurant and event space that opened on the man-made Lago Mayor in Mexico City's Bosque de Chapultepec. Imagine Central Park's Loeb Boathouse with a batwing paraboloid roof devised by an architect so young he wasn't credited with building it until long after its 1964 debut.

What began as a city planning project in the run-up to the 1968 Summer Olympics soon morphed into a series of restaurants, a posh nightclub, and now a multipurpose cultural center. "I came as a teenager; it was this place for banquets," recalls Cristobal Riestra, owner of Mexico City's blue-chip OMR gallery, which is a partner in the project.

In reimagining Ponce's original structure, local architecture firm Naso removed the old finishes and makeshift walls, revealing a Brutalist bunker that was rechristened Lago/Algo. Lago is a farm-to-table restaurant conceived by chef Micaela Miguel. Algo, which translates as "something," is an exhibition space that Riestra inaugurated during Zona Maco with the sprawling group show "Form Follows Energy," cocurated by revered dealer José García Torres and OMR.



"The powerful syllogism of modernism is 'form follows function,' but if you extrapolate that to a larger idea beyond its functionalist purpose in architecture, it's the reason why you take a thousand-year-old tree and turn it into a table," says Riestra.

To address that conceit, the exhibition boasts more than 45 multimedia works from 27 international artists, including James Turrell, Alicja Kwade, and artist trio Troika. A biomorphic chalk mural by Yann Gerstberger fills the cylindrical foyer, which leads in one direction to the restaurant area, where visitors will find murals by Jorge Méndez Blake and Gabriel Rico. In the other direction, a stairwell rises to a light-flooded promontory that features Eduardo Sarabia's *La Conquista de México*, a series of ceramic vessels perched upon boxes, the tops of which are painted with different game boards and the sides of which display logos from Mexican political parties. Also on view are Christian Jankowski's video *Crying for the March of Humanity*, for which he hired telenovela actors to re-create sob scenes, and Superflex's *Modern Times Forever (Stora Enso Building, Helsinki)*, a ten-day-long CGI video that imagines a building's evolution over thousands of years. "Turrell once told me that civilization is maintenance," says Riestra, gesturing to Jose Dávila's *The Stone That the Builder Refused*, a sculpture comprising three slabs of marble held together by ratchet straps. "If one of them collapses, they all collapse."

At the reflective resting point of the show, visitors are asked

to take off their shoes and walk onto a carpeted expanse to examine Pia Camil's *BluJeanando*. The work is composed of a pile of hand-sewn sculptures made from 120 pairs of denim jeans that were produced in Latin America and sold to U.S. retailers before ending up south of the border again in Mexico City's bargain markets. "It's an idea of transformation; that's why you take off your shoes, to reflect on where we are today," says Riestra. "Its form follows energy, which is a more harmonious path, a more symbiotic relationship to that livable system. People are looking for deeper meaning now." [lago.com.mx](http://lago.com.mx)

—MICHAEL SLENSKE

FROM TOP: RAMIRO CHAVES, COURTESY OF OMR, JOSÉ IGNACIO VARGAS, COURTESY OF OMR, JOSÉ GARCÍA, MX, AND GRUPO OMR