Mario García Torres unsettles the somewhat static history of Conceptual art by lending it a fictional quality in his multipart constellations of images, words, live performance, video, and sound. His first U.S. museum survey, *Illusion Brought Me Here*, currently showing at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, is a museological essay in its own right, raising questions about exhibitions’ relationship to time and space. It extends some of the experimental aspects of the artist’s first museum survey, *Let’s Walk Together*, held at the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City in 2016. Here, Lucy Cotter reflects on some of these exhibitions’ underlying paradigms, tracing García Torres’s repositioning of artworks in a cyclical understanding of time and his foregrounding the porosity of ideas through the presence of a cohort of ghostly collaborators.
Artworks are not so much the end products of an artist’s thinking process as temporary halting places in a thought process that never stops. Art “thinks” as a field, with the ideas of individuals connecting across time and space in a manner that is entirely at odds with the linear narratives of art history. Mario García Torres is well known for his excavation of this push-pull of ideas in the form of “museological essays”: multipart works in which the history of conceptual art becomes raw material for new narrations. For more than fifteen years he has been questioning the idea that “time and memory, beginnings and endings,” are stable concepts. He has tested how these notions contribute to the hidden structures that enable the production of art, and, indeed, maintain the function of the artist. Being exhibition-like, his “essays” have moreover led García Torres to question, with great sensitivity, the exhibition as form.

What does it mean for an exhibition to exist in space? This is hardly a new question, but it became a departure point for a radically new approach to exhibition making in García Torres’s first museum survey, Let’s Walk Together, at the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City in 2016.1 Looking for something more interesting than a midcareer overview, García Torres and curator Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy considered preparing an exhibition for the Museo de Arte Sacramento, a conceptual museum García Torres conceived in 2002, and “touring” it to the venue in Mexico City. In the end the “floor plans” of this purely conceptual museum were overlaid on a map of Mexico City to come up with the exhibition locations. The resulting show was a peripatetic experience, inviting the public to walk in a conceptual space that linked several buildings and streets. Its extended physical space also created a durational experience, which in effect amplified the phenomenon of an exhibition being temporal as much as physical.

In Illusion Brought Me Here, the artist’s first U.S. survey, currently on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, García Torres seems to ask what it means for an exhibition to exist in time. Having his second survey at a museum that felt like a blank slate to him enabled García Torres to revisit his works to date with more conceptual distance. He was struck by the tenacity with which the subjects of time, image, and memory had returned again and again in pieces that he had previously considered quite unrelated. Working against the notion of looking back in time that is implicit in a retrospective, García Torres wanted the show’s layout to convey this circularity of ways of thinking and of occupying time. In close collaboration with curator Vincenzo de Bellis and curatorial fellow Fabián Leyva-Barragan, he chose to use the Walker’s double-entranced rooms as an architectural blueprint for a show that would self-consciously function as a loop in both time and space. They selected and placed the works in the two opening rooms so as to undermine the clarity of a beginning and ending, going so far as to install two editions of the same work.

The invitation to experience the exhibition as a temporal loop is furthermore brought home through García Torres’s new sound installation, Silence’s Wearing Thin Here (2018), strategically placed midway on the show’s circular path. Two apparently computer-generated female voices offer alternating reflections on time against a collage of ambient music and edited fragments of video works from throughout García Torres’s career. The status of the material as coming from multiple time zones, materially fused in the editing process, reflects the work’s central thesis: that “time is an invention which sometimes gets crumpled, crashes and reversed.” “When is it today?” one voice asks. “Is it the future?”

1. Unless otherwise stated, all citations are from the author’s dialogue with the artist in November 2018.
Silence's Wearing Thin Here, 2018 Installation view at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2018 Courtesy Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Photo: Bobby Rogers
A Life Full of Headscratchers

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This insistence on the possibility of conversing outside the limits of linear (historic) time and space pushes toward the more radical question of whether time actually exist. García Torres’s “touring” of the entirely conceptual Museo de Arte Sacramento to the architectural spaces Against this “soundtrack,” García Torres’s long-term preoccupation with time comes strongly to the fore. It manifests in works that extend backward and forward in chronological time, like This Painting Is Missing / This Painting Has Been Found (2006-ongoing). The differently sized white canvases stacked against a museum wall each bear a title and measurements corresponding to one of Ed Ruscha’s paintings, previously or currently lost, thus falling in and out of existence.

The impulse to connect across time echoes as well in García Torres’s “conversations” with artists long gone in video works such as Carta Abierta a Dr. Atl (Open Letter to Dr. Atl, 2005), in which he narrates an imaginary letter to landscape painter Gerardo Murillo (aka Dr. Atl, 1875-1964) against a scenic view proposed as the site of a Guggenheim Museum in Mexico.

of the Museo Tamayo fourteen years after the former’s conception is one example. In his current survey, the idea that there is something fundamentally wrong with our conceptions of time and space is foregrounded in works like The Cordiality Paradox, one of a trilogy of staged performances scheduled to take place several times over the course of the exhibition. Its protagonist, an actor accompanied by a plastic tortoise, grapples with Zeno’s second paradox of motion, an unsolvable conundrum that suggests that no matter how far we travel in space, we can never progress or “catch up” with motion.

By extension García Torres rearticulates and flips the notion of an artist’s work “moving forward” in the two other performances, I Am Not a Flopper (2007-2014), cowritten with Aaron Schuster, toys with definitions of failure, while in The Causality of Hesitance (2015), cowritten with Alan Page, the idea of hesitation as a political statement against progress is nudged forward, evoking the art market’s narratives of newness and originality. That the performance was inspired by Seth Siegelaub’s unfinished bibliography on time reinforces the cyclical nature of artistic thought, destabilizing the art world’s centering of the artist as a uniquely creative individual.

What if, instead of being proposed as the output of a solo author, art was presented in exhibitions in a manner that did justice to this intertextuality and multiplicity of the authorship of any work of art? What if exhibitions did more justice to artists’ cyclical returns and art’s inevitable lack of completion? Could this not be an extension of how an exhibition engages with time? At the Walker, García Torres worked with the curatorial team to present his works in constellations that opened up the works’ own “crippled” status and their inevitable open-endedness. The artist explains, “This is not the position of autonomy or making a strong statement of what I want, but rather proposing that waves of ideas are permeable.” What if artworks are porous entities, into which various people manifest ideas that mingle and shape-shift through collective processes of endeavor? For one thing, this realignment challenges how the art world underplays the creativity of most of its producers in order to prop up the myth of the artist as solo creator. Why, García Torres asked himself consciously in the making of this exhibition, if his artworks all involve the creativity of so many people, does he finally “take that plane alone, hard disk in hand, to have a ‘solo’ show?”

3. The Causality of Hesitance was commissioned by curators Leontine Coelewij and Sara Martinetti for the exhibition Seth Siegelaub: Beyond Conceptual Art, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2016.
Illusion Brought Me Here, installation view at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2018. Photo: Bobby Rogers
For the last 8 years I have been building a practice that in different ways discusses the structures that make art possible.
A long-standing sense of debt to his creative peers triggered the show’s title piece, *Ilusión Brought Me Here* (2018), a series of augmented-reality avatars of some of the many musicians, writers, photographers, galleryists, and curators who have been important in developing García Torres’s work to date. They populate the gallery spaces as full-length holographic portraits, viewable on smartphones or on available iPads. Their ghostly presence acknowledges that the forty-five pieces on show were made through collaboration with people who are invisible in the final works. The idea to manifest this insight as a work also developed through intense conversations with the curatorial team, and Vincenzo de Bellis is one of the many avatars in the show, alongside several other curators who have been significant for García Torres’s thinking. It is intriguing to consider which invisible collaborators might inhabit any artist’s show. Having carefully made up a long list, García Torres left the final selection partly up to happenstance: since he set up the photo shoot in Mexico City, his Mexican and U.S.-based collaborators became foregrounded. Yet García Torres plans for this work to continue over time, allowing for the virtual writing of such a history to unfold, following the twists and turns of the artist’s and collaborators’ lives.

It is fitting that the exhibition title *Ilusión Brought Me Here* points to the role of chance in the circuitous paths that lead to art’s making more generally, co-formed by passing conversations and unexpected finds. García Torres reflects that in his native Spanish, the word *ilusión* has more than one meaning. It suggests a misinterpretation of the senses: “a deceptive appearance or perception.” But the word can also be used to relate to a sentiment of hope, to favorable expectations. *Ilusión me trajo aquí* [*Ilusión Brought Me Here*] could then be both the possibility of a fortunate occurrence happening here and a misleading view, setup, or mirage that prompted a personal journey. This journey is physical and conceptual, inhabiting spaces that are both in and out of time. Just as the avatars inhabit real time as people and virtual time in this exhibition, art too is perennially re-erated and thus multiple at its core, material and immaterial. And by extension the museum itself exists somewhere outside of its architectural shell as a nexus of lives in time, past and present.

While García Torres embraced the *carte blanche* of surveying his work in a museum he had not previously set foot in, he simultaneously tried to get to know the museum as a “living” entity. Coming across a photo of the demolition of the Old Walker building in the museum’s vault, he was intrigued by a woman in the foreground documenting the event on a video camera. This woman was Louise Walker McCannel, granddaughter of museum founder T. B. Walker. She had served in several capacities at the museum, none of them filmmaker. Yet efforts to track down her film led García Torres to the Chicago Film Archives, where he found more than sixty of her filmic works. They were in fact already a subject of research for Ruth Hodgins, the Walker’s archivist and assistant curator of moving images. With McCannel’s daughter’s blessing, García Torres lovingly finished the unedited film of the demolition, commissioning accompanying music by Sol Oosel, another of the exhibition’s avatars. García Torres credits himself as the film’s editor, thus foregrounding McCannel’s status as a filmmaker and artist. Yet he also embeds her work in an installation, *Goodbye, Goodbye* (2018), together with the demolition photo from 1969, a contemporary picture of the wrecking ball discarded in a local yard, and two graphic posters marking the time difference of fifty years between the two images. In this work García Torres challenges the notion that a museum is a building, reframing it as a collective endeavor in time, not unlike the making of art itself.

Beyond something deceptive that is implicitly negative, the possibility that *ilusión* could have brought us here is a hopeful one, suggesting the potential of a misleading view of things prompting a productive personal journey. But García Torres offers no promise of “moving forward” through the journey mapped out by *Ilusión Brought Me Here*, only a reminder that, like art, we too are entangled in nonlocal and atemporal ways that are only beginning to be understood. García Torres asks us to imagine, just for a moment, that “this is not an exhibition and these are not works of art but rather objects that appear, randomly, out of negotiations between interests and desires.”

5. Louise Walker McCannel (1915-2012) was an MFA grad-
6. Vincenzo de Bellis, “Misinterpretation of the Senses.”

Mario García Torres (1975, Monclova, Mexico) is an artist currently living in Mexico City. He has had solo exhibitions at Franco Noero, Turin (2017); TBA21, Vienna (2016); Perez Art Museum, Miami (2015); neugerriemschneider, Berlin (2015); Museo MADRE, Naples (2013); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2010); Berlin Biennale (2014); Manifesta 11 (2016); the Berlin Biennale (2016); Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2013); DOCUMENTA (13), Kassel (2012); the Bienal de São Paulo (2010); and the Venice Biennale (2007).

Lucy Cotter (1973, Cork, Ireland) works across the artistic-curatorial-academic spectrum. She was curator of the Dutch pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale (2017), presenting *Cinema Olanda with artist Wendellien van Oldenborgh. Widely published as a critic and theorist, her latest writings extend into ficto-theory, speculative fiction, and poetry. She was guest editor of *Machinarijet in 2018, with an edition entitled Reclaiming Artistic Research... First Thoughts, and is author of a forthcoming book that foregrounds artistic thinking. Former director of the experimental Master Artistic Research program at the Royal Academy of Art, the Hague, she will lecture at Portland State University in 2019. A trained artist, she holds a PhD in cultural analysis from the University of Amsterdam. She is currently working on a series of lecture performances.\n
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6.  Vincenzo de Bellis, “Misinterpretation of the Senses.”