



HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN

For Immediate Release

CONTACT: Shelley Farmer, Director (shelleyf@HirschAndAdler.com), or Tom Parker, Director (tomp@HirschAndAdler.com), Tel: 212-535-8810 / Fax: 212-772-7237

María Elena González

Riven

May 5 – June 16, 2023

In the summer of 2020, as COVID tightened its grip on what felt like a world coming apart, María Elena González, tenured Chair of the Sculpture Department at the San Francisco Art Institute, sat alone in the school's deserted studios trying to process an announcement that the venerable institution would soon close its doors forever. Surrounded by abandoned workspaces filled with objects discarded by students forced to vacate the premises as the pandemic hit, González did what any true maker would do to assuage her mounting fear. With the scant few materials at hand, she began making. Grabbing a tube of black epoxy, she sifted through the remnants of scrap wood, unfinished ceramic projects and shards of everyday objects—thrown out in haste and anger—and slowly began to repair them. At an anxious time and her future in doubt, the simple act of gluing broken things back together made sense. The pieces borne in that uncertainty, a tumultuous period forever burnished in our collective memory, form the basis of *Riven*, the artist's second solo exhibition at Hirschl & Adler Modern.

The Cuban-born González is known for interweaving the conceptual with a strong dedication to craft in exploring themes like dislocation, identity, memory, and the environment. Like much of the art González has made over an impressive forty-year career, the body of work she now calls *Repairs*, are externalizations of what and how she feels in a particular moment. A common dinner plate, someone's ceramic slabs, a glass decanter—all cracked, shattered, or left unfinished during the pandemic scramble and confusion—find new meaning in González's hands. With simple epoxy serving as both the binder and the visual punctuation, each recycled object becomes an expression of the artist's resilience and her power of invention; a gutsy attempt to bring order to chaos, and the purest illustration of a determined artist's grace under fire.

As COVID eased over time, *Repairs* gave way to another body of work featured in *Riven* she calls *Tepco*. Eager to find more materials she could recycle from the past, González discovered Tepco

Press release, María Elena González, *Riven*, May 5-June 16, 2023

Beach in San Francisco Bay that for decades was the former dumping ground for Tepco, a China and porcelain company that made no-frills dinnerware for restaurants and diners across the country. What started as an artist's pragmatic hunt for materials soon morphed into a poignant ecological statement about American waste and the urgent need to make amends. Combing through millions of ceramic fragments littering the beach, González made what UCLA art historian Chon Noriega refers to in the exhibition's accompanying catalog essay as random combinations with "a Frankenstein-like wholeness. These works are more inclined toward the surreal, and horror, turning the seriality of mass production into an assemblage that is unique, useless, and uncanny." The objects are presented as discreet groups isolated in bakery-style display cases, consciously recalling the architectural glass cases used so effectively by Louise Bourgeois. These individual cabinets, housing bizarre yet oddly familiar mashups, invite the viewer to contemplate their inherent pain and whimsy. There are not just ecological forces at play here, but archeological and anthropological ones too.

The creative process is central to González's work. She describes each series as the welcome "discoveries" from periods of intense experimentation. Not knowing where the path will take her, González opens herself to the unexpected by pushing and pulling her materials in different directions. A series of deeply enigmatic photographs called *Prints*, also featured in the exhibition, is the serendipitous result of the freedom she allows herself. While piecing together the Tepco "Frankensteins," she acted on an impulse to scan one in her copier. What came out were ghostly, quasi-abstract images that accentuated the objects' ambiguity, but also imbued them with an unforeseen elegance they had previously lacked. In this way, perhaps González's valiant rescue effort, begun in the depths of the pandemic, is ultimately achieved. There is an unmistakable message throughout *Riven*—that sustainability and healing are intertwined. The artist will say she was merely responding to her predicament, desperately keeping it together with little more than grit and epoxy. Intentional or not, by rescuing the past she just may have rescued herself. And showed us a way to do the same.

Over a career spanning forty years, María Elena González has won the Prix de Rome (2003) and the Grand Prize at the 30th Biennial of Graphic Arts at Ljubljana, Slovenia (for "Tree Talk" 2013). She is a recipient of a 2023 Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant (her fourth), a Fleishhacker Foundation Eureka Fellow in 2019 and was a Guggenheim Fellow in 2006. She has been awarded grants from numerous other organizations including the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the Penny McCall Foundation. She has served as the Sculpture Commissioner for New York City's Design Commission and has also taught at Cooper Union School of Art, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and the San Francisco Art Institute among others. In 1999, González received widespread acclaim for her site-specific sculpture Magic Carpet/Home, commissioned by the Public Art Fund, and another site-specific work titled You & Me (2010), commissioned by Storm King Art Center. In 2017, González's work was featured in Home-So Different, So Appealing, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and organized in collaboration with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston [as part of the Getty-funded Pacific Standard Time exhibition program]. That same year her work was exhibited at the Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA), in Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago. In 2019, her acclaimed series "Tree Talk" was exhibited at Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, California and at Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, Vermont. In 2022, elements of "Tree Talk" were featured in Beyond the Sounds of Silence: Latin-American Artists Connecting Sound, Art, Society, Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Miami, FL.

Press release, María Elena González, *Riven*, May 5-June 16, 2023

González's work can be found in numerous public collections including the Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland; Museum voor Modern Kunst, Arnhem, The Netherlands; Museum of Art, The Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI; The Museum of Arts and Design, New York; and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. "Riven" is González's second solo gallery exhibition with Hirschl & Adler Modern.

This exhibition is accompanied by a full-color, digital catalog (available through Hirschl & Adler's website) with an essay by Chon A. Noriega, Professor in the UCLA Department of Film, Television and Digital Media as well as Director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

María Elena González *Riven* opens at Hirschl & Adler Modern on Friday, May 5 and runs through Friday, June 16, 2023. Located on the 9th floor of the Fuller Building, at the corner of 57th Street and Madison Avenue, Hirschl & Adler Modern is open Monday through Friday, from 9:30 am to 5:15 pm.

For additional information or images, contact **Shelley Farmer**, Director, or **Tom Parker**, Director, at 212-535-8810 (phone) / 212-772-7237 (fax), or by email at shelleyf@HirschlAndAdler.com or tomp@HirschlAndAdler.com. Please visit our website at www.HirschlAndAdler.com for an online preview of the exhibition.