RICARDO MAZAL: A 15 YEAR SURVEY
AN EXPLORATION OF PLACE, COLOR, SPACE AND SOUND
Opening reception Friday, June 15, 5-7pm
at the Center for Contemporary Arts

MAZAL’S MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATIONS
MERGE ART, TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

Santa Fe, New Mexico—Internationally celebrated Mexican abstractionist Ricardo Mazal, whose ambitious installations engage viewers in multimedia explorations of nature, globalization and the human experience, reinterprets and expands on recent bodies of work to immerse the Center for Contemporary Arts in an inspired demonstration of the creative intersection between contemporary art and global culture.

Ricardo Mazal: A 15 Year Survey, opening reception on June 15 and on view through September 23, 2018, highlights Mazal’s mastery of merging art, technology and design into profound multi-sensory encounters. The exhibition promises a dramatic transformation of CCA galleries to global hubs of human experience as expressed through Mazal’s keen sense of place, color, space and sound.
“My work is not about the paintings, it’s about the whole installation,” says Mazal, whose installations have reimagined such venues as Mexico City’s Museo Nacional de Antropología and Museo de Arte Moderno among others, as well as galleries in New York, Singapore, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver and Hong Kong. “It’s about the experience.”

The much-anticipated show is Mazal’s first major exhibition in over a decade in Santa Fe, where the artist has lived and worked part-time since 2002, while also maintaining home and work spaces in New York and his native Mexico City.

“CCA is honored to present the work of Ricardo Mazal, whose deep, almost anthropological investigations into diverse cultures and their practices place him in the pantheon of peers like Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter,” says CCA Executive Director and Chief Curator Stuart Ashman. “Mazal’s paintings and video installations stand out among contemporary painters, and his presence in our community demonstrates Santa Fe’s prominent role in contemporary art.”

**Linking Reality and Abstraction**

*Ricardo Mazal: A 15 Year Survey* continues the artist’s exploration of paintings that are rooted in the cycles of life and nature, conceived through technology, and finally, realized on canvas. Mazal blends and bends his medium in a dynamic dialogue between imagination and technology, utilizing photography, videography and other digital media to enhance his craft and expand his artistic expression. The resulting works blur the traditional artistic borders between realism and abstraction while mining the universal meaning and cross-cultural connections of personal experience.

“What separates me from traditional painting is that I don’t paint for the sake of painting. My paintings are created and developed from a conceptual idea.”

Mazal innovated his approach while experimenting with Photoshop in 1999. Starting with a photograph of his desired subject, Mazal was intrigued by how technology could help him push images of realistic subject matter to detailed and compelling abstractions of color, texture and form.

“I realized I could use technology as a tool to help me think faster, create faster,” he says. “I take photos or videos and develop them as conceptual ideas. I can change the format or shape, literally transform images into new ideas and new works. I’m not an artist driven by technology, I use technology as I need it.”

Mazal’s installations include photography, video and sound, providing viewers valuable context for his process. The other media also illuminate the complexity of Mazal’s oil paintings, his primary medium. His virtual manipulations ultimately lead him back to the canvas, where he is challenged to transform his virtual ideas to real paintings.
**Following the Thread**

While Mazal’s projects showcase his technical expertise, each also serves as a metaphor for the personal experiences and global travels through which he navigates the cultures that inform many of his creations. Journeying to such diverse places as Mexico, Germany, Tibet and Bhutan, Mazal follows threads of physical geography, cultural practice, and spiritual ritual to express common cycles of life and death, the path of spiritual transformation, and the essential relationship between humanity and the natural environment.

Showcased in the CCA exhibition, for example, are selections from an extraordinary trilogy of works created by Mazal between 2003 and 2014 that explore global burial practices: *La Tumba de la Reina Roja* (*Tomb of the Red Queen*), 2003–2007; *Odenwald 1152*, 2008–2010; and *Kailash*, 2011–2014. Mazal’s first work in the series was inspired by an ancient burial custom from his native Mexico, where a Maya queen was entombed in red cinnabar at the ruins of Palenque, in Chiapas, in 600 A.D. His second work took him down the path of a German “peace forest,” a cemetery where trees have supplanted headstones, nourished by the human cremains ritually buried at their base. For the final work, he looked skyward to Tibet’s 21,000-foot-high Mount Kailash, a centuries-old site of pilgrimage and burial, the country’s most sacred mountain for Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Bons alike.

From a rectangle of brilliant red pigment radiating from the floor, to vertical bars and textures reminiscent of tree trunks and bark, to bold black-and-white striations appearing like stripes of snow on a mountain peak, Mazal’s trilogy reflects the essence of each place as site-lines of time, mortality and transcendence. “It’s not about death, it’s about life, he says.”

**The Art of Transformation**

Other exhibition works also follow themes of transformation—artistic, personal, universal. Mazal’s 2015 *Bhutan Abstracto* (*Bhutan Abstractions*) features paintings, photographs and Mazal’s first interactive video installation. All are inspired by the long, flowing, colorful prayer flags that rise above homes and buildings throughout Bhutan, cast to the winds as offerings of faith and hope. While Mazal’s Bhutan paintings echo the elements of color, space and wind that power these prayers, his video installation
invites viewers to participate in the ritual. Visitors type their prayers on iPads, which are then carried by the winds of technology to become part of the installation.

“These installations takes everything into consideration,” Mazal says, “the architecture of the space, the color of the walls, the interactive possibilities of video and sound.”

CCA’s installation also includes selections from Mazal’s 2016 Noche Transfigurada (Night Transfigured) series, depicting abstractions based on photographs of branches against a night sky. In that series, he used the color violet for the first time. Its compelling qualities inspired him to a deeper examination of the magic and spiritual qualities of the red-blue hue.

Mazal’s 2016 Violeta (Violet) series thus emerged as a meditation on what he calls “the color of the spirit.” Violeta has been exhibited in New York (2016), Singapore (2017) and Mexico City (2017). His examination continues as he prepares five large scale new Violeta paintings for the CCA exhibition.

Highlighting both new works and new installations of previous works, Ricardo Mazal: A 15 Year Survey follows the track of Mazal’s ongoing inspiration with the fluidity, intensity and surprise of a piece of orchestral music. It’s no coincidence, Mazal says, confessing a love of music that rivals his love of art.

Ricardo Mazal: A 15 Year Survey opens June 15 and will run through September 23, 2018 at the Center for Contemporary Arts, 1050 Old Pecos Trail.

For more details, interview requests and photographs, contact Clare Hertel at Clare Hertel Communications at 505-474-6783 or clare@clarehertelcommunications.com.

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