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# GABRIEL KURI BEFORE CONTINGENCY AFTER THE FACT

SOUTH LONDON GALLERY  
EXHIBITION GUIDE  
29 SEPTEMBER – 27 NOVEMBER 2011

**SLG**

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## GABRIEL KURI BEFORE CONTINGENCY AFTER THE FACT

Internationally acclaimed Mexican artist, Gabriel Kuri, presents his first solo exhibition in a London public gallery with an entirely new body of work. He has devised an installation in three parts, spanning the SLG's main space, Clore Studio and interlinking back garden. Primarily the work addresses the nature of sculpture, the formal possibilities it affords and the artist's ongoing exploration of the relationship between 'hard' and 'soft' materials and resources. The pieces in this show were also born of an exploration of ideas and imagery associated with housing, shelter, aid and economics. Inspired in part by the SLG's proximity to the housing estate behind it, and the gallery's links with the residents, the works are underpinned by Kuri's reflection on the role of speculation in real estate.

In the SLG's main space, back garden and Clore Studio, a series of 'hard' sculptures – large, uniformly painted metal shapes – refer to the language of statistics or graphic representations of data. By presenting these related forms in sequence, each one embodying a slightly different relationship between positive and negative space, placed at different angles or tipped over on one side, Kuri exposes their potential to be perceived as abstract, symbolic and/or utilitarian. The human scale of these pieces, for example, lends them the potential to function as shelters were someone to lie beneath them. Whilst this might not be an immediately obvious reading of these works, in one instance the possibility is made overt through the incorporation of two carefully folded blankets. Laid out like a makeshift bed, the blankets also introduce a play on their use in the transport and installation of sculpture.

Kuri's deft ability to convincingly merge totally unexpected combinations of 'soft' and 'hard' materials results in works which resonate on multiple levels. While the work is about sculpture, first and foremost, the possibility of a function is sometimes implied, sometimes actual, and often there is an invitation for us to assign it political significance. The fusion of a remodelled rusty skip with a pristine abstract metal form, which might also be read as a scaled-up segment of a 3-D pie chart, is given a further twist by the insertion of an inflated condom in *Untitled (Extra Safe)*, 2011. Wedged into an angle to create an almost perfect sphere, absurd in its apparent fragility resisting the weight of the metal, the condom also suggests the critical influence of demographics in both economics and financial management.

*Shelter*, 2011, makes more immediate and direct visual reference to ideas of fiscal and physical survival, and the paraphernalia associated with emergency housing. Kuri is fascinated by the basic human instinct to mark out territory and delineate the boundaries of ownership, no matter how extreme the circumstances. Temporary homes and refugee camps are invariably designed around the need to divide and separate, to partition one patch of land from the next, a tendency signalled in this piece by what the artist describes as 'privacy screens' – fabric-covered metal frames – which can equally be understood in purely formal terms.

Interspersed with giant matches, dishcloths and sheets of cardboard, the screens create a zone of relative comfort within a bleaker landscape of funereal slabs of black marble, burnt out matches and energy drinks cans squashed dry of their life force. A bundle of clothes is poised as if in waiting for ignition, a notional campfire in the making, but also anticipating a sorry end for items which in another life might have been objects of consumer desire. In the midst of all this, the cut strips of giant, burnt out credit cards could make you laugh or cry as Kuri ensures through his play on scale and formal relationships that this dark scenario isn't without the possibility of both humour and visual intrigue.

The political references in the show are notional rather than literal until the third and final space which features prototype versions of polling tables and voting booths. Division is paramount once again as these simplified forms emphasise the separation of individuals from each other as they play their roles in determining the political shape of collective society. References to emergency shelters, and ultimately survival, provide a continued undercurrent of inter-connecting logic, and with a lightness of touch for which he has become known, Kuri brings bottles of water, used soap bars, worn door wedges and plastic sheeting into a surprising yet plausible visual play with their weightier counterparts. Doubling up as plinths, the tables support displays of carefully selected and positioned items which together contribute to the dialogue running throughout the exhibition, and Kuri's work more generally, between found versus manufactured objects. Everyday and often 'throwaway' things are meshed with those which have been specially produced, bringing into question the value system which underpins our consumerist society.

That the exhibition's title could be repeated indefinitely – before contingency after the fact before contingency after the fact etc – introduces from the outset the circularity of the ideas and issues it addresses, as well as the structure of the show itself, and the relationships between the works within it. Time and again Kuri draws us into various lines of thinking which eventually take us back to where we began, albeit via a fascinating array of possible routes. The potentially eternal dialogue between form, function and materials vies with the unsolvable contradiction embodied in attempts to shape the future in the face of its inevitable unpredictability.

Works in the Clore Studio are viewable on Tuesdays to Fridays from 2–4.45pm, on Saturdays from 11am–6pm and on Sundays from 11am–1pm.

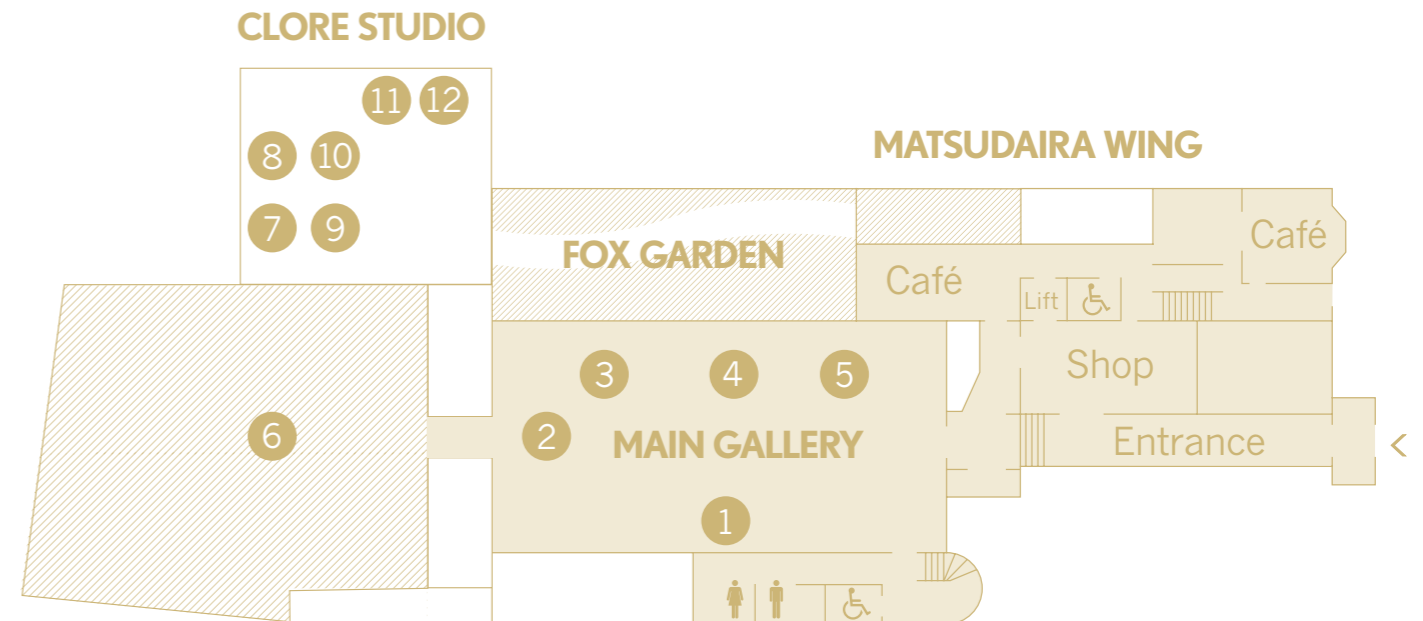
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The Henry Moore  
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## LIST OF WORKS

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| 1. <i>Untitled (Shelter)</i> , 2011<br>Mixed media<br>Dimensions variable              | 4. <i>Untitled (Extra Safe)</i> , 2011<br>Painted metal and<br>inflated condom<br>102 × 83 × 149cm | 7. <i>Untitled (Charted<br/>Topography)</i> , 2011<br>Prototype voting table and<br>mixed media<br>181 × 81 × 138cm | 10. <i>Untitled (Shells and<br/>Stubbed-out Cigarettes)</i> , 2011<br>Prototype voting table and<br>mixed media<br>181.5 × 61 × 127.5cm |
| 2. <i>Untitled (Opening)</i> , 2011<br>Scaffold screen on wire<br>500 × 443cm          | 5. <i>Untitled (Platform)</i> , 2011<br>Glass, stone,<br>concrete, cigarettes,<br>100 × 181 × 87cm | 8. <i>Untitled (Safe Step)</i> , 2011<br>Prototype voting table and<br>mixed media<br>181 × 61 × 127.5cm            | 11. <i>Untitled (Booth 1)</i> , 2011<br>Prototype polling booth and<br>mixed media<br>74 × 60 × 184.5cm                                 |
| 3. <i>Untitled (3/4 Blue)</i> , 2011<br>Painted metal and blanket<br>210 × 200 × 120cm | 6. <i>Untitled (100%)</i> , 2011<br>Painted metal<br>394 × 134 × 135.5cm                           | 9. <i>Untitled (Scoop)</i> , 2011<br>Painted metal<br>239.5 × 140 × 100cm   | 12. <i>Untitled (Booth 2)</i> , 2011<br>Prototype polling booth<br>and mixed media<br>74 × 60 × 148cm                                   |



Ground floor