

GRONK'S THEATER of PAINT



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**CRAFT &
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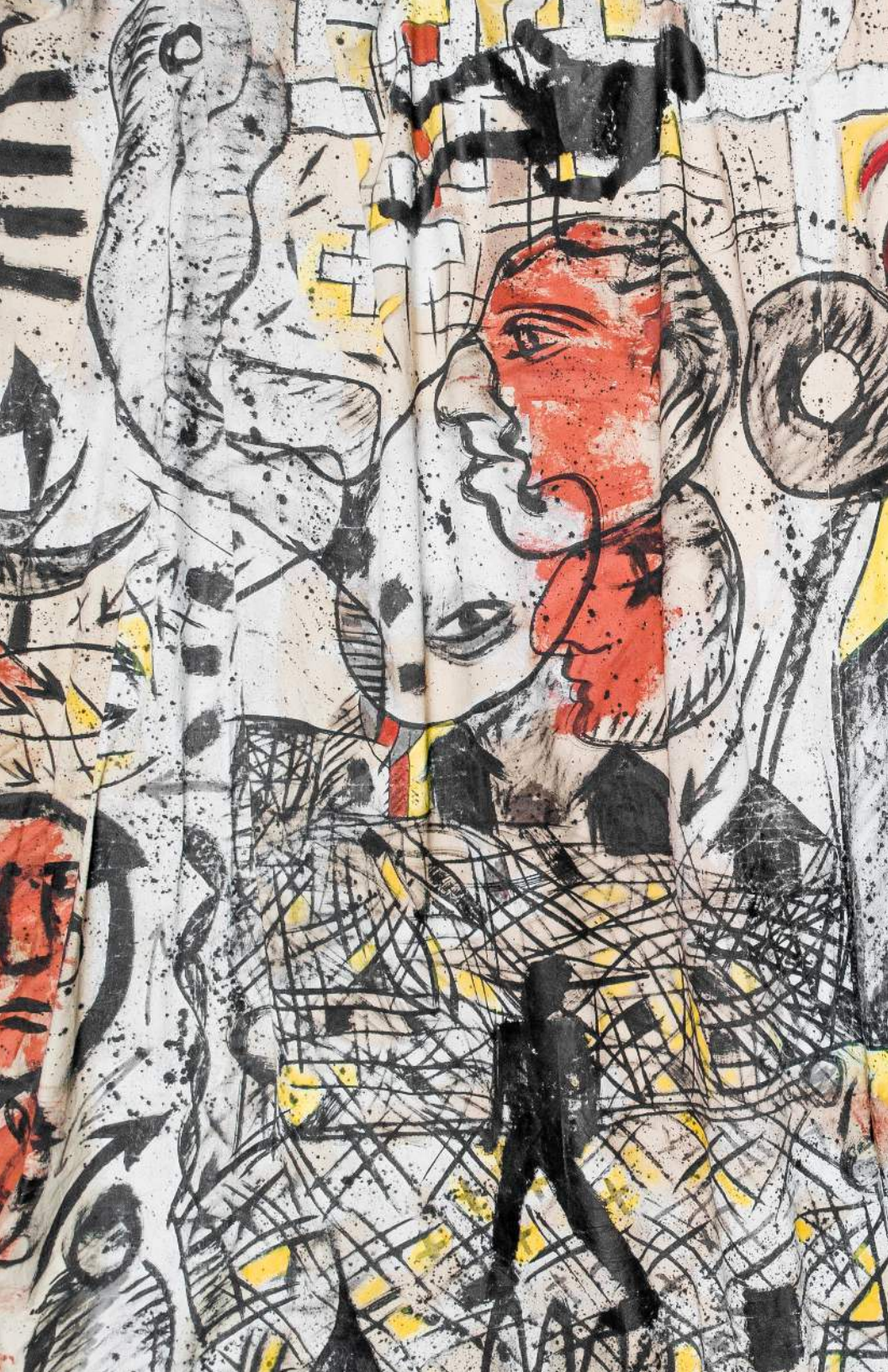
Welcome to *Gronk's Theater of Paint*, an exploration of legendary Los Angeles artist Gronk's extensive work in theatrical design. Though mostly known for his paintings, murals, and prints, set design has been an integral part of Gronk's varied artistic practice. This exhibition tracks his trajectory in set design, starting with his performative collaborations in the 1980s to recent international opera productions. Gronk's theater sets are an extension of his overall body of work, which layers references to film, literature, philosophy, politics, and urban life into a distinct visual language. Gronk interweaves this visually dense abstraction with extensive research about each production, creating sets that embody the emotional landscape of each theatrical production rather than a specific setting.

Gronk is devoted to practice, process, and finding the "divine in the daily." The concepts for his set design and other work develop from his daily drawings. These sketches exercise his conceptual and creative muscles and generate a reservoir of characters, settings, and narratives to draw upon in larger works. In his set designs, Gronk works with a minimal range of materials—staying true to the basic tools he has always used (paint, canvas, cardboard, wood) and priding himself on always coming in under budget. Gronk's approach demonstrates his belief that great things can come from limited means when fueled by invention, skill, and passion.

This exhibition culminates with Gronk's new site-specific installation, where he merges the grandeur of opera with his love for the low-brow aesthetic of B-movies. The basis for *Gronk's Theater of Paint* is an imaginary production inspired by *Tomorrow You'll Be One of Us*, a book of surrealist poetry written by Chuck Rosenthal and Gail Wronsky and illustrated by Gronk. Brought together by a childhood love of sci-fi and horror B-movies, Rosenthal and Wronsky's poems were constructed from the dialogue found in these films. *Gronk's Theater of Paint* is the first time one of his sets has been made physically accessible to the general public. As you enter his theater, Gronk invites you to investigate the space, interact with the props, and make your own meaning. Your performance ultimately completes his production.

I wonder what kind of world we're opening the door on.
I shall go there in one of your bodies.
I merely tell you the future of your planet is at stake.
How can you just stand there as if nothing were wrong.

- excerpt from *Tomorrow You'll Be One of Us*



ACT 1: EARLY WORK

Performance, collaboration, and character development are an innate part of Gronk's varied artistic practice. As a teen, Gronk developed and staged experimental performances with artists Mundo Meza and Cyclona, exploring queer identity and the restrictions of societal norms. Along with Patssi Valdez, Willie F. Herrón III, and Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk was a founding member of ASCO, a multidisciplinary arts collective active from 1972-1987. Influenced by literature, film, fashion, and the social discontent in East Los Angeles, ASCO created provocative performances and happenings that challenged the media's lack of Chicano representation, as well as the perceived parameters of what Chicano art could be. These street theater pieces were largely improvised with members of the group taking on various personas and using the city itself as their set. In the '80s, ASCO expanded beyond its core members to a number of additional collaborators, and the four founding members began producing independent work while still working in the framework of ASCO. Gronk decided to turn his attention to painting. After receiving an Individual Artist Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1981, Gronk began to explore painting as a personal medium, setting the foundation for materials and concepts he would eventually apply to set design.

During this time, Gronk developed his iconic visual motif, *La Tormenta*—a solitary figure in a black dress, her back facing the viewer. *Tormenta* is an amalgam, drawing inspiration from strong women in Gronk's life and fashion icons. Both allegorical and theatric, *Tormenta* subverts the male gaze by turning her back on the world's prevailing power structures. We cannot see *Tormenta*, but only view the world she looks upon. *Tormenta* has manifested throughout Gronk's oeuvre in many forms over the years: late ASCO performances, daily drawings, large-scale paintings, and prints. In 1997, Gronk collaborated with composer Joseph Julián González on *Tormenta Cantata*, a visual and musical performance that included a string quartet, a soprano singer, and Gronk painting live with an amplified paintbrush. As the quartet and soprano performed the musical component, Gronk painted an image of *Tormenta*—the sound of his brushstrokes following the musical score along with the strings and vocals.

Gronk's theatrical set design continually builds upon this earlier work. The theater has provided an arena for Gronk to collaborate in a way that requires him to anticipate and strategize how his sets will interact with lighting, music, and performers. The themes of the productions he has worked on address his longstanding concerns and interests including politics, marginalized communities, literature, and the construction of personal identity. After working on many productions in the '90s, the musical element of these performances emerged as a strong influence on Gronk's style, as his figures and references became even more abstracted and layered, taking on the depth and texture of complex musical arrangements.

ACT 2: TIMELINE OF THEATRICAL SET DESIGN

1989 *Stone Wedding* by Milcha Sanchez-Scott and the Latino Theatre Lab, directed by José Luis Valenzuela. Los Angeles Theatre Center, Los Angeles, CA.

1990 *The Chairman's Wife* by Wakako Yamauchi, directed by Nobu McCarthy. East West Players, Los Angeles, CA.

The Mission by Culture Clash, directed by José Luis Valenzuela. Los Angeles Theatre Center, Los Angeles, CA.

Come Back, Little Sheba by William Inge, directed by Tom Atha. East West Players, Los Angeles, CA.

August 29 by Violeta Calles (pseudonym for the Latino Theatre Lab, whose participants collaborated on the play), directed by José Luis Valenzuela. Los Angeles Theatre Center, Los Angeles, CA.

1991 *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen, directed by Dorothy Lyman. Designed with Steven La Ponsie. East West Players, Los Angeles, California.

Canton Jazz Club by Dom Magwili, music by Nathan Wang and Joel Iwataki, lyrics, choreography, and direction by Tim Dang. East West Players, Los Angeles, CA.

Bowl of Beings by Culture Clash, directed by José Luis Valenzuela. Los Angeles Theatre Center, Los Angeles, CA; Great Performances on PBS, broadcast March 4, 1992.

1993 *La Chunga* by Mario Vargas Llosa, translated by Joanne Potlitzer, adapted by Liana Odalys, directed by Del Zamora and Liana Odalys. Chapel Court Theater, Los Angeles, CA (Drama-Logue Award for Set Design).

The House of Sleeping Beauties by David Henry Hwang, directed by Philip Kan Gotanda. East West Players, Los Angeles, CA.

Carpa Clash by Culture Clash, directed by José Luis Valenzuela. Designed with Edward E. Haynes Jr. Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, CA (Theatre LA Ovation Award Nomination for Best Set Design).

1994 *Los Faustinos* by Bernardo Solano, music by Robert Ceja, directed by Juliette Carrillo. Presented by Cornerstone Theater Company at San Miguel Parish Hall, Watts, CA.

- 1995** *Journey to Córdoba*, music by Lee Holdridge, libretto by Richard Sparks, directed by José Luis Valenzuela. Presented by the Los Angeles Opera at the Luckman Fine Arts Complex, California State University, Los Angeles; Glenn Wallichs Theatre, University of Redlands; Norris Theatre for the Performing Arts, Rolling Hills Estates; La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts, La Mirada; Wadsworth Theatre, UCLA Center for the Arts; and Lobero Theater, Santa Barbara.
- Welcome to the Moon* by John Patrick Shanley, directed by Kathy Scambiaterra. McCadden Theater, Los Angeles, CA.
- 1997** *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* by Cherríe Moraga, music by John Santos. York Theatre, San Francisco, CA.
- 1998** *Los Biombos/The Screens* by Jean Genet, adapted by Gloria Alvarez with Pete Galindo, Lynn Jeffries, and Peter Sellars, directed by Peter Sellars. Presented by Cornerstone Theater Company at the East Los Angeles Skills Center, Los Angeles, CA.
- 1999** *L'Histoire du soldat (Story of a Soldier)* by Igor Stravinsky, adapted by Gloria Alvarez, directed by Peter Sellars. Presented by the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Hansen Dam Amphitheatre, Pacoima; Hollenbeck Park, Los Angeles; and MacArthur Park, Los Angeles. Traveled to Palermo, Italy; Paris, France; Madrid, Spain; Vienna, Austria (1998-2000).
- 2005** *Ainadamar (The Fountain of Tears)*, music by Osvaldo Golijov, libretto by David Henry Hwang, directed by Peter Sellars. The Santa Fe Opera, Santa Fe, NM. Traveled to the Lincoln Center, New York, NY (2006).
- 2011** *Griselda*, music by Antonio Vivaldi, libretto by Apostolo Zeno, adapted by Carlo Goldoni, directed by Peter Sellars. The Santa Fe Opera, Santa Fe, NM.
- 2013** *The Indian Queen*, music by Henry Purcell, libretto by John Dryden, text by Katherine Philips, George Herbert, Rosario Aguilar et al., directed by Peter Sellars. Presented by The Perm Opera and Ballet Theatre, Perm, Russia. Co-produced with Teatro Real, Madrid, Spain (2014) and English National Opera, London, UK (2015).
- 2014** *Se Llama Cristina* by Octavio Solis, directed by Robert Castro. The Theatre @ Boston Court, Pasadena, CA.

ACT 3: PUBLIC PROGRAMS

JUNE

Member Event:

Artist & Curator Talk for *Gronk's Theater of Paint*

Sunday, June 26 | 11:00am | Members-only event

We invite our members to this intimate gallery talk with legendary L.A. artist Gronk and curator Holly Jerger. Space is limited, RSVP required: rsvp@cafam.org

JULY

Tormenta Omnia

Saturday, July 16 | 5:00- 5:30pm (Spanish) & 5:30- 6:00pm (English)

Free with museum admission

Gronk's iconic muse, La Tormenta, comes to life in a bilingual staged theatric performance, written by Froykan Cabuto. The enigmatic female character will be performed by actress Mariana Montes, with original music by Otto Cifuentes and direction by Denise Blasor.

Summer Concert: Theater of Sounds

Friday, July 22 | 6:00 -9:00pm | \$7 General admission

Experience CAFAM's exhibitions in a whole new way. For one night only, musicians from around LA will fill the museum's galleries with an experimental mix of music and sounds, concluding with a special performance and dance party in *Gronk's Theater of Paint*.

Chuck Rosenthal & Gail Wronsky

People of Earth This is Your Last Warning

Sunday, July 24 | 3:00pm | Free with museum admission

Authors Chuck Rosenthal and Gail Wronsky present *People of Earth This is Your Last Warning*, a new performance and reading adaptation of their book, *Tomorrow You'll be One of Us*, which inspired Gronk's site specific theater. Space is limited, RSVP required: rsvp@cafam.org

AUGUST

CraftNight

Disguise & Performance: A Mask Making Workshop with Gronk

Thursday, August 4 | 7:00–9:00pm | Museum courtyard

Galleries open 6:30pm–9:30pm | Project demonstrations at 7:00pm & 7:30pm

\$8 / free for members (includes materials, drinks, and snacks)

Spend the evening with Gronk as he leads a hands-on mask making workshop utilizing the materials and approaches he uses in set design. Invent a new persona, and activate *Gronk's Theater of Paint* with your mask creations!

Space is limited, RSVP requested: cafamaugust2016.eventbrite.com

Peter Sellars & Gronk

Saturday, August 6 | 1:00pm | Free with museum admission

Visionary theater director Peter Sellars will join Gronk for a conversation about their multiple theatrical collaborations, favorite moments in opera, and how their varied artistic influences meld in each production.

Space is limited, RSVP required: rsvp@cafam.org

Keep Your Shirt on While I Put on My Pants

Gallery Talk with Marisela Norte & Gronk

Sunday, August 21 | 6:30pm | Free with museum admission

L.A. based writer Marisela Norte will join longtime friend Gronk for a conversation about their shared Los Angeles history and the influence of B-movies on their lives and work. Space is limited, RSVP required: rsvp@cafam.org

After It Happened

A Community Set Design Workshop with Invertigo Dance Theatre

Saturday, August 27 | 12:00–4:00pm | \$40 / \$30 Members

Join John Burton, Invertigo Dance Theatre set designer, in the creation of collaborative set pieces utilizing re-purposed materials. The set pieces will be utilized in Invertigo's upcoming production, *After It Happened*, presented at the Ford Amphitheatre this September. All participants will be credited and offered discounted tickets to the production. Advanced registration required, email: workshops@cafam.org

Storytelling Through Movement

Invertigo Movement and Dance Workshop

Sunday, August 28 | 1:30–3:30pm | No prior dance experience necessary | Free

Invertigo Dance Theatre company members and teaching artists will lead an all-ages and all-abilities workshop about using movement to tell a story; creating a unique one-time dance installation within the exhibition space. Space is limited, RSVP required: rsvp@cafam.org



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gronk is the moniker of artist Glugio Nicandro (born 1957 in East Los Angeles, California). Along with a vast and never-ending self-education, he studied visual art at East Los Angeles College and California State University, Los Angeles in the 1970s. Gronk is an enduring and influential figure in the Los Angeles and international art scenes—maintaining an active studio in downtown Los Angeles that functions as his live-work space and an epicenter for other artists and community members. Along with a core group of artists, Gronk helped establish Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in 1978. In 1993, a traveling retrospective of his work, *¡Gronk!: A Living Survey, 1973-1993*, was organized by the Mexican Museum in San Francisco and traveled to several institutions including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Gronk exhibited at LACMA again in 2011 for the exhibition *ASCO: Elite of the Obscure*. Gronk's work is represented in numerous private and museum collections across the country, including the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles. *Gronk's Theater of Paint* marks the artist's first solo museum exhibition in Los Angeles in more than two decades.

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