



IN THE STUDIO
González lives
and works in
Mexico City.



ON THE MONEY
González used
devalued currency
from around the
world to construct
his 3-D mural,
*¿Dónde Se Han ido
las Flores?*
(detail pictured).

A Modern Artisan

Máximo González is one of eight Latin-American artists showing at MOCA's new exhibit, "Poetics of the Handmade"

FOR THE ARGENTINE ARTIST MÁXIMO GONZÁLEZ, Mexico has been a land of opportunity. Prior to relocating there four years ago, he had exhibited only in his homeland. But in Mexico, he made key art world contacts and began showing work. And it certainly helped that he was geographically closer to the hugely influential U.S. market. He has since exhibited here and in Spain, Canada, and England.

González has created an original piece for "Poetics of the Handmade," an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art that features works by eight Latin-American artists. Alma Ruiz, the show's curator, says the unifying theme is how the artists transform industrially fabricated items such as aluminum foil, lipstick, and Q-tips into works of art through labor-intensive processes. The show is not about arts and crafts, but about artists

forgoing technology and assistants to make work with their own hands.

The exhibit was an opportunity for González to build upon his frequent theme of economic hardship. His family struggled to put food on the table long before Argentina's 2001 financial crisis, and he has transformed that challenge into art. Encased in crystal pegs and embedded in the walls of his Mexico City apartment are grains of rice with the words "tengo hambre" (I am hungry) written on them. González describes his works as having "a restlessness, because the piece is there, and it's beautiful, but inside it is hungry."

Nowadays, González, 36, works mainly with devalued currency—not hard to find in Latin America—using bills to create 3-D murals of stunning intricacy. For his piece at MOCA, *¿Dónde Se Han Ido las Flores?* (Where Have All the Flowers Gone?), he turned about 5,000 objects into a mural that is more than 130 feet in length. "I only translate what I see into my work," says González, "whether it's poverty and hunger, political oppression, or religion, and then I cover it in beauty."—FRANCISCA ORTEGA

"Poetics of the Handmade" continues through Aug. 23 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 250 S. Grand Ave., Downtown L.A., 213-626-6222, www.moca.org.