



## **CANNED LAUGHTER – YOSHUA OKÓN**

**DECEMBER 2008**

My project is the creation of a canned laughter maquiladora in Mexico, which includes the creation of a fictional corporation that hires hundreds of people in order to produce canned laughter for sitcoms, as well as the subsequent production of a multimedia installation based on it. .

I will rent a section of one of the many empty shells of the ex-assembly plants in Ciudad Juarez, and, for a short period, transform it into a canned laughter maquiladora. A group of people from the area will be then hired to come in for eight-hour shifts during three consecutive days in order to laugh in an orchestrated manner and "assemble" our "product". The space will be arranged in the same fashion as assembly plants are generally done including detailed elements related to the specifics of what is being assembled as well as custom made uniforms for the "workers".

The resulting installation will include videos shot during the recording and assembly sessions, furniture and props from the "set design" of the maquiladora and the resulting packaged "products" from the factory which will take the form of metal cans with labels referring to the specific laughter they contain. These cans will also be hooked to headphones through which the audience will be able to listen to the recording contained in the cans. I will determine and orchestrate 4-6 variants, for example: hysterical laughter, nervous laughter, evil laughter, sexy laughter, scary laughter, manly laughter...etc.

It is important to mention that this project will be executed in a way that it is believable enough so that it won't be completely clear for the viewer whether the canned laughter maquiladora actually exists (even though canned laughter is produced using computers, not people).

The piece stems from my interest in the inexplicability of humor and its subtleties, and this project also has to do with the impossibility of translating "true" emotion and reproducing it through technological means. I am interested in translating laughter in particular because I very much see it as a "social gesture" which also relates to my broader artistic process. As Henri Bergson explains, "[...] Laughter, then, does not belong to the province of esthetics alone, since unconsciously (and even immorally in many particular instances) it pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement. And yet there is something esthetic about it, since the comic comes into being just when society and the individual, freed from the worry of self-preservation, begin to regard themselves as works of art."

Yoshua Okón





