

ARTFORUM



LOS ANGELES

Rubén Ortiz Torres

ROYALE PROJECTS | LOS ANGELES

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Rubén Ortiz Torres's new work responds to the "glitter revolution" that erupted in Mexico City last August when demonstrators glitter-bombed the city's security minister in outrage over policemen's rape of a teenage girl. Subsequent uprisings throughout Mexico protested officials' complicity in rampant misogynistic brutality. This exhibition's title, "*Plata o plomo o glitter*," adverts to Colombian capo Pablo Escobar's notorious catchphrase, *Plata o plomo* ("Silver or lead"), meaning, Accept the bribe or be assassinated. Inserting the sparkly medium into this macho equation, Ortiz Torres wryly mirrors women's self-assertion within a rigged system.

The protesters' weapon is physically harmless but ideologically subversive; glitter is associated with festivity, frivolity, beauty—the antitheses of policemen's irreversible savagery. These twinkling showers mock officials' pretensions of upholding law and order. Here, in paintings such as *Witness Protection Program* (all works 2020), Ortiz Torres encrusts car body panels from junked Tijuana police vehicles with silver leaf, splatters of lead, and glittery paint. (The rape that set off the revolution allegedly took place in a patrol car.) The broken-down doors and hoods are clearly disengaged from their ostensible purpose, like the policemen themselves; the artist's embellishments counterpoint the violence indexed by preexisting dents and bullet holes. One charred, partially melted auto hood (*Burnt*) drives home the horror.

More traditional canvases evoke magisterial veneers of respectability and concern. In *Y la culpa no era mía*, starlike badges inhabit a shimmering expanse whose predominant blue recalls the hue of Blue Lives Matter, a militant anti-Black Lives Matter movement that paints US police officers as victims rather than aggressors. The painting's title, which the artist translates as "It's not my fault," is a protest chant directed at authorities who blame injured parties instead of taking responsibility. The glitter revolution is a Mexican movement, but the malfeasance that sparked it knows no borders.

— *Annabel Osberg*