

Five Highlights from Mexico City's Material Art Fair

by **Bryan Rindfuss** | February 12, 2024

Formed collectively by a group of independent, artist-run galleries, FERIA Material has been delivering a solid alternative to the Zona Maco art fair since 2014. Under the direction of co-founders Brett W. Schultz and Isa Natalia Castilla and programming director Marcos Ruiz, Material is currently celebrating a milestone 10th anniversary with a fair uniting 73 galleries from 18 countries. While Material's disruptive, indie spirit is still firmly intact, the fair has clearly expanded and evolved over time, adding components such as Proyectos — a program that provides practical training and exhibition space to organizations and collectives — and securing commercial endorsements such as this year's Range Rover Lounge in collaboration with the boutique hotel Condesa DF. Although not technically under the Material umbrella, the “nomadic platform” Unique Design X Group took over a full floor of Material's host venue with booths dedicated to “functional art and collectible design.” After perusing two packed levels of galleries, here are five of the best projects at this year's Material, which ran from February 8-11 at Expo Reforma.



Gaku Tsutaja's "Onitaiji" at Ulterior Gallery

Gaku Tsutaja at Ulterior Gallery (New York)

Commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller in 1933 only to be destroyed that same year as anti-capitalist propaganda, Diego Rivera's ill-fated mural *Man at the Crossroads* forms the basis for Japanese artist Gaku Tsutaja's epic painting *Onitaiji: Fall*. Originally devised as a triptych and later recreated as *Man Controller of the Universe* for Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes, where it can still be seen today, Rivera's mural flanks a central machine worker with opposing forces of capitalism and communism. Presented as three

unstretched canvases, Tsutaja's *Onitaiji* triptych replaces the central figure with a four-armed reptilian nurse brandishing a syringe as a beaked, purple figure with a gaping hole in its head awaits an operation. In the surrounding visual chaos are mutated birds, downtrodden figures engaged in thankless labor, and even Kermit the Frog hanging to a rafter for dear life. While *Onitaiji* can be appreciated as a surrealistic, nightmarish tableau, its subject matter keeps with one of Tsutaja's key artistic goals: "shedding light on the invisible and suppressed histories and memories of the nuclear age."

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