

Javier Téllez – Oedipus Marshal

Opening on **Wednesday**, March 7, 2007 at 7.00 p.m., the artist will be present.
Exhibition: March 8 through April 5, 2007

The Venezuelan artist Javier Téllez (*1969) got known to a wider public through his participations in group shows like *Loop – alles auf Anfang* in the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung 2001 in Munich, *Emotions Eins* 2004 in the Frankfurter Kunstverein and – internationally – in biennials in Sao Paolo (1998), Gwangju, Korea (2000), Lima (2002), Valencia (2003), Venice (2001 and 2003), and Sidney (2004) as well as in the large exhibition *La Sindrome di Pantagrue*, which was shown in 2005 in the Castello di Rivoli close to Torino. We are proud to show for the first time in Europe his newest film *Oedipus Marshal*, produced by the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado, together with photographs of its protagonists.

Like in earlier projects Téllez worked in his 30-minute video *Oedipus Marshal*, which has been produced in 2006 in a ghost-town in Colorado with patients of a psychiatric hospital. Téllez situates the story of the classic theater play *Oedipus Rex* by Sophokles in a society, which was as archaic as the society of the ancient Thebes. He uses costumes from western movies and he changes King Laios and King Oedipus into the former and the new marshal of the western town Thebes.

While Téllez in his last films and performances (like *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 2005, and *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc [Rozelle Hospital]*, 2004) asked mentally ill people for commentaries regarding a set film or lets them perform an event that follows his rough outlines, in *Oedipus Marshal* the people are used as true actors. It should be stressed that not only the patients perform the play but that the hero of the play is becoming more or less insane when he blinds himself. The actors, like it is common in classical tragedies, wear masks (which in this case come from Japan). They recite their texts without pronouncing them very well and they move a little clumsy, as if they were performing on a stage and not in the spectacular landscape of Colorado. In addition to that, Téllez worked on the dialogues to fit them into the well-known patterns of western movies. E.g., Oedipus answers to the sphinx' question who he is: "I am just a head under a hat"; and he himself asks Jokaste, "if there is a name to put to this face", as if he was a Cowboy who arrived in Thebes after a long horse-ride across the planes. Téllez accompanies the tragedy with a film score and sounds that transgress the boundaries of the scores of the classical western movie and what one could take for ancient Greek music. Notwithstanding all deviations of the form of the western from the late 19th century, the dominant impression remains that the transfer between the ancient tragedy and the, nowadays classical, western is totally plausible. This is the fact because of the masks and the stoicism of the actors, who move their bodies and gesture only in a very reduced way, probably because they are handicapped by their medical condition and their medication. Thereby Téllez brings together different elements, which do not belong together in the beginning. He enables his actors, whom we get to know during the credits and in the exhibition with 8 photographic diptychs – each actor is portrayed frontally with and without mask – to perform. And he gives the viewer a fascinating new perspective on the theater play that is still shocking in its inevitability of the catastrophe. We can reflect not only the elements of the Greek tragedy, but also the problem of the mental state of the actors and their disabilities which is not detectable without knowing where they come from, and – finally – the definition of abnormality in our societies. If patients of a hospital for mentally ill people perform a theater play and transgress their own being, then the "normal" viewer can be as well an actor and/or a patient.

For more information, photographic material and/or the wish to interview the artist please contact the gallery.