



COVER + ABOVE:  
 ROMEO GONGORA, *Fort-Da (Ooo, Aaa)*, from the series  
*Logiques de l'arrachement 2005*, colour video projection,  
 stereo sound, 03:14 min., loop, 320 x 240 cm.



**Romeo Gongora** is a video artist who lives in Montréal. He received a Masters degree in Visual and Media Arts in 2005 at the University of Québec in Montréal. His videos explore the junction of photographic and videographic languages through lyrical settings. In 2006, Gongora's work was presented at Centre d'art contemporain OPTICA (Montréal) and at Centre de diffusion et de production de la photographie VU (Québec City). Recently, he has invited to work at Centro de la Imagen (Mexico City) and at Centre Culturel de Rencontre de Neumünster (Luxembourg). In 2007, he will exhibit at Centre de photographies actuelles DAZIBAO (Montréal) and will be resident artist at the Rijksakademie (Amsterdam).

**Stephanie Rogerson** is an independent writer and curator, and the Exhibition Coordinator for Gallery 44.

**Gallery 44** Centre for Contemporary Photography is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to the advancement of photographic art. The centre is supported by its members and patrons, The Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council. Registered Charity # 11924 7310 RR0001

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**Gallery Hours**

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# Romeo Gongora

## Recovery



**November 4 to December 2 2006**

OPENING RECEPTION  
 Saturday November 11 | 2 to 5 pm



# Recovery

## – Romeo Gongora

by Stephanie Rogerson

Romeo Gongora's exhibition *Recovery* at Gallery 44 includes video works entitled *Fort Da (Ooo, Aaa)* and *Fratrie*. His meditative and thought provoking work deals with issues such as immigration, forging individuality and psychoanalysis. Gongora's work requires audiences to take time to absorb its subtle tensions. The subjects he explores are not autobiographical, however neither are they fictitious. Gongora possesses a unique skill in connecting the act of extrapolation and perception with personal subjectivity.

### **Fort-Da (Ooo, Aaa) From the series Logiques de l'arrachement**

Fort / Da is a German expression based on Sigmund Freud's Ooo, Da experiment. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud relates the story of a game his grandson invented. One of the child's toys was a wooden reel attached to string. When he threw the object away he would say "o-o-o-o," when he pulled the reel back toward himself, the child would say "da." With the game repeated over and over, Freud and the boy's mother understood him to be saying "Fort" and "Da" (German for gone and there).

The Fort / Da game was the child's invention of linguistic symbolism. The theory of disappearance and return or *gone* and *there* is used in Gongora's video to imbue the symbolic transition of teenage angst to adulthood. *Fort-Da (Ooo, Aaa)* is a spirited piece that is as playful as it is arresting. Mother and daughter face each other; the mother is dowdy and somewhat stern in dark clothes, while the girl is slender and clad in what appears to be a prom dress. In the room surrounding the subjects are items associated with school-girl youth: stuffed animals, curios and perhaps the most valued possession of a young girl, a mirror. The mirror relates not only to the narcissism associated with youth but also to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's critical reinterpretation of the work of Freud. Lacan proposes that infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror, or represented to the infant through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of self or the individual. The struggle for individuality is the crux of Gongora's *Fort-Da (Ooo, Aaa)*.

The silence of the subjects is interrupted by the Buster Keaton-like



ROMEO GONGORA, *Fratrie*, from the series *Les Lois L'indifférence* 2003-2004, colour video projection, diptych quadraphonic sound 03:14 min., loop, 640 x 240 cm.

destruction of the room. Objects on strings break, fly apart and return to their original positions in an almost comedic way, yet the hostility between mother and daughter is palpable. The daughter's unrepented hate for her mother becomes clear as she raises her hand and slaps her. The gesture signals not only what Gongora calls the "transgression of the maternal yoke" but also suggests matricide. While *Fort-Da (Ooo, Aaa)* is stylized and almost kitschy, the actions and conflict in this piece leaves viewers tremendously uncomfortable.

Gongora's exploration of Freud's Fort / Da theory is understated. The psychological developments Freud sought to understand were based primarily on sounds and words as symbols that emerge into language. Gongora represents this initiatory rite through the subjects' gestures and stony silence, and the room's destruction and renewal. Rites of passage are common practice as a bridge between adolescence and adulthood, and for the young girl in this video it is no coincidence that she is 15 years old, an important age in Latin culture called Quinceañera — a developmental symbol of endings and rebirth.

### **Meme and Mary diptych entitled Fratrie, part of the series Les Lois L'indifférence**

Romeo Gongora heavily constructs his videos. *Fratrie* is a photomontage of still images and video with the subjects superimposed in the frame. Gongora calls this "the interbreeding of photography and video," whereby he seeks "to establish a dialogue between the fixity of photography and the movement of video." Layer upon layer of digital photographs and video have been meticulously melded. The result is a psychological trick where the action seems continuous and without a centred focal point.

As we watch the slow, thoughtful movements of Meme and Mary, the quiescence of *Fratrie* is alluringly deceptive. Meme and Mary are brother and sister, and we are witnesses to their changed relationship. Where there was once harmony and intimacy, we find the subjects at a crossroads and disconnected.

It is not incidental that Gongora's subjects are of Latin American descent. Notwithstanding his own Guatemalan heritage, Gongora explores the ideas of immigration with a kind of distance much like a spectator. The process of immigration and assimilation has radically altered Meme and Mary's bond. While Gongora does not directly feed us that information, as we watch Meme and Mary stretch and bend toward each other, it becomes clear that the desire for closeness is impeded. The conflict we watch becomes a socio/political issue caused by the complexity and instability of the immigration experience. We watch their slight movements create an ebb and flow of tension, leaving us powerless to assist or mend their ache.

*Recovery* examines change and loss through an arcane lens that simultaneously presents a current moment threaded with hindsight. The notion of recovery speaks to the possibility of regaining agency over oneself after a disaster. In the case of Gongora's videos each subject attempts (in their own way) to grasp at self-possession, in essence these are acts of hope. Gongora's fascination with obscured time and identity are hauntingly familiar. His strategies feel reminiscent of French New Wave cinema where Zen-like momentum is fused with politics to expound on the human condition.