

Rubén Ortiz-Torres

Power Tools (Herramientas)

1999

Tool #1: customized leaf-blower machine with electric motor and car battery (by Cody Sanchez) and chromed low-rider bicycle club plaque, displayed on mirror and Astroturf pedestal, on a carpet of Astroturf ringed with cedar chips

Tool #2: customized leaf-blower machine with 24-karat gold-plated engine, velvet, and metal-flake candy apple paint, displayed on mirror and Astroturf pedestal, on a carpet of Astroturf

Banner: synthetic fabric banner

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Modern and Contemporary Art Council, 2000 Art Here and Now Purchase

A quintessential Los Angeles story informs Rubén Ortiz-Torres's *Power Tools (Herramientas)* sculptures which are aesthetically influenced by lowrider car and bike customizing. A 1996 citywide ban on gasoline-powered leaf blowers was instituted due to claims that residents' quality of life was being destroyed by the blowers' noise and fumes. Gardeners and landscapers could be fined or even go to jail for using them. The ban threatened their livelihood. This conflict had both racial and class undertones, and resulted in the gardeners' protesting and organizing. The unlikely savior in this story was an auto mechanic named Gody Sanchez, who designed a quiet, environmentally friendly electric-powered leaf blower.

In his work, Ortiz-Torres displays a pair of contrasting blowers: one of Sanchez's electric models, alongside a gasoline-powered blower that Ortiz-Torres customized with candy apple red metal-flake paint, a 24-karat-gold-plated engine, and a low-rider club plate that reads "Power Tools." One blower *looks* good, the other one *does* good.

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