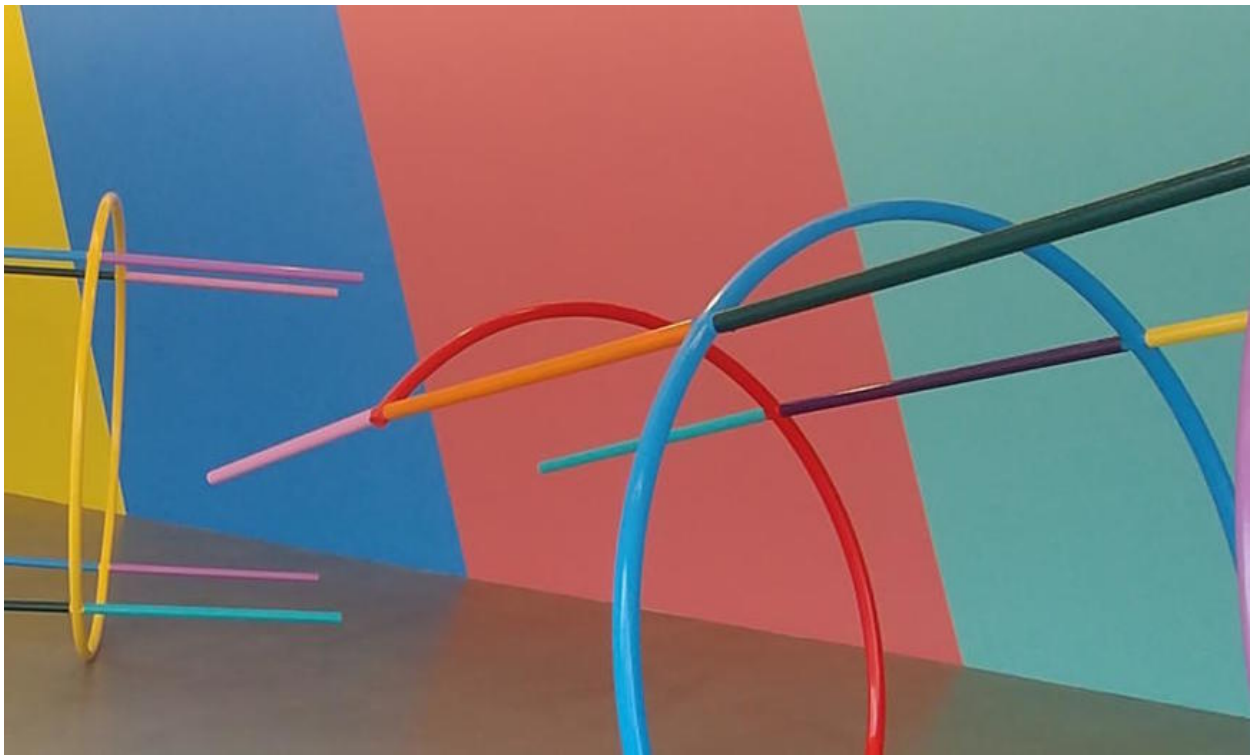


**Teacher's Guide: for two solo exhibitions, Przemek Pyszczyk: *Białystok* and Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa: *Shit-Baby and The Crumpled Giraffe***  
**Dates: March 31 – June 10, 2018**

For our 2018 Spring Education Program, Plug In ICA is offering a combined tour of two exhibitions: *Przemek Pyszczyk: Białystok* and *Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa: Shit-Baby and The Crumpled Giraffe*. The guided tour will be complimented by a workshop with local artist Hannah Doucet on the concept of play as radical practice. The combined tour and workshop gives students direct experience of how personal narrative and political strife can manifest as art in unexpected and sometimes surprising ways; the expression and exploration of memory; the role of psychological experience or states of mind and perception; as well as formal considerations such as how scale, color and placement affects experience. Students will be encouraged to think about what the term diaspora means in a context where both artists have complex relationships with immigration and migration.

The tour will introduce students to Plug In ICA's history and then discuss the individual exhibitions, accompanied by the workshop. The tour and workshop can vary in length to suit your schedules but is designed to last approximately two hours.



Przemek Pyszczyk: *Białystok*, 2018. Installation view. Photo: Karen Asher

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### i. Learning Objectives:

#### In general students will:

1. Read and interpret visual materials—connecting art to diverse contexts and developing ways to speak about, and think through contemporary art.
2. Communicate their ideas, experiences and feelings—developing critical reflection and thinking skills.

#### Specific to the current exhibitions, students will:

3. Through the themes presented in the exhibitions students will think about embodiment in both Ramírez-Figueroa's and Pyszczyk's installations, reflecting on socially formed understanding of how bodies should 'behave' or function publicly. *Białystok* highlights questions about architecture and the built environment. Here color is a sign of political change, and the sculptural forms highlight the ways forms are built for or against particular bodies. With the work of Ramírez-Figueroa, students will reflect on the body as a system and social conditioning that emphasizes bodily control.
4. Students will reflect on the ways complex histories and ideas (Guatemalan Civil War or the end of communism in Poland) can be distilled into artistic forms of sculpture, theatre, etc., reflecting on personal and national experiences.
5. As part of the workshop participants will be encouraged to engage in 'free play.' Using a toolkit created by artist Albert Potrony and Serpentine gallery in London UK, local artist and Art City facilitator, Hannah Doucet will guide the group in a play session that aims to center their creativity, and give control over their creative impulses. The workshop will be held offsite at Studio 393, which is located very nearby.

### Assessment:

The teacher will decide on the appropriate assessment of this activity and communicate it to the class.

Suggested assessments:

a) ask students to explain the themes of each exhibition and how the artists explored those themes – what materials did they use? How did they link those materials to their ideas?

b) Discuss personal experiences with the work. How did the students relate or not relate to the ideas presented. Topics can include: displacement or multiple identities/nationalities; how memory changes experience of things and places; social 'taboos' around the body.

c) In relation to Pyszczyk's exhibition, name the historical context he is responding to. Discuss personal experiences with immigration and/ or ideas about what it means to be "Canadian."

d) What links can they draw links between the two exhibitions? Name two.

### **Curriculum connections:**

#### **Grade 9-12 Visual Arts**

- The workshop will work with basic materials, emphasizing experimentation and introduce new ways of relating to play as an essential part of learning.
- Students will reflect on their personal histories, and think about how a lot of art can be created from one concept, experience, or observation (such as the use of color in architecture post the fall of the Iron Curtain in Poland, or to illicit childhood memories).
- Students will be given the opportunity to think about how art can be used as an outlet for expressing complex experiences such as immigration, war, and memory.

#### **Grade 9-12 English Language Arts**

- Students can think creatively about the role of 'theatre' in Ramírez-Figueroa's sculpture and video works. Who are the cast of 'characters'? How would they animate them? What is the simple structure used by the artist in the video to create a situation for the participants to engage with?
- Thinking through the context that each of the artists are responding to, students can reflect on the role of 'narrative' in understanding the works.
- Community will be built by introducing students to a local cultural organization.

### **ii. Context of Exhibitions**

Two solo exhibitions by internationally acclaimed artists Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa (Guatemala and Canada), and Przemek Pyszczyk (Poland / Winnipeg). This marks Pyszczyk's first major solo exhibition in Canada and Ramírez-Figueroa's first exhibition in Winnipeg. Both artists transformed one of Plug In ICA's galleries using sculptural installation.

### **iv. Framework for Gallery Visit:**

Classroom preparation (before coming to Plug In ICA):

- As a class go over a selection of the provided resources.
- Answer the worksheet questions individually or as a group.

- In smaller groups discuss some of the themes you think will be important in the exhibition. Discuss your expectations and thoughts on what the exhibition and gallery will look and feel like.

#### **Activity (at Plug In ICA and Studio 393):**

- Participate in a tour of Przemek Pyszczek *Białystok*, and Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's *Shit Baby and the Crumpled Giraffe* guided by gallery staff. This may include an optional tour of Plug In ICA facilities; including the office, permanent collection of artwork, and rooftop terrace (weather permitting).
- Communicate ideas, experiences and feelings in a question and answer period
- Hannah Doucet, workshop facilitator will talk about the themes of the exhibition in the context of her work as youth art facilitator at Art City, and the themes of play and childhood in the exhibition.

#### **Optional activities (after coming to Plug In ICA):**

- Try writing a story for the 'characters' in Ramírez-Figueroa's installation. What roles would each of them take? What actions would they engage in?
- Thinking about the place of scale in Pyszczek's installation: have students reflect on something from their childhood that they can no longer do as an adult, try to imagine what it would be like at adult scale, what would that look like? Have them make sketches or maquette's and reflect on the effect of scale.
- Thinking about Ramírez-Figueroa's video, *Illusions of Matter*, 2015 Write a 'script' for a performance with your friends. What kind of situation would you set up? What role would you have?

#### **v. Background information:**

##### **Curatorial Overview:**

##### **Przemek Pyszczek: *Białystok***

gallery 1: Richardson Foundation Gallery & breezeway  
April 14 – June 04, 2017

Colourful hues of hand brushed steel-poles create two centralized geometric forms in *Białystok* - Przemek Pyszczek's first solo exhibition in Canada and in his home town of Winnipeg. Heavily influenced by the architectural and civic structures from his birth place *Białystok* in Poland, Pyszczek builds a colourful, expansive and fractured sculpture that simultaneously captures a conformity and resistance to public housing infra-structures in Communist Poland, which turned from grey to an explosion of colour with the fall of the Iron Curtain.

As a form of claiming public space after the communist state collapsed, colour marked a transition from a monochromatic social state to an individualist multi-colored sprawl. The well-

known Polish literary writer Andrzej Stasiuk wrote in the cultural journal *Tygodnik Powszechny* that: "Under communism the basic building material was greyness. That's what we all remember. Even those of us who have forgotten everything else. Communism was grey – this truism has poisoned our minds. And so, after our heroic liberation, our first reaction was to rush to a paint shop. And that's what my country looks like now: as if a monkey had played around with a paintbrush."i Pyszczyk's palette is compiled from these colourful reprisals of civic space in reference to the residential concrete blocks that were and still are painted in an array of pastel hues, which the writer Martha Kirszenbaum, when discussing Pyszczyk's work, refers to as 'koloroblok' and situates within the working class.ii

The city's colour palette works as a cue for Pyszczyk, and an accent that draws the artist's attention to the architectural details of these working class neighbourhoods. The defining elements and structure of his sculptures draws from the architectural details of these colour blocks. The latticework that forms hand railings, the flourishes of pattern in balcony balustrades, the graphic patterning of fencing, the decorative embellishments of rod iron window and door security. These functionally ornamental frames are dividers often delineating the space between public and private. Pyszczyk uses these barriers as references in his work, which often and otherwise appear to be isolated abstracted objects. The artist most commonly uses steel rods in his work, which he shapes, lacquers, assembles into objects. The compositions come first and then colour is applied. In this new work for Plug In ICA, this material process is reflective of the artist's own encounter with his birthplace *Białystok*, as a measuring of his time and an articulation of larger political history.

The exhibition title is itself nostalgic in alluding to the artist's origin — his childhood before his family immigrated to Winnipeg, Canada and before his first visit back to Poland after the collapse of communism. This reference to his childhood is mediated and doubled in the formal construction of this exhibition, which is an allusion to and amalgamation of vintage playground jungle gyms. The forms in this new work like in much of Pyszczyk's production are rigid yet bent, straight yet circular, unified yet divided, heavy yet airy. They are oddly familiar — ubiquitous in that their form and colour inhabit and elicit common architectural frames of reference.

In this work, *Białystok*, Pyszczyk prompts so many childhood memories. Playgrounds with monkey bars were a standard across so many mid 20th century European and North American parks. Built in metal for physical recreation – structures for unstructured play. These playground forms did not prompt organized game play beyond climbing and swinging from bar to bar. Their structure rigid, patterned and systematic but action on them unordered, free form and chaotic. In Pyszczyk's frame of reference these playground forms become a reflection of a liberated civic movement within the confines of a past regime's civic order through housing. These residential blocks are no longer being built, but they still continue to shape the cities around them.

These playground forms are relegated to the past. It is now rare to find colourful jungle gyms made of lacquered metal. A combination of wood, rope, metal and plastic are more the norm for these play structures which now have defined routes and at times offer more representational play with added steering wheels, or games of Tic-Tac-Toe. In *Białystok* the structure is a mere reference point. It is unusable, broken in two, toppled on the ground as it lies on its side. This diptych looks like a fallen tower and relic of the past – maybe a reminder of a toppled regime. The artwork is multi-coloured, reminiscent of monkey bars covered in the palette of Stasiuk's painting monkey. The sculpture is framed by multi-coloured walls painted in

simple abstract patterns that imply the building facades of his birth place. This new work is divided in two, fragmented like the childhood memories it might provoke: a toggling between two hometowns one that lingers more in the imaginary (Pyszczeek left *Białystok* when he was two) and another that is the tangible ground Białystok sits on.

**Przemek Pyszczeek** is a Polish born, Winnipeg raised artist. After living in Berlin for the last eight years, he has relocated to rural Poland to continue his artistic research. Through architecturally inspired sculptures, installations and paintings Pyszczeek's work traces Poland's transition since the fall of the iron curtain and also serves as an ongoing journey to rediscover his own past. He obtained his Bachelor of Environmental Design from the University of Manitoba in 2007. Pyszczeek's work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, most recently presenting a solo exhibition at Galerie Derouillon, Paris. His work has been included in *Forever Never Comes*, Museo Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma, Grosseto, Italy; *1989 Belenius*, Stockholm; *Sandomir*, Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles; *Industrius*, Window Gallery, Winnipeg; *Building Systems*, Berthold Pott, Cologne; and *Corporalitas*, Open Forum, Berlin.

curated by Jenifer Pappararo

i Andrzej Stasiuk, "A jednak lubię brzydotę mojego kraju..." *Tygodnik Powszechny* (April 01, 2013).

ii Martha Kirszenbaum, *Przemek Pyszczeek*, October 2017. [www.galeriederouillon.com/PAST/Przemek-Pyszczeek](http://www.galeriederouillon.com/PAST/Przemek-Pyszczeek)

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### **Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa: *Shit-Baby and The Crumpled Giraffe***

Gallery 1: Jennifer Blumenthal and Daniel Bubis

April 14 – June 04, 2017

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa has been quoted as saying "At the end of the day, I am just making images."i This generalized statement when isolated within the context of Ramírez-Figueroa's performance and sculptural work alludes to both the artist's intent and a process of making. Each action carried out or object made by the artist contributes to a larger picture or series of scenes that have personal and political referential points often alluding to the over 30 year civil war in his home country of Guatemala addressing the violence and unrest of a country that had his family flee to Mexico and then Canada.

This history is embedded into much of Ramírez-Figueroa's production of images through an amalgamation of scripted actions and sculptural forms that often uses costuming to frame the body and prop-like objects to set it in motion. His recent work, *El corazón del espantapájaros (Heart of the Scarecrow)* (2015) is constructed around five characters from an oligarch to a religious leader or more common soldier pulled from a 1960s play by Guatemalan playwright Hugo Carrillo, for which Ramírez-Figueroa makes costumes, masks and props. He presents these theatrical devices in a cluster hanging in a circular formation waiting to be animated by actors in staged performances based on rewritten scripts of the original play. Ramírez-Figueroa's work often references the history of experimental theatre in Guatemala known for

its social critic and a blend of realistic elements intertwined with the magical, absurd and grotesque, and further combined with a poetic use of myth and folklore.ii

In the performance video *Illusion of Matter* (2015), which plays on a loop in Plug In's breezeway, Ramírez-Figueroa cast himself in a central role, reminiscent of any one of Carrillo's cast of characters. Ramírez-Figueroa often performs in his work, using his body as an object but also as a director who establishes action. In this performance video, the artist holds a white foam skeleton-like figure in front of him while he walks down a colourful corridor of yellows and oranges from which white oblong objects poke through. Once out of the picture frame, the artist gives direction to those holding the white objects to switch props and come out from behind the scenes waving their new objects, which have animal-like qualities, and seem to have their internal organs exposed. The viewer now sees that children have been puppeteering these objects - to whom the artist utters, "destroy" which the children do so using their props and hands to pull down the set.

*Illusion of Matter* seems a celebration, or maybe a spiritual ritual, or even the parade of a corrupt dictator; no matter, the scene is certainly a tale gone awry in the improvised chaos of children bringing the house down in a scripted act of defiance. The actions of these children who are clearly enjoying themselves as they rip the simple set apart are given the ability to control their actions. They gain this control through destruction. There is no pause here, where the child even though guided, intuitively takes action.

In *Shit-Baby and the Crumpled Giraffe* the main work in Ramírez-Figueroa's exhibition at Plug In ICA, the artist taps into this child-like possibility, casting the child, here, an infant who is magically shitting, in a role that directs the scene. A cast of characters from a stork to a deformed giraffe sits amongst simple sculpted objects in an unfolding drama of subjugated memories. The interactions between the sculptural forms take place in a void - in the blank space of the white cube as if in a dream or foggy memory. The haze of early childhood memories is conjured through this blankness and embodied by the sculptural forms carved out of foam and painted brightly. This scene captures the spirit of childhood, illuminating infantile perceptions, not necessarily illustrating the wonderment of new experiences but instead the odd clarity of a child not yet swayed by or conformed into the shame of its bodily functions. *Shit-Baby and the Crumpled Giraffe* is about the body, as is much of Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's work. Not a disenfranchised body but one that acts politically and rests in the personal. The term 'the body' is a loaded word in contemporary art, drawing references to performance art in the sixties where the body is a material to be used - the body as a tool and medium. The human form is material for Ramírez-Figueroa but it becomes a metaphorical prop to unravel histories of suppression that rest in the body.

**Naufus Ramírez Figueroa** is a Guatemalan and Canadian artist. Working in sculpture, performance, video, installation and printmaking, Figueroa's work is grounded in mechanisms and conditions of colonialism worldwide, with specific investment in Guatemalan history. Receiving ongoing support from Corpus (2015-present), Figueroa has engaged in a series of performances that he describes as an "attempt to exhaust my interest into the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1990)". The weight of his subjects is often tempered by a playful material sensibility, forays into childhood, dreams, fantasy and the complexity of embodiment. Figueroa holds a BFA from Emily Carr University, Vancouver with a specialization in media art, and an MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work has garnered international acclaim, with notable inclusions in Viva Arte Viva, 57th Venice Biennale 2017; Incerteza viva, 32nd São Paulo Biennale, 2016; Burning Down the House, 10th Gwangju Biennale, 2014 and in 2016, he was a

resident artist at DAAD, in Berlin. He also has strong ties to Canada, where his work was featured on the cover of FUSE Magazine in 2013 and in 2018-19 Figueroa will present three major solo exhibitions in Canada, at Grunt Gallery, Vancouver; the Audain Gallery, Vancouver; and Plug In ICA, Winnipeg.

*Curated by Jenifer Pappararo*

#### **v. Worksheet:**

Respond to each of the following questions with at least three sentences:

1. Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa uses performance, video and sculpture in the two works presented at Plug In ICA. The artists body is the main tool used in performance. Reflect on how you think performance is different from theatre? What effect does this difference have on you as a viewer?
2. Both artists address the body, or embodiment in their exhibitions. Explain how they do this.
3. Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa and Przemek Pyszczek use the entire gallery for their exhibitions. Describe how they use the space and the effects of this approach on your experience of the artwork in each instance.
4. The artists each draw on their connection to places outside of Canada, name the countries they each come from, and discuss the way their work reflects on something significant from them.

#### **vi. Definitions:**

##### **Performance Art**

Often associated with the 1970's – a time when performance, or live art came into wide use by artists in North America and Europe - performance art usually uses the artist's own body. It can be rehearsed or spontaneous and is usually only performed once, however performance for the camera has become a common practice. One theorist, Jonah Westerman made the remark that "performance is not (and never was) a medium, not something that an artwork can be but rather a set of questions and concerns about how art relates to people and the wider social world." (2016).

##### **Site Specific**

"The term site-specific refers to a work of art designed specifically for a particular location and that has an interrelationship with the location"

(source: Tate Museum website: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/site-specific>)

##### **Installation Art**

Often site-specific, installation art is three-dimensional, and works to break down barriers between the viewer and the art object, often engaging the body of the viewer in the work.

(The Art Story website has a good expanded definition: <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-installation-art.htm>)



## **Diaspora**

The term originates from the Greek *diasporá*, meaning “a dispersion or scattering.” It generally refers to the (often forced) dispersal of any people from their homelands. It is important to note that is a political term and the meaning fluctuates.

## **Iron Curtain**

This is a term that relates to a division that occurred in Europe after World War II ended in 1945 until the Cold War ended in 1991. It is a metaphor for a political boundary that divided Europe into ‘East’ and ‘West’. Eastern Europe was under communist rule, which is heavily regulated, whereas Western Europe was not under communist rule, and experienced more political freedom. The term comes from theatre. The iron curtain in this context was a heavy fire-proof curtain used in theatres to prevent fires from spreading.

## **vii. Introduction to Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art:**

Plug In, established in 1972, was Manitoba’s first artist-run centre. For the first 15 years of its history, Plug In was one of the first (and few) organizations on the prairies to focus exclusively on the production and exhibition of contemporary art. The interest in contemporary art, coupled with a sense of isolation from large-scale cultural institutions such as the Winnipeg Art Gallery or the National Gallery, originally attracted artists to Plug In. Belief in the idea of an artists’ network as a social, aesthetic and economic alternative to those represented by commercial and public galleries was the foundation of Plug In.

Throughout its forty year history, Plug In has encouraged and nurtured the development of independent arts group in the province that each address an identified community need (e.g., Video Pool was spawned by Plug In, as was Mentoring Artists for Women’s Art and Counterparts: the Winnipeg Gay and Lesbian Film and Video Festival).

In the late nineties, after twenty-five years of operating as an artist-run-centre, Plug In began to re-envision its role in the local and national art community. Having arrived at a position of notable acclaim for its exhibitions and publications program, Plug In sought to have these programs matter in a larger way. To reach this goal, Plug In launched three initiatives to connect with larger audiences and expand the reach of our programming: the national and international circulation of exhibitions; the development of a website; and the creation of an audience development initiative. These changes marked Plug In’s transition from an artist-run-centre to something that resembled both a gallery and a museum, yet was neither – an interim phase during which a new hybrid was taking form.

The descriptions, and various models of, “institutes of contemporary art” in the UK and the US confirmed that Plug In’s mission; priorities; and activities fit best within an ICA model. And while this model is itself a relatively fluid one, for Plug In’s purposes the ICA distinction meant: the generation of a thoroughly researched mix of exhibitions that offered multiple access points to contemporary art and ideas; insightful interpretation through publications, programs and events; and creating the facilities and environment for lively interaction among artists, art and audience.

With these goals in mind, in 2009 Plug In made the decision to move from its location at 286 McDermott to a new purpose-built facility for art and education in partnership with University

of Winnipeg at the corner of Portage Avenue and Memorial Boulevard. This move expanded the ability to program multi-disciplinary activity that stretched what art, and what an ICA, could be. The facility was co-developed with the active participation of Plug In, and hosts three permanent installations by internationally renowned artists Jimmie Durham, Dan Graham, Rodney Latourelle and Louise Withoft.

Plug In expanded its mentorship opportunities by focusing on education in a number of ways, including making a summer residency (the Summer Institute) a regular part of its programming. The goal of the Summer Institute is to provide a space for professional artists and other cultural producers and (scientists, engineers, writers, curators, architects, philosophers, etc) to research and produce work, individually or collaboratively. This program serves a distinct niche in that it provides collegial support for artists at all stages of their careers, following their basic training (university, art colleges, or equivalent experience). Faculty is hired, and provides feedback and support to artists on a peer-to-peer basis. Each year 10 to 15 artists participate in the program. The idea of encouraging mentorship and facilitating an open discourse has always, and continues to be, integral to Plug In as an organization, and the Youth Education Program is built upon these premises.

#### viii. Sources

Link to Plug In ICA:

<http://plugin.org/>

Artists websites:

**Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa**

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**Guggenheim feature**

<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/naufus-ramirez-figueroa>

Video and interview with the artist about *Illusion of Matter*, 2015. Could be nice to watch before the visit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RUS9XXkbNE>

More info:

<https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/naufus-ramirez-figueroas-color-and-tone-metaphors>

**Przemek Pyszczek**

Artist Website:

<http://www.przemekpyszczek.com/>

Links to writing about the artists work:

<http://przemekpyszczek.com/index.php/project/texts--press/>