

Pedro Gómez-Egaña: The Great Learning

Hayden and Reference Galleries

February 21–July 27, 2025

MIT List Visual Arts Center presents the first US solo institutional showcase for Gómez-Egaña.



December 17, 2024, Cambridge, MA — MIT's List Visual Arts Center announces *Pedro Gómez-Egaña: The Great Learning*, the artist's US museum debut and largest solo exhibition to date. Gómez-Egaña creates dynamic constellations of objects and events in time. The exhibition, which features a number of works and interventions articulated as one temporal, sonic and spatial composition, will be anchored by a large-scale architectural and performance installation *Virgo*, which debuted at the Biennale de Lyon in 2022. The exhibition includes the constant activation of artworks by gallery attendants, or “orchestrators”, with whom the artist has devised various forms of intervention and activation. The exhibition will be on view in the Hayden and Reference Galleries February 21 - July 27, 2025.

“Pedro’s works are lyrical and mesmerizing interplays of space and time,” says curator, Natalie Bell. “At once immersive and intimate, his exhibition is equally a site of composition and contemplation as his works’ subtle or unexpected movements summon our powers of attention.”

Gómez-Egaña orchestrates arenas of motion and observation that seek to modulate audiences' perception. Drawing on features of both architecture and dramaturgy, he layers moments of intimacy and alienation to expose the porous and unstable conditions of contemporary life—and, in his words, “a world dominated by saturation and speed.”

Pedro Gómez-Egaña (b. 1976, Bucaramanga, Colombia) lives and works in Oslo, Norway where he is professor of sculpture and installation at the Oslo National Academy of The Arts. *The Great Learning* is organized by Natalie Bell, Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

VIRGO

In *Virgo* (2022), set-like reproductions of a generic domestic interior are bisected by 28 modular walls, some of which repeat throughout the installation, teasing viewers with mise-en-abyme viewpoints. A path for visitors cuts through the work's recursive architecture on a diagonal. Two large steel frames, mounted on a hidden system of wheels, connect to domestic furnishings and household objects, which are manually moved by the exhibition's “orchestrators” through precise gaps in the walls. These movements become a choreographic dimension adding to an uncanny encounter that probes the affective qualities of familiar objects and spaces.

Within *Virgo*, a television plays a video of starlings in flight, a laptop navigates a map of the Richat Structure in the Sahara desert as it plays fragments of Olivier Messiaen's 1941 “Quartet for the End of Time,” and an iPhone on a bed displays fragments of text from Annie Dillard's 1982 non-fiction essay “Total Eclipse.” Each of these encounters underscores the experience of one's home as a site of both isolation and constant connection to all corners of the world and moments across history, whether through moving images, written words, music, or memory as a medium in itself.

The work, which will span the entire Hayden gallery and measures approximately 20 x 70 feet, takes its name from the zodiac constellation as well as the Parthenon, which was known as the Temple of Virgo and was also built using repeated architectural features and optical illusions. Depending on one's vantage point, *Virgo* can appear either very solid and dense, or extremely porous and vulnerable.

Virgo also explores a contrast between different modes of experiencing and understanding time. Like stills in a film strip, each space within *Virgo* repeats with slight variation. As a visitor moves through and encounters each frame of interior space, they act as the animating agent, just as a projector's mechanics animates a series of film stills to create the illusion of time. This mechanical manipulation of time contrasts with cosmic rhythms, which are alluded to throughout the exhibition. With *Virgo*, this can be found in lighting that simulates the movement of the sun over the course of a day.



THE GREAT LEARNING

In the adjacent gallery, richly saturated with red carpet and wall color, Gómez-Egaña presents *The Great Learning* (2025), a temporal sculpture in which a copper rod begins in a vertical position and falls slowly to the ground. From custom seating that lines the perimeter of the gallery, visitors observe the rod's descent, which takes approximately 15 minutes. Its fall is the result of a meticulous balance between the forces of gravity on the rod and a set of eleven counterweights, as well as the friction on microfilament threads holding the rod and the environmental conditions in the room.

The Great Learning is inspired in part by the work of British composer Cornelius Cardew and his experiments with composition and pedagogy with the heterogenous and Fluxus-inspired ensemble known as The Scratch Orchestra. Their 1971 piece, also titled “The Great Learning,” borrowed its title from Confucius' text of the same name, which also reflects on collectivism. Gómez-Egaña's sculpture resonates with ideas of shared learning and interdependence, as its carefully distributed elements come together in a single understated gesture. The installation of the work itself, which can take up to a week, is a rigorous process of calibration and rehearsal, in which the most minute adjustments can affect the overall operation.

Elsewhere in this gallery, steel pendulums [*The Ask* (2025)] knock on the walls, their movement compelled by gravity and electromagnetic triggers hidden inside the walls. *Deep Rivers* (2025), a new multifaceted work blending sculpture, sound, and performance, created for the exhibition, appears as a nightstand embedded in the exhibition architecture. When activated by the exhibition's “orchestrators,” the work creates drone-like sounds from two bellows-driven instruments—one within the nightstand and a second hidden in the gallery's custom bench seating.

A new multi-channel audio work, *Cordillera* (2025), serves as a unifying device in this space, connecting the dynamics of the works with the kind of attention the exhibition seeks to solicit. At the exhibition's entrance, a new video work, *Great Year* (2025), serves as an introductory gesture, alluding to Gomez-Egaña's interest in cinematic time and scoring and situating the exhibition cosmically. Its stop-motion animations are based on the times when the sun and moon coincide in the sky above Cambridge during the exhibition's run and serve as a graphic, moving-image score for the exhibition's "orchestrators."



IMAGE CAPTIONS (top to bottom)

Pedro Gómez-Egaña, *Virgo*, 2022. Installation view: Biennale de Lyon, 2022. Photo: Blaise Adilon

Pedro Gómez-Egaña, *Virgo*, 2022. Installation view: Biennale de Lyon, 2022. Photo: Blaise Adilon

Pedro Gómez-Egaña, *The Great Learning*, 2015. Installation view: Mana Contemporary, New Jersey. Photo: Pedro Gómez-Egaña

PEDRO GÓMEZ-EGAÑA: THE GREAT LEARNING

MIT List Visual Arts Center, Hayden and Reference Galleries

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pedro Gómez-Egaña (b. 1976, Bucaramanga, Colombia) lives and works in Oslo, Norway where he is professor of sculpture and installation at the Oslo National Academy of The Arts and chair of the board of The Kunstnernes Hus. He holds an MFA and PhD in Visual Arts from the Bergen National Academy of Arts and a BA from Goldsmiths College, London, where he studied performance and music composition.

Recent institutional solo exhibitions include Podium, Oslo (2023); KODE Museum, Bergen, Norway (2021); Munch Museum, Oslo (2019); Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Baku, Azerbaijan (2018); Entrée, Bergen (2017);, and Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen (2015). He has also exhibited at: the 16th Lyon Biennial (2022); MAMBO, Bogota (2021); Henie Onstad Art Centre, Oslo (2021); TENT Rotterdam (2018); the Contour Biennial, Mechelen, Belgium (2017); the 15th Istanbul Biennial (2017); and Palais de Tokyo (2017); Kochi-Muziris Biennial (2016); and Performa 13 Biennial (2013); among many others.

ABOUT THE MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

The List Visual Arts Center is a creative laboratory that provides artists with a space to freely experiment and push existing boundaries. As the contemporary art museum at MIT, the List Center collects, commissions, and presents rigorous, provocative, and artist-centric projects that engage MIT and the global art community. Exhibitions are accompanied by a broad range of educational programs for the public and the MIT community, special events, and scholarly publications. The galleries and all programs are free and open to the public.