



# FRIEZE



Main image: Ignacio Gatica, *Stones Above Diamonds* (detail), 2023, stock ticker, live financial data, LED screens, steel frame, printed credit cards, card reader, aluminum shelves, 2.5 × 2.5 m. Courtesy: the artist

## Ignacio Gatica Reifies the Abstractions of Global Capitalism

From 1973 to 1990, the dictator Augusto Pinochet ruled Chile with an iron fist. It was a forced experiment in neoliberalism, led by a generation of young economists educated in free-market theories at the University of Chicago and other US institutions – a reshaping of which American right-wingers could only dream. As multimedia sculptor Ignacio Gatica told me, while tinkering with a circuit board in the gallery, ‘Santiago is like a mini-Manhattan’: an eerily distorted mirror image in which its worst lessons – consumerism, debt, financialization of daily life – are gospel.

Such conversations were at the heart of the Washington, D.C., protests of 2000 against IMF/World Bank policies that led to the immiseration of millions in the Global South, rationalized by bureaucrats as ‘structural adjustment’ – the cost of doing business. Gatica’s *Preface to an Automated Stratosphere* (2022) visualizes such abstraction: propped against the wall, an LED ticker of the sort you’d see in Times Square, New York, cascades data like water, a lovely cyber-punk minimalism. But it’s no mere readymade. Per Gatica, such devices are difficult to come by, so he builds his own from aluminium and steel, assembling arrays of circuits to light the display. Its algorithm, which simulates a roll call of debt by country and as a percentage of GDP – Kazakhstan, for instance, clocked an eye-popping 99.6 percent – is Gatica’s work as well.

Since the 1950s, the US has helped set the rules of the international financial system, but its own bill rarely comes due, thanks to the reserve-status of the dollar. In 2019, millions of Chileans turned out across the country to protest this inequality, resulting in a new president and a referendum to rewrite the national constitution. On his return to New York the following year, Gatica felt new resonances between the two countries, both ablaze in protest. He documented slogans painted on walls in lower Manhattan and splashed across plywood barriers in desolated streets. In *Stones Above Diamonds* (2020–23), viewers interrupt the stock data that unrolls across a suspended circular display by selecting credit cards that depict scenes arrayed neatly on a nearby metal shelf. Scan the card and a slogan – ‘I STILL WAIT YOU MY FREEDOM,’ reads one – hijacks the feed, resurrecting a trace of those strange months.

Plenty of art these days purports to be about late capitalism, but Gatica’s works deliver: their sleek materiality and concise text renders the diffuse newly legible. Installed sparsely in a post-industrial gallery space in DC’s own version of SoHo, they reveal both the power of the bland institutions down Pennsylvania Avenue to alter the fate of millions with a spreadsheet and the mirage of wealth around it. It was newly upsetting to walk out of the gallery into displays of luxury garments made by exploited labourers on the other side of the world. DC, no less than Santiago, is vulnerable to systematic boom-and-bust cycles, and the COVID-19 years in particular remind us that no one is truly insulated: beneath shimmering surfaces is a Potemkin village of shoddy construction and demand-side precarity.

Still, there is a genuine beauty to Gatica’s work, an unexpectedly caring transmutation of capitalist realism and its visual culture. Several photographs of derelict shops, such as *BALENCIAGA (620 Madison Ave, New York, NY, 10022)* (2023), are displayed as traditional stills, framed in engraved-aluminium shadowboxes to elegiac effect: Balenciaga never actually looked this good. My favourite work was *Fantasmas Terminal* (2023), a small credit-card reader, that ubiquitous financial interface. Resting on the floor, it looked vulnerable, its sad display carouselling through eight minutes’ worth of Gatica’s street scenes. Good-old-fashioned culture jamming is at work here – abstract forces are brought back to their grubby materiality, revealed as artifice, so much sleight of hand. – Ian Bourland, 11 April 2023

*Ignacio Gatica, ‘sujeto cuantificado: quantified subject’ is on view at von ammon co, Washington, DC, until 7 May.*