

Changarrito in Action

There are two significant times of day in Mexico City that are often unconsidered by most. They are the quietest times, when street vendors unpack for a day of commerce, unloading wares off trucks, carefully balanced dollies, and from under tarps. There is a particular sound that this often overlooked labor makes. It is the distinct clanging of metal poles, the sound of tables being set up, plastic stools dragging against the pavement, and the fanning of coals under the comal. It is also a ritual that is repeated in reverse at the end of the day when the vendors of the city wrap things up into their tarps and *huacales*, and back onto carefully balanced dollies, and the beds of aging trucks. But every day, the sound of labor fills the crisp morning air as *changarritos* of every size, style, make, and model are constructed according to the needs of whatever the vendor is selling, then deconstructed meticulously after a twelve hour day of commerce.

It is a distinct cycle of both labor and economy that is unique to Mexico. Improvised carts designed for the function of what is being sold on said cart reflect the ingenuity of a population that adjusts to the complication and complexities of life in the city. Any number of items is sold in these carts — these *changarritos* — from tortas to tacos, quesadillas to sopas, or gum, water, candy and at times a colorful variety of second hand objects like books, comics, and clothing. These carts settle into their spots on street corners, parks, open air markets, and *tianguis*, street markets demarcated by the brightly colored tarps extending from one side of the street to the other.

The *changarritos* contribute to daily life in Mexico City by adding to the visual density, offering wares, bites, or full meals on the whim of any passerby. Amidst the sounds of the metrobus, the occasional *whoosh* and burst of warm air from a subway grate, the whistle of the knife sharpener, or the distinct *shhht* of the street sweepers, the *changarritos* sit in the conceptual paradox of quiet defiance amidst the visual noise. They are mobile carts that are specific to the culture of Mexico which claims more informal economy than any other country in the Americas. It is the flexibility of the *changarrito* that provides the backbone to street markets, and amidst the variety of vendors and visitors negotiating and navigating through masses of people, the *changarritos* adapt to their circumstances. These carts can be adjusted to the needs of their wares, and regardless of the intricacies of their setup, they are all easily mobile, can be moved on a whim, and at the very least constructed each morning from scratch then deconstructed every evening at the end of the day, both the first and last remnants of labor in a city that relies upon them.