

REGEN PROJECTS

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Subversion through inefficiency

Abraham Cruzvillegas's work raises questions related to the aesthetic and social dimensions of objects, pedagogical processes and social relationships.

by AMANDA DE LA GARZA MATA

One of the key concepts in Cruzvillegas's work is "self-building," which refers to the way that much housing in Third-World urban areas is built: that is, made by the inhabitants themselves through processes that imply coexistence and collaborative work. Cruzvillegas takes up the structures and the components of self-building to disseminate his work in a wide variety of formats and contexts.

Amanda de la Garza Mata: *Could you tell me about the last project you completed for the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea?*

Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Biennale is held in a city that had an important event in 1980, a series of student protests against a dictatorship that was installed following the division of the country after the Second World War. On May 18 there was a massacre in the city of Gwangju. Eight years later they managed to overthrow the dictatorship. The Biennale was the result of that situation, a sort of compensation to society. It became a catalyst, a space for discussing social, political, and economic problems. So, instead of making a piece in the Biennale building, I used an abandoned house. The house belonged to the owner of a movie theater that's had an experimental film program since the '30s. I asked to work there because in it you can see the vestiges of the house's different uses — its modifications, adaptations and destructions. I asked them to let me use it as a workshop in two senses: a workshop where things are made, but also a workshop in an academic sense. I spent three weeks using it as a studio, making my piece only with materials from the house. At the same time, I was organizing meetings with people twice a week to talk about topics of a different order, but that were about the local context: the house, the theater, the city, the country, history, economics, politics, culture, food, etc. I tried to design that space in the direction of a discussion workshop, as an educational apparatus, so

I could learn from the people there. The pieces were left as an exhibition in the house.

AdIGM: *In what way does the project synthesize aspects of your earlier work?*

AC: I've used the artisanal aspect before — recuperating materials and turning them into a whole, which meant sculpture, then putting the objects into an assemblage, but trying to respect each of their experiences, which is what I have done since I began working as a sculptor — and also the educational aspect, which has interested me a lot ever since I studied for a degree in education rather than art. There's also an epistemological interest, but always in a more individual sense, with the possibility of constructing an individual identity that is not collective. But obviously this affects the collective, and in that sense the urban experience: how we inhabit the city.

AdIGM: *We might think of objects as ideological containers. Although you work under a single structure that brings together assemblage and found objects, in some way each sculpture produces meaning in each specific culture, or for the audience in the context where you're working.*

AC: This idea of objects as containers of experience is important. Experience isn't just that objects should be rusty or look old in order to become attractive and be incorporated into a work of art. For me, that's decoration. On the contrary, experience implies a series of moments of economic transformation, and objects are vessels for that, for the transformation of thought and of the modes of perceiving reality. From the perspective of self-building, I would say that it's a necessity demanding a possible transformation. Objects appeal to different ways of seeing reality, and that's what I want: to create phrases or enunciations that might bear many meanings, to give objects voices other than my own. I'm interested

Opposite:

Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Palo matutino después de un arresto domiciliario durante La Noche de los Vidrios Rotos, 2011. Found diverse wooden elements, stainless steel, acrylic paint, felt and beer bottle caps, 280 x 250 x 255 cm. Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Photo: Michel Zabé and Omar Luis Olguín.*



in taking on the social life or the political life of objects as a very fertile field of work.

Even when I know how to use a drill, a hammer, I know how to make something that is a sculpture, but I also know that I can keep on learning. It's something that has happened in my work from the beginning — projects in which I appeal to the local, understood as something from which I can learn, like the project in Korea or at Documenta 13, or in a project that I did with craftspeople in France, or another project that I did with craftspeople from my father's hometown Michoacán in Mexico. There's a part that has to do with approaching a body of knowledge in order to appropriate it, so I can transcend my own limitations. Nowadays it would be strange to appeal to the idea of style. In my case it's what I try to escape. Occasionally those ways of using the drill, one material or another, are repeated. Still, in each experience, in each new project there's a learning process that makes all the previous bodies of knowledge unstable, so it becomes a pile of instabilities.

AdIGM: *In the case of the dialogues in Gwangju, there's the idea of process. But in the project you did for Documenta 13 there's another dimension that has to do with actions on the street. In that context I was trying to understand the idea of living sculptures.*

AC: For me, what I did for Documenta 13 represents a big challenge; it implied formulating a more profound critical reflection about public space and about my own work. I reviewed constant features of my work, trying to

destabilize my own forms. I worked with thirty-four concepts, in order to generate works that could not be seen. I wanted to create a space of work and of experimentation that may not necessarily yield products. My list sought to go to the territory of experience and not so much of accumulation. The list of concepts came up by chance. I found myself with concepts like sweat: you sweat when you work, but also when you dance, when you're in bed with someone, when you're at the beach; it's a situation with a lot of possibilities. I assigned each concept a color, and I painted a game of pick-up sticks with the thirty-four colors that I used as a tool to decide the actions I made in the street. I used as a reference the dynamics of the Situationists, renaming streets and transforming them with gestures that weren't necessarily meant to be visible. I went out in the streets each day with the possibility of making a living sculpture, but with a weight or a burden that was pressuring me. There came a point where I wasn't doing anything; I reached a blind spot in the coordinates of my own internal discussion. I'm interested in creating a space with a certain degree of what you could call "subversion through inefficiency." That's where an economic dimension reemerges in my work. One part of my belief lies in Taoism and contemplation, which is inefficient. I produce works that occasionally get into commercial spaces, but I believe that those moments serve to generate resources for more inefficiency, and not in an accumulative way. In the eyes of the institution it's immoral, which could be the institution of capital. Investing in art becomes an immoral act to a certain degree.

Top left:
Abraham Cruzvillegas,
Atelier Autoconstruccion:
The Inefficient Tinkerer's
- Workshop: Free Advice
Behind Cinema, 2012.
Photographic documentation
of the project. Gwangju
Biennale (KR), 2012.
Courtesy the artist and
kurimanzutto, Mexico City.



Abraham Cruzvillegas, Untitled non-productive activities, 2012. Photographic documentation of the project, dOCUMENTA (13) Kassel (DE). Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

Amanda de la Garza Mata is associate curator at MUAC. She lives and works in Mexico City.

Abraham Cruzvillegas was born in 1968 in Mexico City where he currently lives and works.

Selected solo shows:

2013: Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
 2012: Regen Projects, Los Angeles.
 2010: kurimanzutto, Mexico City. 2009: Thomas Dane, London; Redcat, Los Angeles; CCA Wattis, San Francisco. 2008: CCA, Glasgow.
 2007: Jack Tilton, New York. 2005: The Breeder, Athens; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, Mexico (with Dr. Lakra). 2004: Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles; MARCO, Monterrey (MX). 2003: Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; Jack Tilton, New York. 2001: MUCA, Mexico City.

Selected group shows:

2012: Gwangju Biennale (KR); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel (DE). 2009: Bienal de Mercosul, Porto Alegre (BR); Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan, Puerto Rico. 2008: "Mexico: Expected / Unexpected. Colección Isabel & Augustine Coppel," La Maison Rouge, Paris; Salón Nacional de Artistas, Cali (CO). 2007: "Unmonumental," New Museum, New York. 2005: "Universal Experience: Art, Life And The Tourist's Eye," MCA, Chicago / MART, Rovereto (IT); Torino Triennale, Turin (IT). 2003: Venice Biennale; "The Squared Circle: Boxing In Contemporary Art," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. 2002: São Paulo Biennial. 1995: "La Liga De La Injusticia," La Panadería, Mexico City. 1994: In Site, Tijuana, Mexico; Havana Biennial. 1993: "The Return Of The Cadavre Exquis," The Drawing Center, New York.