

REGEN PROJECTS

Clayton, Jace. "Locally Sourced." *Frieze* No. 174 (October 2015) pp. 244-248 [ill.]

frieze

When Abraham Cruzvillegas talks, his thoughts emerge as paragraphs, not sentences, and this attentive specificity finds its physical reflection in his sculptures. Humble found materials gather into strangely elegant forms, shaped by precarity, ingenuity and a shamanistic sense for the inner lives of objects. Cruzvillegas insists on offering his autobiography (growing up amidst the informal urbanism of an under-served Mexico City neighbourhood) and his own neologism, *autoconstrucción* (self-building), as the preferred framework for engaging with his art. While the improvisatory pragmatism of *autoconstrucción* may well provide the principal generative force of Cruzvillegas's work, what emerges assumes a life of its own, and it often leaps across media. Bound up in *autoconstrucción* is not a sense of belonging or fixed identities but, rather, a series of questions: material, economic, philosophical.

We spoke a few days before he left Mexico City to begin installing his Turbine Hall commission at London's Tate Modern.

JACE CLAYTON

Can we discuss what you're going to do at the Turbine Hall?

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS

Tate would like it to be a surprise for the audience, so I'm not really allowed to talk about the specific details of the project yet. I proposed something that I consider to be a conceptual synthesis of everything that I've done so far. It's not necessarily formally similar to previous works: it's an exercise in experimenting with my own language, trying to understand the roots of my identity and trying to provoke more questions.

JC *Much of your work involves using found materials, so I'm curious as to how – and what – you'll source in London.*

AC I work with the local wherever I go. I don't think of myself as a tourist trying to find the most emblematic thing from a place. Rather, I try to find something to mirror my questions about identity. I've been dealing with this idea – *autoconstrucción* – for a long time. I carry that principle wherever I go, then I use local materials and bring them to my own territory. It can be rocks, pieces of wood, furniture or discarded things. It can also be labour – working with people who do things in a particular way, according to the specific economic environment or social context. In London, it will be a combination of different elements that talk about the local environment. More like a dialogue in which people can recognize themselves instead of trying to understand me.

Locally Sourced

With a major commission for the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern opening this month, **Abraham Cruzvillegas** talks to *Jace Clayton* about his approach to art-making and his philosophy of *autoconstrucción*

REGEN PROJECTS



Autoconstrucción
2010, wood, beer caps,
bulbs, roots, fabric,
iron, dimensions variable

Courtesy
the artist and Galerie
Chantal Crousel, Paris

REGEN PROJECTS



1



2



3

1
AutodestrucciónB: Sinbyeong, 2013,
 found objects from redevelopment areas
 in Seoul, dimensions variable

2
Autoconstrucción, 2008, wood, wool,
 artist's hair, iron, tin, hemp cord,
 plywood, plaster, cardboard, plastic rope,
 buoy, pipe, aluminium, chicken wire,
 ceramics, broom, coins, sheep shit and
 red acrylic paint on newspaper
 clippings, cardboard, photographs, drawings,
 postcards, envelopes, tickets, vouchers,
 letters, drawings, flyers, cards, recipes and steel
 pins on wall, dimensions variable

3
The Simultaneous Promise, 2011,
 tricycle, portable PA, horn speakers,
 amplifier, car battery, metal tubing,
 mirrors, 2 x 1.6 x 1.9 m

4
Nuestra imagen actual: Damián,
 2015, Indian ink on water-based, acrylic
 enamel paint on kraft paper, 3 x 4 m

Courtesy
 1 the artist, Art Sonje Center and
 kurimanzutto, Mexico City •
 2 & 3 the artist, Haus der Kunst, Munich,
 and kurimanzutto, Mexico City •
 4 the artist and kurimanzutto

REGEN PROJECTS

We artists carry the institution as a backpack. Once we accept being part of it, we carry it everywhere we go.

JC *Many stores sell goods and services that are 'locally produced' and 'ethical', allowing them to charge more money. As an artist whose work moves in international circles, how do you deal with this aspect of the local?*

AC I've been thinking about this for a while. As you say, in the context of late capitalism, this trend towards organic food, for instance, might stem from a good intention – in terms of creating a better relationship with the environment – when, in fact, it's producing more consumption and waste. In my work, many times I've dealt with people who make things with their hands or with primitive tools. Like the candles made out of fat that they use in Cuba for witchcraft. Then, I'll also use something that is absolutely hyper-industrialized, like a soda can. Both types of object are alive for me; both can be magical if you use them properly. This clash of economic environments – post-industrial production and pre-industrial production – can live together very well.

I like to think of my work as evidence of the possibility of animism. I believe everything is alive. In this brutal world of consumption, organic food and the like is presented as being produced in a 'nice' way – if you want to call it that – but, in fact, it's as aggressive as any product from an industrial environment. I like the notion of these things colliding and living together: it's about tolerance and inclusion. It's not like saying: 'No, I will not use this because this is part of an environment I don't identify myself with.' In fact, it's about acceptance. Both 'local' and 'global' could be descriptions applied to a single object, and these definitions do not conflict in terms of the life of an object, handmade or industrially made: a local object can live together with a global one. This is more about conviviality than about consumption.

JC *You were one of the core participants in El Taller de los Viernes (Friday Workshop), an informal artists' learning project held in Gabriel Orozco's studio from 1987 to 1991. What motivated you to join?*

AC When I was younger, I very much wanted to study art. However, at that time in Mexico City, in the 1980s, the art schools were not teaching art, but techniques. So, I decided to study pedagogy at university.

In El Taller, we shared information about things that no art school was providing. There was no internet then, so there was a different speed for obtaining and processing information about people we liked a lot, such as David Hammons, David Medalla and many others. We worked hard to find information, then we'd discuss it. That was the most important thing. And, of course, we'd get some beer, listen to music, hang out: a full day. It was a parallel education for all of us.

JC *If El Taller was happening today, how would it be different?*

AC When artists are young, they often have a genuine need to belong to something. This sometimes produces another need: to construct a platform to reach the thing that you imagine you want to be a part of. This type of collective artist space has many different profiles – both in Mexico and around the world – and it's not hard to recognize which ones are interested in learning and which are just interested in building a platform for visibility. It's very easy to say: 'We're a collective of artists trying to produce knowledge,' when, in fact, what they want is to produce a platform. That's fine, of course, but let's not confuse it with a more pedagogical intention.

JC *To take a left turn: there were some odd, arte povera-style objects in the motorcycle-tunnel structure that Mexican cartel boss Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán used to escape from a maximum-security federal prison earlier this summer. I'm thinking, in particular, of the hand-built motorcycle-on-rails, which may be the Mexican sculptural assemblage seen by the largest number of people this year. What do you think of an object like that?*

AC The construction of the tunnel – the formal configuration of his adventurous escape – is about the shape taken in space by all the corruption and rotten power that we have in Mexico, and how we are not able to deal with it as citizens. The creativity and ingenuity invested in making such a thing, along with the parallel structures of power that Guzmán instituted in the last 30 years (and not only Guzmán; he's part of a bigger apparatus producing one of the country's main sources of income, alongside oil and remittances from undocumented Mexicans working in the US) – all of this together can describe a panorama. The landscape of this culture is not something you can be proud of, but trying to understand it and asking questions about it can lead to an art that is more self-critical. Instead of apologizing for Guzmán or trying to make an ironic comment, I would use your question to ask why artists don't point a critical gaze towards our own platforms as political entities.

JC *You used the platform provided by DOCUMENTA (13) in 2012 to create ephemeral street sculpture/performance, leaving no traces that could exist in a catalogue or gallery. I'm curious about how you modulate your work's entry into the historical canon, given that those performances vanish and the art-historical weight gravitates towards your sculptures in museum holdings.*

AC Documenta is a mammoth exhibition. Everybody goes to Kassel like it's a pilgrimage, like they're going to Mecca or to the Vatican City. I think your question is about transcendence, in a way: how these things become part of the development of a language just because they form part of an institution.



REGEN PROJECTS

When people said to me: 'But nobody saw your invisible work at DOCUMENTA (13)!' I replied: 'Actually, more people than you think saw it — ordinary people in the street saw it, even if they didn't perceive it as art.'

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS

What is the genealogy of the behaviours in art history that wanted to escape from the institution: the ones that tried to exist neither in the institutional building nor in the cathedral, but outside. This is a beautiful intention but nowadays it's a bit naive. Even if you make work in the street, it's part of the institution. We artists carry the institution as a backpack. Once we accept being part of it, we carry it everywhere we go.

Then, not being naive, you can re-examine all these intentions of making things in the street, enjoying and trying to learn from the experience, as I did in DOCUMENTA (13), where I made silly, playful, stupid, non-productive shit, not even taking pictures of what I did. When people said: 'But nobody saw your invisible work!' I replied: 'Actually, more people than you think saw it — ordinary people walking in the street saw it, even if they didn't perceive it as art.' Also animals, objects, plants and myself.



JC *If your audience included trees and animals, does that mean you consider non-human viewers when working on a sculpture?*

AC That's true. And not just because of animism, or my dream of being part of a horizontal universe in which we all have the same dignity: dignity for all humans but also for all objects and all animals. This means respect. How can you respect something else if you don't respect yourself, first of all? I think of my entire body as a tool, and this tool needs to be maintained — eating and drinking well, having good sex, enjoying life — and then you can relate yourself to everything else in a respectful way. An object tells me: 'I can be part of this,' or: 'I can share my space with this other thing; we've been looking at each other for a long time.' I can only witness their internal relationship, but they are also looking at me, and they'll know if I'm lying or misusing my body. When someone goes to see one of my exhibitions, my work looks at them as well.

JC *Your oeuvre draws on multiple lineages, many far from the Western canon. What art (or non-art) inspires you these days?*

AC I like Japanese *shunga* very much: little books produced during the Edo period that are a form of printmaking for the representation of sex. I love them, and not just for the visuals and craft. Even if you remove the people having sex, the display of things in space is utterly beautiful; they speak a lot about the culture.

I like the production of craft everywhere. Mostly from Mexico, of course, which I know best — particularly Michoacán, which is where my father is from. There's an area where, since pre-Hispanic times, they've specialized in crafts using nearby resources. One small town produces only copper things, in another they only carve stone, while another specializes in cheese, and so on. You can learn a universe of things. ♣

Jace Clayton is an artist living in New York, USA. He is also known for his work as DJ Rupture. He is currently writing a book on 21st-century music and global digital culture to be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Portobello.

Abraham Cruzvillegas is an artist living in Mexico City, Mexico. In 2015, he has exhibited at Sinbyeong, Art Sonje Center, South Korea; Kunsthau, Zurich, Switzerland; 12th Havana Biennial, Cuba; MALI, Lima, Peru; and Gdanska City Gallery 2, Gdansk, Poland. His Hyundai Commission for the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, UK, opens on 13 October 2015.

'Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Autoconstrucción Suites', 2013, installation view at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Courtesy the artist, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, kurimanzutto, Mexico City, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris