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Abraham Cruzvillegas

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ARTFORUM

MÉRIDA TO HOST FIRST EDITION OF BIENAL DE YUCATÁN



Downtown Mérida. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

The Bienal de Yucatán, the first large-scale international contemporary art biennial in Mexico, is set to open in Mérida, the capital of the Yucatán state, this November.

Artistic director Abraham Cruzvillegas has made language and all forms of communication the focus of this first edition. Titled "Vocal," it will bring together seventy-six artists and other participants—including linguists, filmmakers, poets, musicians, and dancers—from twenty countries. Participating visual artists include Oscar Murillo, Minerva Cuevas, Yoko Ono, Wael Shawky, Jimmie Durham, Lawrence Weiner, Cecilia Vicuña, and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Mérida to Host First Edition of Bienal de Yucatán
Artforum, September 22, 2026.
https://urls.fr/Ux-XCY

“This international exhibition will focus primarily on tongue, languages, idioms, the written, the spoken, and what needs to be said,” Cruzvillegas said in a press release. “The works and individual participating in this renewed version of the Bienal de Yucatán will make it one of inclusion and diversity, of languages and idioms that engage in dialogue and contradict one another.”

The principal venue is the Casa de la Cultura del Mayab, a sixteenth-century former convent in Mérida’s Centro Histórico. The fourteen other sites include the Centro de Artes Visuales, the Biblioteca Yucatanense, the Museo de la Ciudad, and the Museo Pinacoteca Juan Gamboa Guzmán. The Bienal will run from November 26, 2026, to February 28, 2027.

The bienale was founded by the art historian and collector Catherine Petitgras, who is based between London and Mérida. She noted the city’s lack of local exhibition opportunities—exacerbated by the closing of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Ateneo de Yucatán in 2021—despite its vibrant contemporary art scene. “Since then,” she said, “I began dreaming of a biennial which would strengthen and draw visibility for contemporary art in the region.”

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Flash Art

Improvisation, Rebellion, and Transformation. A Conversation with Abraham Cruzvillegas



Gea Politi: Your Art Basel performance involved transforming four improvised drawings into a single wine label through tearing and reassembly. How do you approach decision-making during the moment of recomposition, and what do you hope the final image will reveal about improvisation as authorship?

Abraham Cruzvillegas: Even when materials and strategy were designed earlier, I always like to respond to accidents, contradictions, and mistakes during improvisation. Unexpected findings and random encounters can become as important as everything else. I make decisions accordingly when unexpected sensations arise while creating an artwork. In this case, there was an element I didn't consider that remains only in the very moment of the performance but is definitely an important part of the piece: the sound made while dealing with a gigantic twelve-litre wine bottle, which I was using as a tool.

GP: Terra Mista blends Italian varietals with Napa terroir and will carry your image as its label. How do you see the wine's "metaphorical mini rebellion" — its hybrid grape mix and adaptability — resonating with your concept of autoconstrucción and cultural assemblage?

AC: Rebellion takes shape not only in improvised gestures but also while materials take on a voice in response to my actions. Paper, colors, water, and even myself rebel against expectations, accepting failure as part of success. There is no metaphor here, just facts.

GP: The performance uses tinted charcoal and water-soaked sponges to create watercolor-like effects before collage. How did you select these materials and techniques for a durational public activation at Art Basel, and what sensory or material qualities were you aiming to evoke?

Gea Politi
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Flash Art, January 15, 2026.
https://urls.fr/Ui99P1

AC: I used four tinted charcoal bars — blue, yellow, pink, and green — to allegorically evoke the different cultural contexts of each grape, each with its own environment and context, but all now shifted to what we call California.

GP This project follows your *Two Untitled Maps* installation at the Louis M. Martini Winery. In what ways did that site-specific work inform your approach to producing a portable, reproducible image for a wine label and for a global audience at Art Basel?

AC: The work at the Martini tasting room in Napa allowed me to learn about winemaking, including the labor in the vineyards, which involves people with very particular backgrounds and environments. Insects, birds, gophers, and other plants are also part of that process, which culminates when the liquid enters our bodies, transforming us alchemically and connecting us with nature, culture, landscape, and other people in different ways. The artwork made for the label carries all this learning in a way that does not illustrate anything but provides evidence of my own transformation in that very moment.

GP: Your practice often repurposes found materials and foregrounds local histories. How did collaboration with a commercial winery and the constraints of label design influence your process and considerations about circulation, objecthood, and audience?

AC: I have created similar works for tequila and beer brands, each of which is completely different, starting with the proper questions about the precise context of each product — not only economically or socially but also in terms of manufacture, traditions, history, and nature, thinking about agave, hops, grapes, substrata, soil, earth, sunlight, water, and hands. Then there's someone sipping something all around the globe.

GP: Terra Mista's concept responds to changing climate conditions in Napa. Does the project prompt you to think differently about ecological narratives, migration, or adaptability in your art, and if so, how will those ideas appear in the final label or in the broader collaboration?

AC: I've been interested in how to engage in conversation with specialists about the environment in context. I'm constantly learning from biologists, historians, lawyers, botanists, and others to find ways to include those dialogues and the critical apparatus that each field provides. Without making any literal representations, people on the move, plants, animals, and myself are at the heart of my long-term, transdisciplinary (and mostly indisciplinary) research. This research aims to be an educational device, in which the one who learns is me.

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OCULA



In early December, a small crowd gathered as Mexico City-based conceptual artist Abraham Cruzvillegas crushed pigmented chalks into dust with the base of a wine bottle at Art Basel Miami Beach, dipped them into water and began to paint. The live drawing performance, commissioned by the Napa Valley-based Louis M. Martini winery, was staged in the heart of the fair. The artist's starting point was a handful of requested materials: four small bowls of water, four sponges, pigmented chalks, paper, and one enormous, novelty-sized bottle of wine. From there, he improvised the rest, rhythmically crushing the chalks and using the pigmented dust to mix watercolours that he applied with the sponges. He produced a series of gestural, monochromatic drawings that he tore into pieces and fixed on to the bottle as a collage, which he presented to his rapt audience as the label for the vineyard's newest wine.

'I grew up doing things without resources,' Cruzvillegas tells me the next morning over coffee, explaining the origins of his improvisational performance in the ideas of *autoconstrucción*. From his childhood home in Mexico City to the shanty towns of Jamaica or the *bidonvilles* of France, the word describes a resourcefulness born of scarcity: 'You make your home with whatever is at hand. You improvise, and then you recycle, and then you collaborate.'

Janelle Zara
Abraham Cruzvillegas is Ready to Work 'Without Resources'
Ocula, December 22, 2025.
https://urls.fr/2iUHYq



Abraham Cruzvillegas for Louis M. Martini at Art Basel Miami Beach (5–7 December 2025). Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York. Photo: Zack Paris.



Abraham Cruzvillegas for Louis M. Martini at Art Basel Miami Beach (5–7 December 2025). Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York. Photo: Zack Paris.



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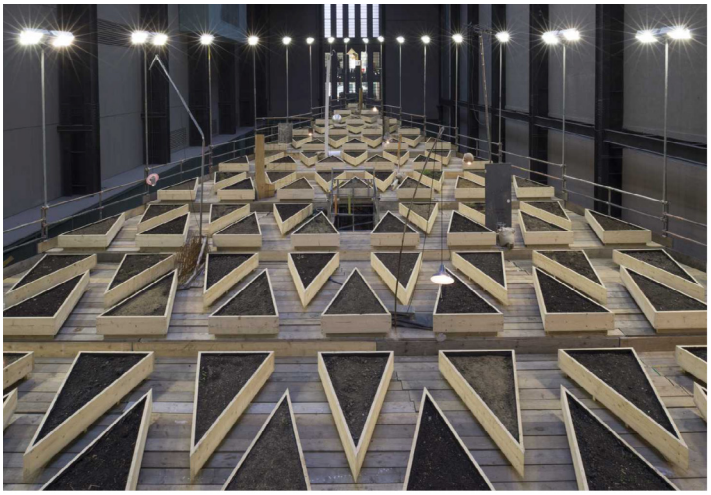
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As a methodology, *autoconstrucción* embraces the imperfections of unpredictability, inefficiency and the perpetually unfinished. Since the early 1990s, these features have been central to Cruzvillegas' practice, manifesting as installations of disparate found objects, assembled in unexpected and often humorous ways: knives and machetes stuck into a butcher's block resembled a plume of feathers in *Aeropuerto Alterno* (2002) at the 2003 Venice Biennale; planters filled with London soil were watered and allowed to germinate in *Empty Lot* (2015) in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Although the details are still in their early stages, lately he's been thinking of how to apply the tenets of *autoconstrucción* in his role as the artistic director of the forthcoming inaugural Bienal de Yucatán (26 November 2026–28 February 2027). The resources at hand apply not only to the materials and artists of the region, but what can be borrowed through 'relationships of work and collaboration with friends from abroad'.

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Exhibition view: *Hyundai Commission 2015: Abraham Cruzvillegas: Empty Lot*, Tate Modern, London (13 October 2015–3 April 2016). Courtesy the artist and Tate.



Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Ichárhuta atonal en cientotreyntaidosavos de tono (para Luis González y González)* (2017). Wood, resin, strap, metal, bicycle wheel. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Florian Kleinefenn.



Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Autorretrato oponible actual, 28* (2023). Ink on paper. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Jiayun Deng.

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Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Balbuceos infratonales para Francisco José Múgica* (2017). Cotton fishing net, rope, pigeon hoof, two smoke soarmoza. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Florian Kleinefenn.



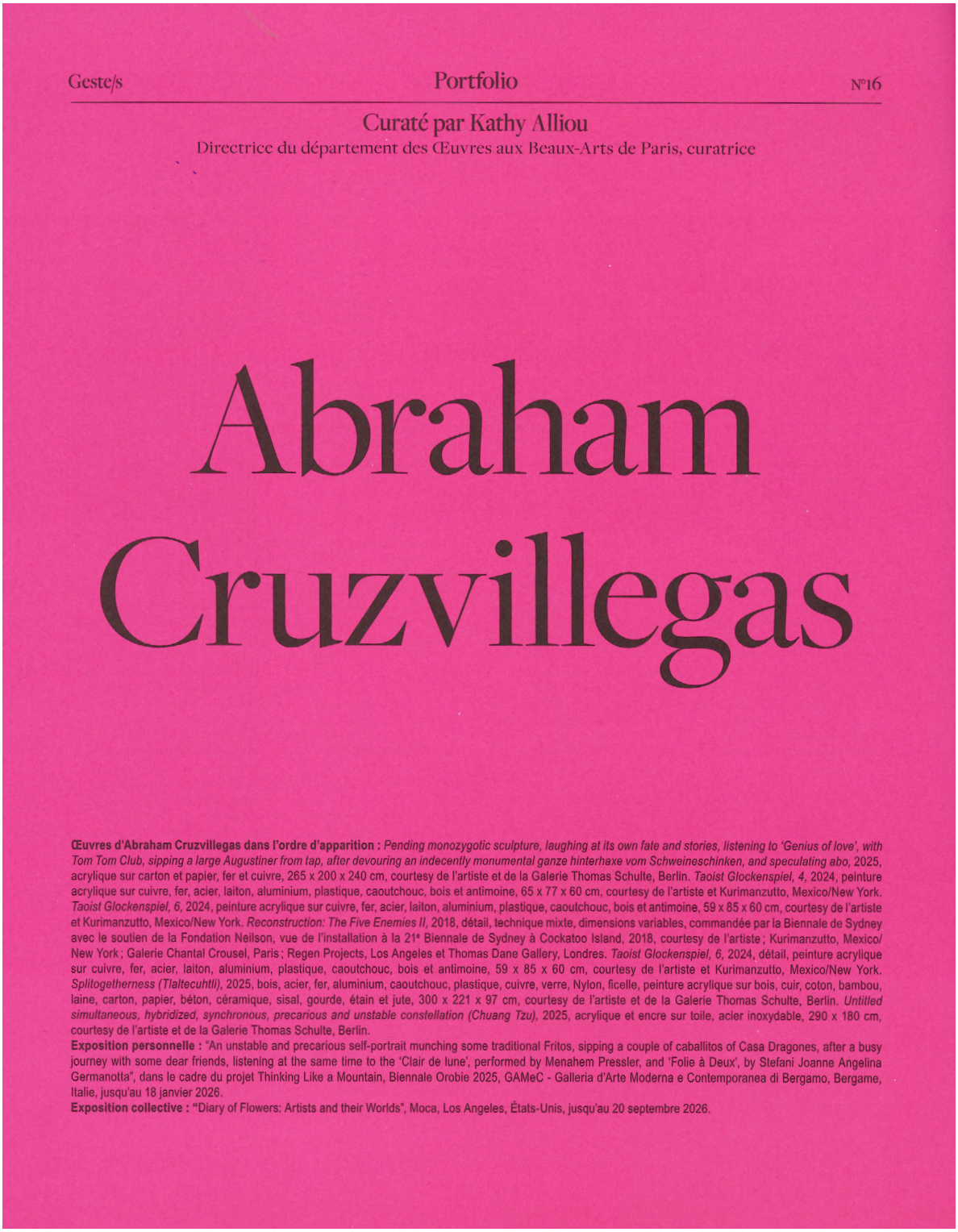
Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Untitled portable sculpture (La Señora de Las Nueces) 3* (2020–2021). Wood, nylon, steel, leather, beer caps. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Martin Argyroglo.

Reflecting on the latest edition of Art Basel Miami Beach, I ask Cruzvillegas for his take on *Regular Animals* (2025), Beeple's AI-powered robotic dogs that grabbed headlines worldwide. The artist declines to comment on that work directly, but does express an ambivalence about the use of AI: 'I don't think I need it for what I do in general, like writing, educating, curating or making sculptures or drawings. But if I need it, why not?' Despite his performance in Miami, Cruzvillegas adds: 'I try to avoid the art fair environment.' Although he has nothing against art fairs, and feels the utmost gratitude for everyone who's supported his practice by buying his work, his stance is that: 'We need to consume art, but we don't really need to buy art.' Having never bought a work of art himself—'not once'—the art he owns is as a result of gifts and trades with other artists. 'What I buy is books,' he says.

When I ask Cruzvillegas how his success as an artist has changed his relationship to scarcity, he answers with words from his father, which he says have often been repeated: 'We have to do things without resources, with resources and despite resources.' Continued success is also never guaranteed, he adds, citing recent contractions in the market. 'I've been very, very privileged in different ways, showing and sharing my work in big institutions with fantastic people in a very beautiful window of opportunities, but that's also changing. The collapse of the market is a big opportunity now to challenge ourselves to do things without resources. I'm ready. I was born in that context myself.'

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Geste/s



Kathy Alliou
Abraham Cruzvillegas
Geste/s, N°16, December, 2025—January, 2026, p.60-69.

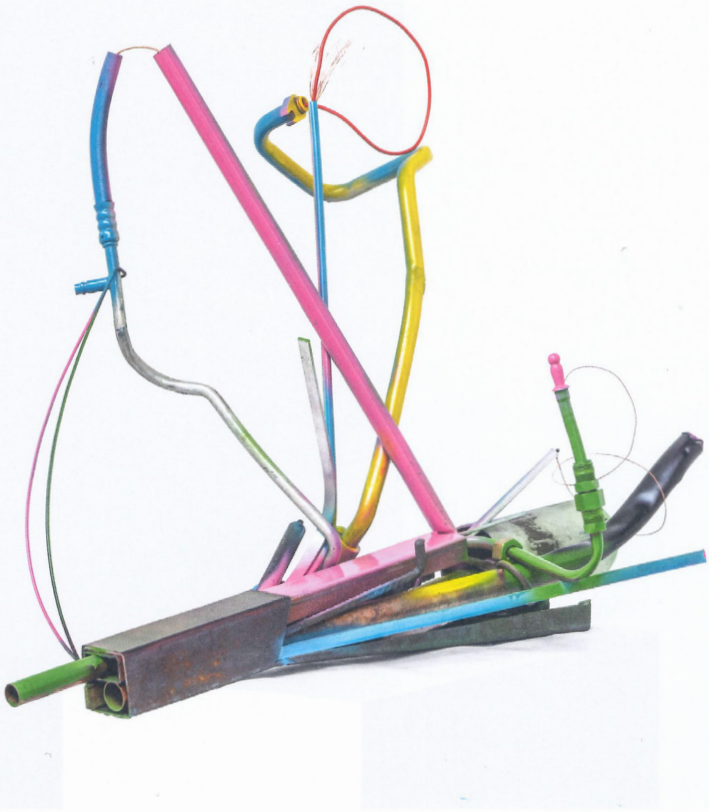
Abraham Cruzvillegas transforme l'économie de la précarité en une poétique du faire, où le geste de construire devient aussi celui de raconter, d'habiter le monde et de se réinventer. Le travail de Cruzvillegas puise son origine dans son quartier natal d'Ajusco, à Mexico, où les familles bâtissent aussi leur maison à partir du réemploi et du réagencement de matériaux trouvés. Le concept pivot qu'il a forgé pour son œuvre est celui d'*Autoconstrucción*. La "mythologie individuelle" d'Abraham Cruzvillegas repose sur une intrication entre l'affirmation biographique de sa démarche artistique et les pratiques collectives de la communauté dont il est issu. Il en prolonge les effets bien au-delà de leur territoire géographique, culturel et symbolique d'origine. Pour ses expositions, les matériaux de ses œuvres sont généralement collectés ou trouvés dans l'environnement du lieu d'accueil, qu'ils soient bruts ou repeints dans la palette de couleurs propre à l'artiste. À partir de carambolages et d'appariements inattendus entre ces objets usagés, il sculpte de nouvelles singularités et en organise leur prolifération au sein de vastes installations parfois performées. Expressions d'une pratique située, ses œuvres dessinent un portrait pluriel, trop mouvant pour se laisser enfermer dans des assignations, et appellent des écosystèmes en transformation. Le stigmate du rebut inhérent à la production de masse tout comme celui de la relégation d'une partie de la population s'y trouvent renversés. Plus encore, l'intuition, l'improvisation et le jeu donnent la mesure aux dialectiques en tension dans sa sculpture : l'apprivoisement du chaos et la vitalité des matières apparemment inertes. L'œuvre d'Abraham Cruzvillegas incarne ainsi un contrepoint à une culture standardisée qui éloigne tout rapport créatif au monde. Elle s'inscrit dans la lignée d'une société conviviale, au sens d'Ivan Illich (*La Convivialité*, 1973), *"qui donne à l'homme la possibilité d'exercer l'action la plus autonome et la plus créative"*.

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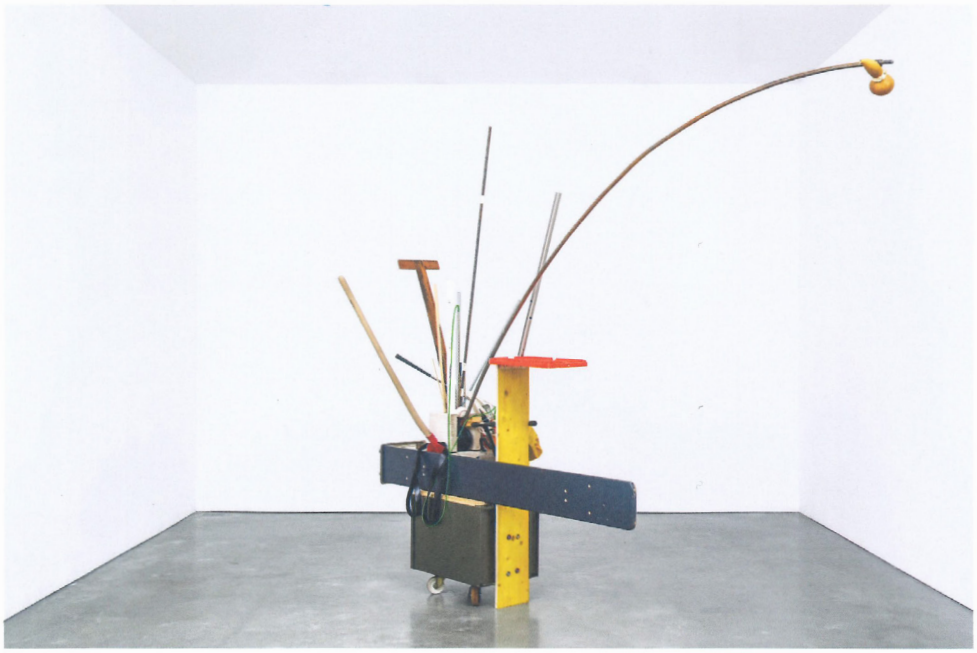
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"Existe-t-il des manières de produire des questions à partir de matériaux
et de formes qui ne produisent rien d'autre que davantage de questions ?
Y a-t-il de mauvaises questions ?
Comment pouvons-nous encore construire ensemble ?
Comment pouvons-nous restaurer le désir au XXI^e siècle ?
Est-il possible d'embrasser tout le corps comme un outil de pensée, encore ?"
Abraham Cruzvillegas pour *Geste/s*, octobre 2025.

Kathy Alliou
Abraham Cruzvillegas
Geste/s, N°16, December, 2025—January, 2026, p.60-69.



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El artista mexicano Abraham Cruzvillegas, exposición en el Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Amilly



El artista mexicano Abraham Cruzvillegas en RFI © Jordi Batallé

El artista mexicano Abraham Cruzvillegas acaba de inaugurar una nueva exposición en el Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Amilly, localidad francesa a un centenar de kilómetros al sur de París.

Abraham Cruzvillegas (Ciudad de México, 1968) es un artista conceptual mexicano que vive y trabaja en México. Su trabajo se caracteriza por la utilización de materiales encontrados y la re-utilización de objetos, en particular su proyecto llamado "Autoconstrucción". Su obra utiliza medios como la escultura, pintura, dibujo, instalación y video con la cual Cruzvillegas revela un compromiso con el mundo material que lo rodea además de interesarse en la construcción y transformación continua de identidades tanto personales como colectivas. Para sus esculturas el artista acumula objetos encontrados en las inmediaciones del lugar donde va a crear la pieza y los reorganiza aleatoriamente en piezas escultóricas que desafían los cánones tradicionales de la creación artística.

Jordi Batallé
El artista mexicano Abraham Cruzvillegas, exposición en el Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Amilly
RFI, July 5, 2022
https://cutt.ly/MLstjEc

En México es representado por la galería kurimanzutto.

Abraham Cruzvillegas es profesor de escultura en la École des Beaux Arts de París desde septiembre de 2018.

Cruzvillegas creció en Ajusco, un distrito al sur de la Ciudad de México. Estudió pedagogía en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Más tarde fue profesor de Historia y Teoría del Arte en la misma universidad.

Abraham Cruzvillegas comenzó su carrera como escultor y escritor en una nueva ola de arte conceptual en la Ciudad de México durante las décadas de 1980 y 1990. Fue alumno de Gabriel Orozco entre 1987 y 1991, y ha sido señalado como la principal influencia en la obra de Cruzvillegas. Junto con Orozco, Damian Ortega, Dr. Lakra, y Minerva Cuevas, se considera a Cruzvillegas como parte de un nuevo movimiento en arte latinoamericano (comparado con el auge YBA en Gran Bretaña durante la década de 1980 o el movimiento modernista de la década de 1920)

Junto con Gabriel Kuri, Dr. Lakra y Orozco, participó en "Taller de los Viernes", una reunión semanal la que los artistas se conocían y colaboraban en proyectos.1 Como explicó Cruzvillegas en el catálogo de la exposición Escultura Social: Una Generación Nueva de Arte de Ciudad de México (2007): "aprendimos juntos a hablar, criticar, y transformar nuestro trabajo individualmente, sin programas, calificaciones, exámenes, diplomas o represalias. No pretendíamos hacernos conocidos, preparar un espectáculo, ir en contra de la corriente, hacernos presentes como grupo, o incluso trabajar... ésta era mi educación". Esto llevó a la creación del espacio "Temístocles 44" en la década de 1990, fundado por Eduardo Abaroa y Cruzvillegas.

Trabajos y exposiciones

Las obras de Cruzvillegas se han presentado en diversas ciudades de México, América y Europa. Algunos elementos del proyecto Autoconstrucción fueron expuestos en el Tate Modern en marzo de 2012, en el Museo de Arte Moderno de Oxford en 2011, en el Walker Art Center en 2013, y en el Haus der Kunst, Múnich en 2014. Su obra está en resguardo en varias colecciones, incluyendo al Tate Modern, Londres y el MoMA, Nueva York. Cruzvillegas ha expuesto sus obras en exposiciones individuales y grupales en varias galerías de Europa, América del Sur y Estados Unidos. En 1994, su obra fue presentada en la quinta Bienal de la Habana; en 2002 en la XXV Bienal de São Paulo; en 2003 en la Quincuagésima Bienal de Venecia; en 2005 en la primera Bienal de Torino; en 2008 en la Bienal de Cali, en Colombia; en la Décima Bienal de la Habana, y la Séptima Bienal do Mercosul en Portoalegre. Su trabajo también ha sido expuesto en el New Museum en la Ciudad de Nueva York. Cruzvillegas Participó en ROUNDTABLE: La novena Bienal de Gwangju, la cual tuvo lugar de septiembre a noviembre de 2012 en Gwangju, Corea. En agosto de 2012, se anunció a Cruzvillegas como el ganador del quinto Premio anual de Yanghuyn.7 En 2014, fue el tema de una exposición conjunta entre la Colección Júmex y el Museo Amparo.

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Autoconstrucción

En 2007, Cruzvillegas comenzó una serie de obras llamada autoconstrucción. De acuerdo con Chris Sharp en la revista ArtReview, "autoconstrucción ha sido capaz de manifestarse en [...] muchas facetas, sitios y modos: desde esculturas autónomas pequeñas a grandes instalaciones escultórico-arquitectónicas; desde colaboraciones musicales móviles a una película de una hora, incluso una obra de teatro. Autoconstrucción es la multiplicidad encarnada. De hecho, el término podría usarse para designar más de un espíritu y una ética que, digamos, una estética dominada por la teoría." Declara en Art:21, "A veces, solamente juego con los materiales, encuentro combinaciones, tomo cualquier cosa que esté a la mano [...] las cosas hablan, [e] intento encontrar un equilibrio entre ellos".

Desde 2012, el proyecto fue acompañado por obras alrededor del tema de la "autodestrucción", Cruzvillegas explicó que, a través de las obras de autodestrucción "[quería] mostrar cómo el 'internacionalismo' o 'el estilo' es algo que debe ser apropiado, personalizado, modificado, adaptado e incluso destruido, según las necesidades específicas, locales, individuales, subjetivas."

Empty lot

En 2015, Cruzvillegas aceptó una comisión del Tate Modern; su obra, Empty lot (Lote baldío) estuvo en exhibición entre el 13 de octubre de 2015 y el 3 de abril de 2016.12 La obra consta de 240 parcelas triangulares de madera bordeadas con marcos de madera, llenos con 23 toneladas de tierra recogida de distintos jardines y parques de Londres (incluyendo Hackney Marshes, Peckham Rye, el Museo Horniman y el Palacio de Buckingham). Toda la obra está alzada sobre dos plataformas en andamios triangulares, debajo de luz creciente, y acompañadas de otras esculturas más pequeñas. En una entrevista con The Independient, declaró,

La historia de la humanidad está basada en el movimiento, la transformación, y la esperanza [pero] poseer un lote de tierra que es tuyo y para tu familia es la esperanza principal de todo el mundo – tener un refugio, tener un terreno. Esta idea de esperanza es la que quiero tratar para la Turbine Hall. En su reseña para el Financial Times, Rachel Spence comparó los triángulos ordenados con El Lissitzky y la obra en general con New York Earth Room de Walter De Maria, declarando que "El resultado es una obra de arte que funciona en más niveles que The Shard: como proceso, como performance, como política y como espectáculo. Cruzvillegas dice que espera que esté en algún lugar "donde algo pueda crecer de la nada". Como un Beckett de dedos verdes, su filosofía de menos-es-más lo hace un vidente de nuestro tiempo.

Escribiendo para el Daily Telegraph, Mark Hudson notó la influencia de "los domos geodésicos de Buckminster Fuller y los jardines estructurados en red de los aztecas" y afirmó que "como una pieza de una escultura gigante, 'Empty Lot' es una de las comisiones de la Turbine Hall más dinámicas y emocionantes. Se siente suspendido en una isla geométrica perfectamente situada en el espacio inmenso." Jonathan Jones escribió en The Guardian, llamándola "floja y complaciente, como si no le molestara el reto poco interesada en ganarse una audiencia", una pieza de arte "sin poder estético y poco preciosa para pensar", la seleccionó como su "peor" instalación en la serie de Turbine Hall.

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https://cutt.ly/MLstjEc

Recepción e influencias

Para la Bienal de São Paulo de 2002, Cruzvillegas escribió: "En cualquier forma en la que el arte se hace evidente, debe quedar, por encima de todo, la materia prima en todos sus estados naturales, inestables, físicos, caóticos y cristalinos: sólido, líquido, coloidal y gaseoso. Es la alegría de la energía. En una reseña del show de Cruzvillegas en 2003 para el New York Times, Holland Cotter escribió, "En toda la obra del señor Cruzvillegas poco se habla pero mucho se dice".

En una monografía de Cruzvillegas en la revista Frieze de 2006, Tom Morton discute una obra sin título de 1993 que recuerda a Rueda de bicicleta de Marcel Duchamp (1913), aunque los soportes de la rueda han sido reemplazados have been replaced "por un panel circular en el que su padre, ahora un académico, alguna vez pintó un ramo de claveles rojos". Morton afirma que "al juntar el trabajo de estos dos hombres Cruzvillegas no sólo expande la noción de 'influencia' para que incluya los micro-temas del contexto doméstico específico y los macro-temas de la historia del arte, pero también pone en tela de juicio la pureza del ready-made – que es decir, su inconsecuencialidad, su objeto-vidad muda".

Chris Sharp escribió en Art Review de enero de 2013 que "sus obras a menudo se unen por una sensibilidad formal identificable, cuya estética predominante de arte encontrado o de material pobre le debe tanto a Robert Rauschenberg, David Hammons y Jimmie Durham como a Gabriel Orozco. La diferencia entre ellos y Cruzvillegas es el programa altamente personal, específica e inherentemente primigenia al cual se adhiere su universo material y cultural.".

Niamh Coglane escribió sobre Cruzvillegas en la revista Aesthetica de febrero de 2013 y notó que "Trabajos como Aeropuerto Alterno (2002), A.C. Móvil (2008) o Sin título / Untitled (1999), que referencia directamente a Rueda de bicicleta de Marcel Duchamp, exhibiendo un fuerte elemento Duchampiano, no sólo por su estética sino por elementos apropiativos", y establece que "Cruzvillegas hace con materiales lo que Marcel Broodthaers y René Magritte hicieron con palabras y lingüística.1 También Gareth Harris escribió en The Art Newspaper de enero de 2014 que "con su vasto rango de ensambles escultóricos construidos meticulosamente con objetos encontrados, el artista mexicano Abraham Cruzvillegas ha sido nombrado el equivalente del Marcel Duchamp en el siglo xxi".

En 2014 se transmitió un perfil de Cruzvillegas en el tercer episodio de la séptima temporada de Art:21, programa de arte contemporáneo de la PBS. Cruzvillegas dijo acerca de Gustav Metzger "[su] posición como activista y artista ha sido una gran inspiración para mí"

Jordi Batallé
El artista mexicano Abraham Cruzvillegas, exposición en el Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Amilly
RFI, July 5, 2022
https://cutt.ly/MLstjEc

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

D S C E N E



Katarina Djoric
Contradictory Encounters — ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS
DESIGN SCENE, Issue 15, Summer 2021, p. 46-49



Abraham Cruzvillegas Untitled portable sculpture (La Señora de Las Nueces) 9, 2020-2021 Wood, leather, steel, polyester, beer caps, nuts, concrete, stones Approx. 385 x 180 x 110 cm | 151 5/8 x 70 7/8 x 43 2/8 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Martin Argyroglo.

Contradictory Encounters

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS

DSCENE Editor Katarina Djoric sits down with Paris-based visual artist Abraham Cruzvillegas to talk about his art practice, waste, and consumerism, as well as his ongoing autoconstrucciónproject.

Where does your LOVE for art come from? - From my family. All kinds of art havesurrounded my siblings and me for as long as I can remember: listening to symphonies and dancing to cumbia with our mother, while looking at our father painting at home, cooking and gardening altogether, storytelling attempting to produce some sort of rhyme and mischievous sense before going to bed at night, and drawing a family cadavre-exquis in the morning, before heading to school...

How did your life and upbringing in Mexico influence your art practice? - In many different ways. My practice has that personal experience as a crucial material, but not as a subject matter of the works and projects I make, it's just a starting point.

Could you describe the idea of autoconstrucción? Is it more like a building or a transformation? - Autoconstrucción is a term that I appropriated and it refers to the process of building a house by the family that inhabits it, which is something that happens everywhere in the world with different names, when people are not able to acquire a property at once or to hire an architect to design a house. But for me, coming from such a context, it means also the permanent and unstable construction of the self, as the definitely unfinished process of identity; not mine only, as an individual, but of all humans. This way the word "transformation" is inherent to autoconstrucción. My work doesn't pretend to illustrate these ideas, but to activate processes in which transformation, in different ways, could take shape in space, that could be perceived as art.

Your work questions our relationship with objects by removing them from a position of complacency into one of fresh perspective. Do you think this sort of practice disrupts regular thinking and triggers the unconscious? - All interpretations about my work are welcomed, but I would also insist on an extreme consciousness about the social, political, economic, historical, and even ideological aspects of material life and culture. I would not produce propaganda or pamphlets about my context or my circumstance, but I would better try to share my questions with any possible audience, that could produce their own questions as well. The questions might be completely different from mine, creating some productive friction and precarious instability in the work, both conceptual and material, through the subjective understanding of the same arrangement of objects. All narratives compose a multiplicity of meaning for a single work, multiplying it geometrically, ideally.

Would you say your art expresses processes and ideas rather than being confined to only the visual presentation? - I believe that any visual presentation, or representation, can trigger diverse expressions—sometimes contradictory and slippery—but from the people who are looking at artwork, not necessarily from its authors only. My ideas when making art are only references that might not be intended to communicate, to express, or to tell

Katarina Djoric
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“I like witnessing the inner dialogue of a simple arrangement of things, the way ikebana works, the way cooking happens: putting together things that, as a whole, keep being themselves, but just in a different presentation.”

anything to anybody. I prefer my work to be autonomous from myself, free to be appropriated or to be understood in as many ways as possible, changing its identity permanently, as well.

You call yourself a matchmaker, an animist voyeur. Please elaborate on that. - I like witnessing the inner dialogue of a simple arrangement of things, the way ikebana works, the way cooking happens: putting together things that, as a whole, keep being themselves, but just in a different presentation. I’ve tried all kinds of combinations, testing the strangest of the materials and beings—including myself and other animals—and it always works. Things are alive, they speak among themselves, sometimes there are disagreements, friction, and refusal, and then they arrive to a happy end, after a good negotiation. Sometimes the arrangement collapses, and I accept this as part of the process as well, as part of the art; there’s no chance for a mistake, ever.

What attracts you to certain objects? Is your choice of an object primarily an aesthetic decision or are cultural associations also an important consideration? - I love trying contradictory encounters, sometimes setting some rules, sometimes just improvising. The best is always a good combination of both of these, by breaking my own rules and by planning in detail all the steps. Industrial bright new plastic commodities work very well with organic live elements that could sprout, bloom, dry or rot during an exhibition time. Traditional handmade craft objects, from anywhere around the world, can navigate reality very nicely along with them as well. Together with raw materials, leftovers from architecture, and broken furniture, besides very heavily loaded stuff from my personal life, that goes anonymous and humble with everything else. That cluster of things can be hung together from the ceiling and touching the floor simultaneously in a museum gallery, and be interpreted by a child that would discover something that I didn’t notice while putting them together: that would be the moment when aesthetic associations and considerations happen.

Where do you source your objects? - They find me.

Is there also some kind of commentary on waste and consumerism in your work? - I prefer to think about the possibility of a permanent transformation of all objects, materials, and circumstances, according to the context, the way nothing is dead. I only use things that can be used, I never use garbage. When I see things abandoned in the street, or thrown away and discarded, I almost always find possibility in them. Unless they are useless, like many pieces of cheap furniture that are made so that they have to be replaced very fast; the way consumerism dictates. I never use these things.

How would you define LOVE? - Togetherness. Partnership. Parenthood. Trust. Friendship. Care. Complicity. Fun. Work.

Do you believe in LOVE at first sight? - Yes.

What is your favorite LOVE quote? - “Love is love”, a song by Culture Club

What is next for you? - Some new expectations, I hope...

Katarina Djoric
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Installation view Abraham Cruzvillegas, La Señora de Las Nueces Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, France (23/01 — 27/02/2021) Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Martin Argyroglo

Katarina Djoric
Contradictory Encounters — ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS
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Abraham Cruzvillegas Is Growing an Oasis of Healing Plants in a Miami Park



Installation view of *Agua dulce* by Abraham Cruzvillegas at The Bass. Photo by Zaire Kacz. Image courtesy of The Bass, Miami Beach

From now until next spring, a new, wild greenspace will take shape in Miami Beach, in front of the art deco building that houses The Bass. Tropical pond apple trees, coastal plain willows, prickly pear cactuses, and sunset-hued blossoms will offer a place of respite in an art installation subject to nature's whims, titled *Agua dulce*, which is Spanish for "freshwater." The project is the latest work by Mexico-born artist Abraham Cruzvillegas, and like much of his work, it is centered on metamorphosis.

The installation in Collins Park, which runs through April 18, 2021, will feature more than 1,000 plants of 27 different species, many with a history of use for healing. The piece serves as an oasis during a time when it's safer to be outdoors than inside. In fact, *Agua dulce* is part of The Bass's series "Art Outside," which was launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jacqui Palumbo
Abraham Cruzvillegas Is Growing an Oasis of Healing Plants in a Miami Park
Artsy, December 4, 2020
https://cutt.ly/uhRGQBv



Agua dulce being installed in Collins Park in front of The Bass Museum of Art.

Cruzvillegas had initially planned a third iteration of his show "Hi, how are you, Gonzo?" for The Bass. That show ran at The Contemporary Austin and the Aspen Art Museum and included community events such as performances, book swaps, and ceramics classes. But when the pandemic made gathering unsafe, Cruzvillegas and curators Silvia Karman Cubiñá and Leilani Lynch started from scratch.

Yet *Agua dulce* is not a departure for Cruzvillegas. Like his larger practice, shaped by his upbringing in Colonia Ajusco, Mexico City, the bedrock of the installation is not the medium used but intangible ideas: transformation, collaboration, and "the local," which includes everything from how the materials are sourced to how the nearby community is engaged.

"The most important elements [of the installation] were approaching 'the local' in different ways," Cruzvillegas said. The plants, which are all native to Florida, will be distributed around the city after the installation comes to an end. And the seating, designed by the artist and built by the museum staff, was crafted from locally sourced materials.

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Abraham Cruzvillegas
Esculturas pendientes, 8, 2019
kurimanzutto
Contact for price

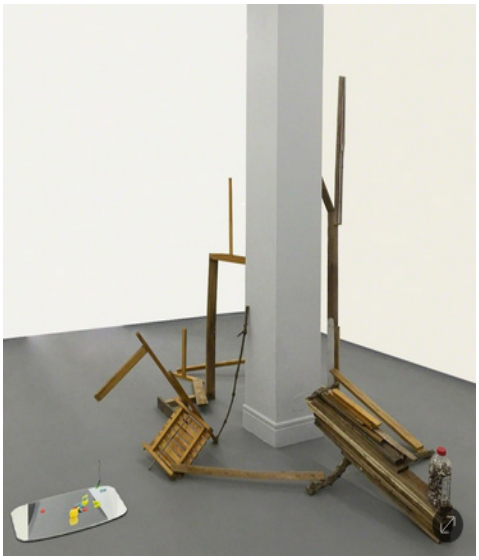


Abraham Cruzvillegas
Autoconcanción IV, 2016
Regen Projects

Community building has been central to Cruzvillegas's practice, influenced by the way that the homes were built in his neighborhood while he was growing up.

"People construct their own houses using almost no money, but through collaboration with neighbors or friends or relatives, using materials that are on hand," he explained. "It's not like buying an apartment or building a house after the design of an architect, but just doing how they can—that's the way I grew up with my family." He named his method of making art "*autoconstrucción*" after this practice of self-building, using found objects to create sculptural works and site-specific installations.

Jacqui Palumbo
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Abraham Cruzvillegas
Autorretrato istmeño escuchando "Colón Colón" con Lord Cobra....., 2015
Diablo Rosso
Sold



Abraham Cruzvillegas
Reconstruction: The Five Enemies II, 16, 201
kurimanzutto
Contact for price



Abraham Cruzvillegas
Reconstruction: The Five Enemies II, 8, 2018
kurimanzutto
Contact for price



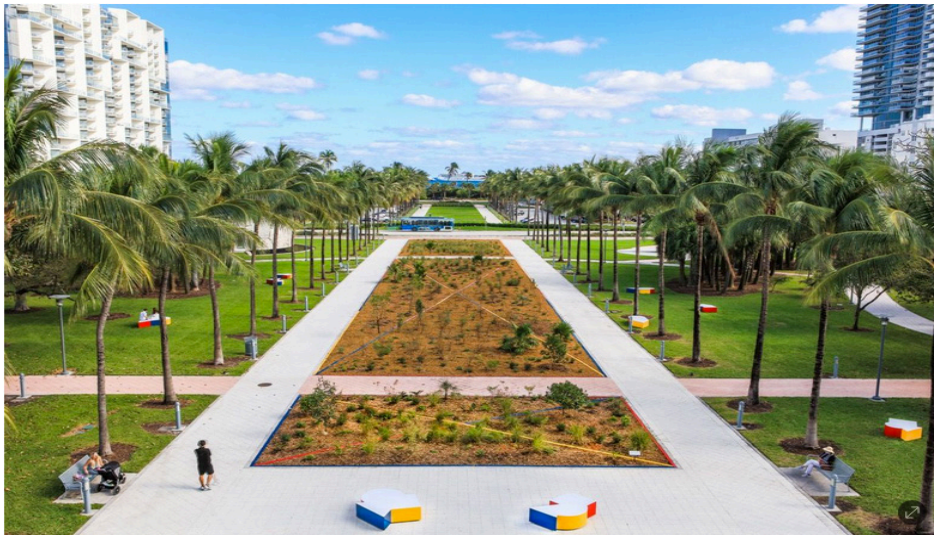
Abraham Cruzvillegas
Development as Freedom, 2010
TWO x TWO
Bidding closed

Jacqui Palumbo
Abraham Cruzvillegas Is Growing an Oasis of Healing Plants in a Miami Park
Artsy, December 4, 2020
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His larger works have resembled partially built neighborhoods or playgrounds, while his idiosyncratic sculptures have included a bouquet of machetes jammed into a wooden stand, or a bicycle with rearview mirrors stacked improbably high on its handlebars. At The Contemporary, scrap wood formed a makeshift quarterpipe and ramps for skateboarders; at Kurimanzutto Gallery in New York, a jettisoned wheel and taxidermy duck were just some of the objects hung from the ceiling. From his work, a language of urban improvisation emerges—one that is strange but tugs on the familiarity of memory.

During a decade when humanity is contending with the effects of migration —refugee crises in Europe and the United States, the impossibility of containing the pandemic in a globalized world, and a reckoning with cruel colonialist histories—Cruzvillegas's work provides reflection.

As with the native plants in *Agua dulce*, in his past works, seeds and roots have become metaphors for identity and its continual transformation, for what is indigenous versus what has relocated, traveling over land and sea.



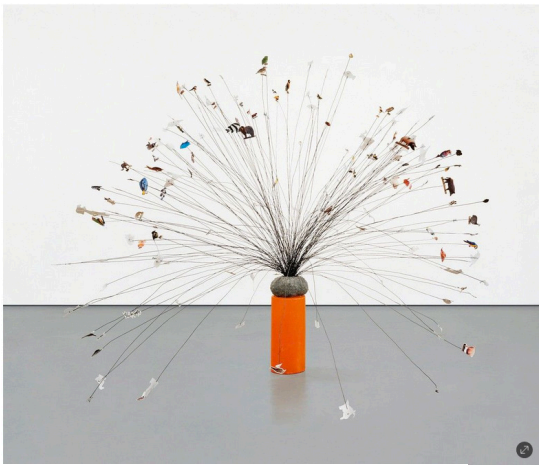
Installation view of *Agua dulce* by Abraham Cruzvillegas at The Bass. Photo by Zaire Kacz. Image courtesy of The Bass, Miami Beach

At his first solo show at Chantal Crousel in Paris in 2010, titled "À la Petite Ceinture," Cruzvillegas placed roots from local markets atop boards of scrap wood, which were nailed together to form an architectural structure redolent of fences and stacked homes. But many of the roots were not local at all, having been imported from Southeast Asia, North America, and other parts of Europe.

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Like *Agua dulce*, the work itself changed as time went on. "[It was] an enormous plinth for little roots, which during the exhibition, sprouted or dried, or even bloomed," he recalled.

Five years later, he mounted an installation at Tate Modern in London, in which soil was collected around the city and organized into an infrastructure of triangular wooden planters. Though nothing was intentionally planted, the soil was watered and lit by sun lamps for six months, allowing whatever seeds were there to flourish—or do nothing at all. Within the careful order of a museum setting, the capriciousness of nature was on display.



Abraham Cruzvillegas
Observatorio oriente (Eastern Observatory), 2003
Phillips



Abraham Cruzvillegas
Be Water My Friend 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, 2019
Para Site Benefit Auction

Now, Cruzvillegas is planning a follow-up to that project with his gallery Thomas Dane in London, using the specimens collected from the Tate. "We found…some 200 different species and almost none are British," he said. "The history of mankind, the history of trading and migration, travels because of nature, with seeds in the stomach of birds and so on."
At The Bass, the plants must live within the boundaries of the park's edges, but beyond that, the installation is out of Cruzvillegas's control, and he prefers it that way.

"I try to control almost nothing in the making of these projects," he said. "Anything can happen—the plants could die, or they could sprout. So it will be six months, and then people can witness transformation by itself."

Jacqui Palumbo
Abraham Cruzvillegas Is Growing an Oasis of Healing Plants in a Miami Park
Artsy, December 4, 2020
https://cutt.ly/uhRGQBv

He leaves other aspects of the planning to chance as well, by asking museum staff to interpret his instructions for the seating as they see fit. He sends sketches, but they choose the dimensions and which materials to work with. And finally, he welcomes the unfixed nature of the installation itself, as it is interpreted again and again through the eyes of viewers, taking a new form each time.

"There is this transformation through interpretation," he said. "When people look at any artwork, they think of something that nobody else can think about."

Identities are inherently unstable, too, he believes, as people are constantly undergoing change, molded by the mercurial nature of the world, like clay taking shape. Because of that, he considers his work ongoing research into the self, and broader identities too. Each work, then, can be considered a self-portrait.



Abraham Cruzvillegas
Autoconstrucción: Low Budget Rider, 2009
Museum of Arts and Design

"It's not that I'm producing self-portraits in the way of representation of the self," he said. "[I'm] trying to shift the conversation about your identity or the identity of whoever can see the work."

And that's why, though the materials he works with may be plants or soil or wood or fabric, or discarded bicycles or scythes, they are just the physical elements. There's memory, too, and associations imbued into the works with each new visitor.

"It's like thinking of my own experience as material," he said, "prime matter that I use and transform into something else." •

Jacqui Palumbo
Abraham Cruzvillegas Is Growing an Oasis of Healing Plants in a Miami Park
Artsy, December 4, 2020
https://cutt.ly/uhRGQBv

HYPERALLERGIC

Abraham Cruzvillegas's Sculptures Echo the Precariousness of Place

Cruzvillegas's forms embody the precariousness and hope, if not the danger, of contemporary notions of borders, and the forces at work that make them porous or impenetrable.



Installation view, *Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Ballad of Etc.*, The Arts Club of Chicago (photo by Michael Tropea)

CHICAGO — Abraham Cruzvillegas brings 11 new works to the modernist ground floor galleries at the Arts Club of Chicago. With his current exhibition, ***The Ballad of Etc.***, the artist has gathered refuse and debris from Chicago and his ancestral home in Michoacán, in western Mexico, to construct a set of highly contingent sculptures whose elements are tethered with thin ropes and twine to the gallery's walls and ceiling.

Laura Raicovich
« Abraham Cruzvillegas's Sculptures Echo the Precariousness of Place »
Hyperallergic.com, December 12, 2019

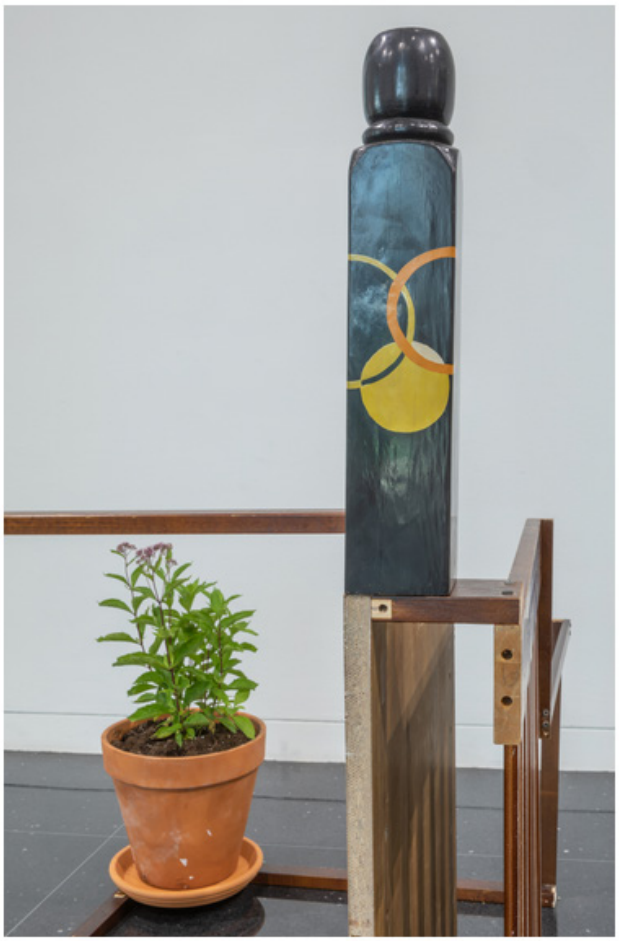


Installation view, *Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Ballad of Etc.*, The Arts Club of Chicago (photo by Michael Tropea)

The works reflect the hands and eye of their maker, as Cruzvillegas has chosen various objects discarded for their "uselessness" (e.g., a chair with a busted leg, a hat rack with broken pegs) and repurposed them to make new work. These items are positioned in relationship to one another, sometimes with pulleys and counterweights keeping them in place, their juxtapositions articulated in some cases by nylon crocheted into gossamer cone-like forms, suggesting they might be easily undone, collapsed, or ruined.

In addition, many of the constructions include modestly scaled pieces of wood lacquered in a traditional "maque" technique, delineating intersecting and concentric circles of the artist's design. Several of the sculptures are anchored by potted plants, such as cacti indigenous to the land that straddles Mexico and the US; milkweed, the only plant on which the migratory Monarch butterfly lays its eggs; and switchgrass, native to Illinois and common throughout the prairies of North America.

Laura Raicovich
« Abraham Cruzvillegas's Sculptures Echo the Precariousness of Place »
Hyperallergic.com, December 12, 2019



Installation view, *Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Ballad of Etc.*, The Arts Club of Chicago (photo by Michael Tropea)

The contrast between these works and the galleries in which they currently reside creates a sense of discomfort, and this too is important. Cruzvillegas's provisional "autoconstrucciones" abut the shine and precision of a hard-edged Modernist space (the steel stairs that lead up to the Arts Club's private spaces were designed by Mies van der Rohe). By making material the vulnerabilities of contemporary relationships between Chicago and Michoacán, tracing a physical (in)balance between geographies with the plants that traverse the edges of these nation states, Cruzvillegas's forms embody the precariousness and hope, if not the danger, of contemporary notions of borders, and the forces at work that make them porous or impenetrable.

Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Ballad of Etc. *continues at the Arts Club of Chicago (201 East Ontario St., Chicago, Illinois) through December 21.*

Laura Raicovich
« Abraham Cruzvillegas's Sculptures Echo the Precariousness of Place »
Hyperallergic.com, December 12, 2019

Galerie

The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens His Diary for Galerie

Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas's practice is rooted in the concept of *autoconstrucción*—or "self-construction," an idea grounded in notions of transformation, dialogue, and play. During his current exhibition at The Contemporary Austin, "Hi, How Are You, Gonzo?," a show co-organized by Aspen Art Museum CEO and director Heidi Zuckerman, Cruzvillegas creates sculpture from found objects and then engages visitors as participants in the transformation of the work. Thus, he has furnished the museum staff at The Contemporary with diagrams instructing them on how to create his sculptures. The Contemporary sourced found materials from around the city to create a set of site-specific assemblage sculptures that participants will activate during the run of the show through music, performances, workshops, roller derby, and artmaking led by Austin-based community partners.

Cruzvillegas has shown at museums and institutions around the world, including the Walker Art Center, MoMA, and Tate Modern, where, in 2015, he received the Tate Turbine Hall commission. His work has been featured in numerous biennials, including the Venice Biennale (2003), Documenta (2012), and the Gwangju Biennale (2012). He shows with Kurimanzutto.

As his show "Hi, How Are You, Gonzo?" is under way (the show will travel to the Aspen Art Museum in October 2019), Cruzvillegas shares his daily journal with *Galerie* at the behest of Aspen Art Museum's Zuckerman. In January, in celebration of the museum's 40th anniversary this year, Zuckerman began a project where she shared her journal with our readers for one week. Since then, she has asked one artist per month to share their journal with us. This month, it's Mexican artist Cruzvillegas.

"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
Galerie - May 7 2019
https://www.galeriemagazine.com/the-5-minute-journal-artist-abraham-cruzvillegas-opens-his-diary-for-galerie/

For more background on Cruzvillegas, you can also read an excerpt of an interview he did with Zuckerman, which will be published in *Conversations with Artists Vol. II* (Aspen Art Press, fall 2019). Enjoy!

Day 5: Abraham Cruzvillegas's 5-Minute Journal for Thursday, May 9, 2019



Still from video shot by Abraham Cruzvillegas.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

What made you feel loved today?
My dear colleagues from Monterrey, Mexico, sent me this video commemorating the sculpture we made in a workshop last year at Parque Fundidora, an urban sustainable park in Monterrey. It's a large pipe pole holding on its tip a whistle, exactly like the original one used at the foundry factory. The only difference with this one, is that it whistles randomly, subverting the efficiency of the original one. I asked them to paint it half pink, half green, celebrating again the beautiful artist Hélio Oiticica's samba school in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Pink and green are the national colors of the

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Mangueira neighborhood [a shantytown neighborhood] in Rio de Janeiro. I've been using this color combination for 15 years now all through my work. My colleagues on this project were Adrián Dávila, Alma Nelly Silva Vanegas, Amelia Carmen Loyola, Anllelica Pérez Salinas , Elías Juárez Kury, Fernanda Villarreal, Fernando Fuentes García, Guillermo Aguilar Huerta, José Ibarra Hernández, Luis Frías Leal, Mario Gildardo García, Nancy Guzmán Rodríguez, Yasodari Sánchez.



The traditional pre-Columbian *maque* lacquerwork made by the Navarro–De Saint Phalle family.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

What surprised you today?

Discussing with Janine Mileaf my project for this September at the Arts Club of Chicago, I had to find an image of the traditional pre-Columbian *maque* lacquerwork made by the fantastic family Navarro–De Saint Phalle (Martina, Erandine, Sophie, Irepani, and Thomas), from Capacuaro, Mexico, that I'll include again in my sculptures. I'll also incorporate found objects, local plants, and handmade works by Tarascan immigrants in Illinois, as I did for works in my recent show at Kurimanzutto gallery in Mexico City. I would also love to work again with the color theory of Swiss expressionist painter Johannes Itten to make funkier combinations for new empty Venn diagrams.

"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
Galerie - May 7 2019
https://www.galeriemagazine.com/the-5-minute-journal-artist-abraham-cruzvillegas-opens-his-diary-for-galerie/

Day 4: Abraham Cruzvillegas's 5-Minute Journal for Wednesday, May 8, 2019



What made you feel loved today?
Having the punk band Bat Lip performing in my exhibition space at The Contemporary Austin museum during the roller derby was a nice reminder today about all activations happening there until July.



"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
Galerie - May 7 2019
https://www.galeriemagazine.com/the-5-minute-journal-artist-abraham-cruzvillegas-opens-his-diary-for-galerie/

What was the most surprising thing about your day?

Being drawn by Amelie Bendrik became a highlight today!!!



What would you have done differently?

Trying to make a new work out of children's leftovers . . .

"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
Galerie - May 7 2019
https://www.galeriemagazine.com/the-5-minute-journal-artist-abraham-cruzvillegas-opens-his-diary-for-galerie/

Day 3: Abraham Cruzvillegas's 5-Minute Journal for Tuesday, May 7, 2019



What made you feel loved today?
Today was surprisingly nice. After years of friendship, knowing that Alexandre Constanzo—the French philosopher who specializes in art and cinema—is as deeply in love with Pier Paolo Pasolini's work as I am. Alex visited the atelier group at the Beaux-Arts of Paris, and we discussed again Antonin Artaud, Wang Bing, Thomas Hirshhorn, Jean-Luc Moulene, Pedro Costa, and Franz Kafka.

What was the most surprising thing about your day?
It was fantastic having Niklas Svennung in this conversation: I met Alex through him, some 13 years ago, because they attended the same school as children. Now we work together.

"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
Galerie - May 7 2019
https://www.galeriemagazine.com/the-5-minute-journal-artist-abraham-cruzvillegas-opens-his-diary-for-galerie/

What would you have done differently?

Taking a look at the photos I took almost a year ago in Aspen—as my exhibition at The Contemporary Austin museum will travel to the Aspen Art Museum in October this year, I regretted not having a better one from the gondolas there. I'm still thinking of doing something in one of them—hopefully!

Day 2: Abraham Cruzvillegas's 5-Minute Journal for Monday, May 6, 2019



Courtesy of the artist.

"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
Galerie - May 7 2019
https://www.galeriemagazine.com/the-5-minute-journal-artist-abraham-cruzvillegas-opens-his-diary-for-galerie/

What made you feel loved today?

When I arrived today to the atelier in the school for today's meeting with the Beaux-Arts' students, I saw this handrail that I didn't notice before. I found it really beautiful and took a picture of it. Then I remembered that I've been taking pictures of similar objects in different places and situations for many years. I thought that it would be nice to make an exhibition of re-creations of all of them. The handrail makes me think of those at my parents' house, that my father's friend Gabriel Jiménez installed everywhere so as not to fall on all the ramps.

What was the most surprising thing about your day?

It was nice reading this comment of one of the students in the studio: "The best discovery from the atelier is the twist of my consciousness about collective action, about its difficulties, and that it's absolutely necessary, anyways."



"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
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https://www.galeriemagazine.com/the-5-minute-journal-artist-abraham-cruzvillegas-opens-his-diary-for-galerie/

What would you have done differently?
I don't know exactly what's not wrong in this scene that I found when arriving to the space in the school where we hold Monday meetings.

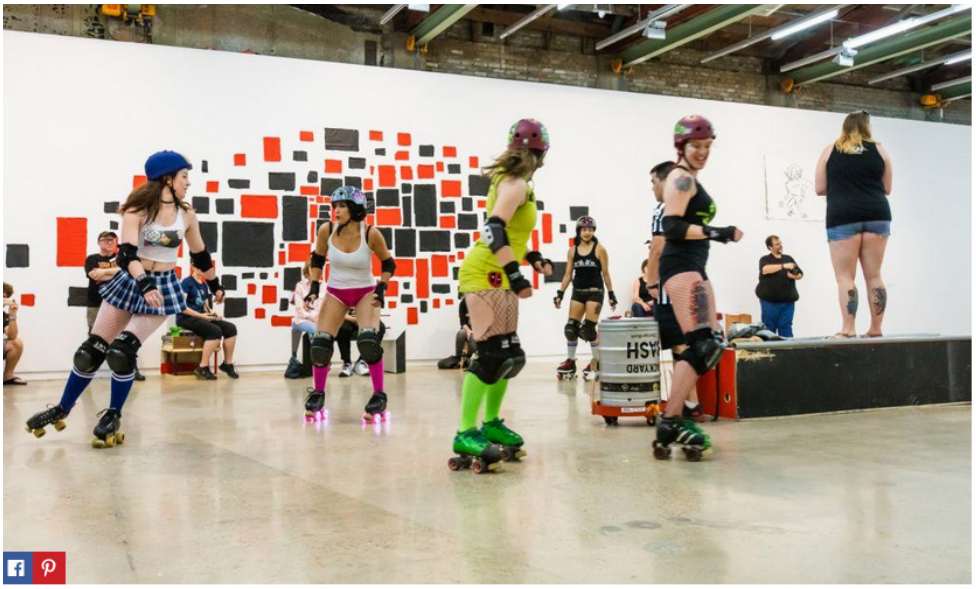
DAY 1: Abraham Cruzvillegas's 5-Minute Journal for Sunday, May 5, 2019

What made you feel loved today?
My son, DJ's fourth birthday rock-and-roll party, on May 5th!!! Along with Ana, my sister, DJ keeps collecting all kind of little debris from the street and says, "For your sculpture, Papá. . . . " In the picture, he is mimicking Lux Interior, from The Cramps, after the playlist we arranged together as a soundtrack for his party, but also for collecting things as we walk around. The playlist included that band but also Blondie, Three Souls in My Mind, The Slits, X-Ray Spex, the Bodysnatchers, Rigo Tovar y Su Costa Azul, The Ramones, The Clash, and some Beatles as well. . . . The song we were listening to is "Garbageman."



Abraham Cruzvillegas's son, DJ.
Courtesy of Abraham Cruzvillegas

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nstallation view of Abraham Cruzvillegas's exhibition "Hi, How Are You, Gonzo?," at The Contemporary Austin
Photo: Courtesy of Abraham Cruzvillegas



What would you have done differently?

I'm anxious to go back to teaching tomorrow morning, at the École Nationale de Beaux-Arts of Paris, after two weeks of a fantastic vacation in Sicily.

"The 5-Minute Journal: Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas Opens his diary for Galerie"
Galerie - May 7 2019
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REVIEWS May 1, 2018

Abraham Cruzvillegas

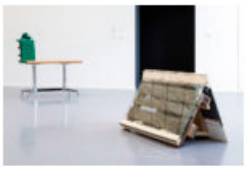
ZURICH

at Kunsthaus Zürich



View of Abraham Cruzvillegas's exhibition "Autorreconstrucción: Social Tissue," 2018, at the Kunsthaus Zürich.





Abraham Cruzvillegas's sculptures and installations often hew to a principle he calls "autoconstrucción" (or "self-construction"), which—inspired by the manner of architecture he encountered while growing up in the Ajusco neighborhood of Mexico City—centers on making work collaboratively in an ad hoc fashion with materials at hand. The approach, which he began pursuing around a decade and a half ago, has spawned various offshoots, such as *autodestrucción* and *autoconfusión*. His Kunsthaus Zürich exhibition seemed to signal a new development. Titled "Autorreconstrucción: Social Tissue," the show was a constantly changing installation: not only were sculptures regularly produced on-site and incorporated into the overall mix, but workshops and other events carried out within the installation served to alter it with their frequent activity and influxes of people.

Arife Rosenmeyer
« *Reviews - Abraham Cruzvillegas zt Kunsthaus Zurich* »
Art in America, May 1, 2018.
https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/abraham-cruzvillegas/

Usually, the windows in this gallery at the Kunsthaus are covered, but for Cruzvillegas's show they were not, allowing sunlight to stream into the space—openness was the order of the day. In a "studio" area set up near the windows, assistants made works using a motley assortment of materials, including cardboard, plastic and wooden crates, and discarded electronic equipment. They painted certain components pink and green (a palette Cruzvillegas has used in previous work, in reference to the colors of a mambo school that Hélio Oiticica was involved with, and took great inspiration from, in the Mangueira favela in Rio de Janeiro). The assemblages were sometimes given absurd flourishes, as in a chair on roller skates that was incorporated into *Das soziale Gewebe A* (Social Tissue A, 2018), which also featured shelving units and a potted tree. Organic elements cropped up repeatedly: in addition to several houseplants, there were a couple avocadoes, a spring onion, a sweet potato, and so on. A stage, a reading area, and a sort of skate park were constructed. Events held in these areas included concerts by local bands, a series of lectures given by refugees on subjects ranging from fashion in Senegal to aircraft maintenance, choreography workshops, and skateboard lessons. Visitors were allowed to sit, climb atop, and otherwise interact with many of the pieces, as well as to make works themselves.

As sculptures were completed, they were transferred into the exhibition proper and given labels, and, thus, endowed with the status of artworks. While most work in the show was of this newly constructed variety, there were some extant sculptures by Cruzvillegas on display, including a few pieces from 2017 featuring circular fishing nets. For each of these, a net is pulled up from the ground into a cone shape by a cord. Dangling at one end of the cord (just above the net) is a pigeon claw, and at the other a dried sausage, some smoked scamorza, or a beer bottle. Such works attested to the poetry, humor, and oddly affecting quality Cruzvillegas's sculpture can have, though they were inevitably overpowered by all the hubbub around them.

Cruzvillegas's approach in the show was both traditional (in that his community-oriented project was taking place within the confines of an established institution) and experimental (with the artist testing how he might direct the resources at his disposal to generate an expanded form of art-making). While one wished to see more of Cruzvillegas's own sculptures, the art in this show lay, as the title suggested, in the social fabric that he wove. The perishable items scattered around the exhibition underscored that something intentionally short-lived and provisional was being orchestrated.

Arife Rosenmeyer
« *Reviews - Abraham Cruzvillegas zt Kunsthaus Zurich* »
Art in America, May 1, 2018.
https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/abraham-cruzvillegas/

An Aerial Dance with an Abraham Cruzvillegas Sculpture

At the Kitchen, choreographer Bárbara Foulkes will perform an improvised aerial dance with Cruzvillegas's suspended sculpture, with musical accompaniment by Andrés García Nestitla.



Abraham Cruzvillegas, Bárbara Foulkes, and Andrés García Nestitla, view of the performance, "Insistir Insistir Insistir" at La Pista, Mexico City (2017, courtesy of the artists, photo by Carlos Altamirano Allende)

The sculptural assemblages of Abraham Cruzvillegas often appear precarious, fragile, and haphazard, creating a heightened awareness of their fragility — and a fear of tripping over a taught rope or delicately balanced chair. Cruzvillegas, however, does not share viewers' precious attitudes toward his art objects. In his performances, most of these Rube Goldberg machine-like installations, which string together found materials, become percussive instruments or dynamic objects that spin into motion with the help of choreography and musical accompaniment. One such sculptural performance is coming to Chelsea this week.

At the Kitchen, *Autorreconstrucción: To Insist, to Insist, to Insist...* will feature a sculpture Cruzvillegas is assembling from materials gathered on the streets of West Chelsea — an area in the midst of a major construction boom of high-end office and condo buildings. On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, choreographer Bárbara Foulkes will perform an improvised, aerial dance, a duet of sorts with Cruzvillegas's suspended sculpture, with musical accompaniment by Andrés García Nestitla.

Benjamin Sutton
« *An Aerial Dance with an Abraham Cruzvillegas sculpture* »
Hyperallergic, April 3, 2018.
https://hyperallergic.com/435950/abraham-cruzvillegas-performance-the-kitchen/



Abraham Cruzvillegas, Bárbara Foulkes, and Andrés García Nestitla, view of the performance, "Insistir Insistir Insistir" (June 22, 2017) at La Pista, Mexico City (courtesy of the artists; photo by Carlos Altamirano Allende)

"*Autoconstrucción* is about scarcity, solutions and ingenuity ... how you can conceive a philosophy of life that you can make something out of nothing," the artist has said of this project, which debuted in his hometown of Mexico City last year. "That is also a metaphor for identity ... we are constantly transforming ourselves." For those seeking further insight into the processes and ideas informing the liftoff of this unwieldy sculpture, Cruzvillegas will discuss the work with co-curator Tim Griffin at 5pm on Saturday.

When: Thursday, April 5 and Friday, April 6 at 6:30pm and 8:30pm; Saturday, April 7 at 2:30pm, 4:30pm, 6:30pm (artist talk Saturday at 5pm)
Where: The Kitchen (512 West 19th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan)



Abraham Cruzvillegas, Bárbara Foulkes, and Andrés García Nestitla, view of the performance, "Insistir Insistir Insistir" (June 22, 2017) at La Pista, Mexico City (courtesy of the artists; photo by Carlos Altamirano Allende)

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Rodriguez-Campo, Elisa. « Abraham Cruzvillegas, Galerie Chantal Crousel »,
ArtNexus, *No.106*, September - November 2017, pp. 107-108.

ArtNexus

Abraham Cruzvillegas

Galerie Chantal Crousel

With the exhibition titled *The Water Trilogy 1: Ichárhuta: Autodefensión Approximante Vibrante Retroflexe* Mexican artist Abraham Cruzvillegas pays a heartfelt homage to the natural, cultural and historic heritage of the Mexican state of Michoacán.

In two spaces of the Galerie Chantal Crousel, in the city of Paris, Cruzvillegas installed a group of proposals centered on the serious issue of pollution and the degradation of the town's main driving force and center: Lake Pátzcuaro. It is an issue that has caused the disappearance of local species and the end of several cultural practices like traditional fishing, a longstanding practice in this community since time immemorial.

With his characteristic adherence to synthesis and the collection and recontextualization of diverse elements, Abraham Cruz Villegas establishes a grammar charged with new connotations as he warns us about the imminent loss of the main natural and cultural values in the state of Michoacán, a "place of fishermen," according to Nahuatl ety-

Abraham Cruzvillegas. View exhibition *"The Water Trilogy 1: Ichárhuta: Autodefensión Approximante Vibrante Retroflexe"*, 2017. Installation. Variable dimensions. Photography: Florian Kleinefenn. Courtesy: Galerie Chantal Crousel.



Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Rodriguez-Campo, Elisa. « Abraham Cruzvillegas, Galerie Chantal Crousel »,
ArtNexus, *No.106*, September - November 2017, pp. 107-108.

ArtNexus

mology. Michoacán was the name that the Aztecs and Mexicans gave to this fertile territory in Western Mexico, where majestic lakes were once surrounded by dense pine forests.

By relying on different icons historically associated with fishing and life around the lake, Cruzvillegas underscores the profound denunciation and clamor for the recovery of lost values.

Several audiovisual installations rely on music as an accurate vehicle to express, in falsetto and with improvised coplas and violins, a compelling message performed by a traditional Huasteco trio. A desperate song, sang by an *Ambystoma dumerilii* (known as *achoque* or axolotl) about to be devoured by a white fish, narrates the imminent extinction of life in the lake. Both are endemic and, unfortunately, endangered species that only live in Lake Pátzcuaro.

A staple of the local culture, the *Chirostoma estor* or white fish (also known as *michin*) hoists the glyph of Michoacán at the top of a green hill. Unfortunately, the white fish that for centuries fed the communities established in the region has been replaced by exotic species introduced in the lake, dramatically altering its natural equilibrium.

Cruzvillegas puts into orbit the cultural universe of Michoacán around the exhibition's central piece: *Ichárhuta atonal en cientotreyntaidosavos de tono (para Luis González y González)* [Ichárhuta Atonal in a Onehundredthirtysecond Tone (for Luis González y González) 2017], a canoe specially used for fishing carved from a single block of pinewood. This watercraft is suspended in the air 49 meters (160.7 feet) high from the floor of the exhibition room, a number that corresponds to the shocking amount of mass that the lake has lost in little more than a decade.

Cruzvillegas declares his intention of shedding light on the effects of human activity on the environment and the manner in which such activity generates palpable and highly symbolic content. He emphasizes the delicate natural balance that can be literally left hanging in the air when no appropriate actions are taken and no efforts are made to generate awareness.

Located at high altitude, Lake Pátzcuaro is home of an important settlement of archaeological, natural and cultural remains. Its degradation is the direct result of global warming, the deforestation of neighboring forests and a population increase in the area, in combination with high levels of pollution, which not only negatively affects the local life but also its traditions.

Abraham Cruzvillegas proposes a reconstruction with the remnants that once made this region great: dances, rituals, the dynamics of community collaboration and, above all, fishing—the activity from which the term Michoacán and the demonym *michoacanos* originate—is practiced with the emblematic butterfly shaped nets called *guaromútacuas*. This practice is reproduced on the enlarged copy of a fifty pesos bill that is part of the exhibition and that also serves as a fantastic exhibition room sheet.

Fishing nets and gear are displayed across the gallery space to convey the fragility that their existence represents.

Black and white postcards—memory fragments—of the overexploited region are displayed on the walls and kept in place with a machete and a sickle. They are intervened with drawings of the peculiar salamander that has also been condemned to extinction.

Lastly, Cruzvillegas echoes a particular situation that is sadly replicated in several other lakes and rivers whose waters embody the tragedy of environmental degradation. To right this wrong it is necessary to be self-motivated and become aware: we are all responsible when it comes to defending what is ours.

The Water Trilogy 1: Ichárhuta: Autodefensión Approximante Vibrante Retroflexe is the first part of an exhibition trilogy. The second part was presented at the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, in Tokyo (April, 2017), and the third one will be exhibited at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, in Rotterdam (October, 2017).

ELISA RODRÍGUEZ-CAMPO

Vettier, Elsa. « Abraham Cruzvillegas », *Zéro Deux*, Numéro 80, 2016.
https://www.zerodeux.fr/reviews/abraham-cruzvillegas/

Abraham Cruzvillegas

par Elsa Vettier



***Autoconstriction approximante vibrante rétroflexe*, Carré d'Art, Nîmes,**

14.10. 2016 – 19.02.2017

Dans un ouvrage paru en 2010 intitulé *Vibrant Matter*, la théoricienne politique Jane Bennett raconte comment un matin à Baltimore elle fut interpelée par un amas de déchets gisant dans un caniveau. Le tableau formé par un vieux gant en plastique, un bout de bois érodé et un cadavre de rongeur exhibait selon elle son « *thing power* », autrement dit la capacité de ces choses a priori inanimées à avoir un effet non seulement sur quiconque prendrait le temps de les considérer mais, par extension, sur la vie publique. Cette matière vivante que sont les débris habite le travail d'un certain nombre d'artistes dont Abraham Cruzvillegas fait partie. À Nîmes, comme à Los Angeles, Saint-Nazaire ou Glasgow auparavant, l'artiste mexicain s'est tourné vers les rebuts matériels de la ville afin de composer avec eux une seule et même sculpture qui court à travers les trois salles du Carré d'Art. Les palettes, matelas, bribes de carcasses métalliques mis bout à bout forment un agrégat hétéroclite rampant et sinueux. Là où étagères et caissons s'empilent, l'assemblage se densifie et s'élève sans que jamais la liaison entre les objets ne soit rompue. Les fils électriques, tuyaux et autres tiges métalliques qui hérissent l'installation en de nombreux endroits semblent assurer la conduction d'énergie entre les choses, donnant à l'ensemble des airs de réseau électrique de fortune, machine précaire sur le point de s'écrouler.

Galerie
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S'écartant le plus possible de toute tentative de sélection des objets, l'artiste a confié la responsabilité de la collecte à deux étudiants de Nîmes avec la consigne presque animiste de laisser les objets venir à eux. Parmi leurs trouvailles, Cruzvillegas n'a opéré aucun tri, une attitude qui n'est pas sans rappeler celle de Marcel Duchamp envers les ready-made dont il disait se saisir sur la base d'une pure « indifférence visuelle[1] ». La roue de bicyclette, clouée par ce dernier sur un tabouret en 1913, est d'ailleurs enchâssée dans l'installation de Cruzvillegas. Au-delà du détail iconographique, la chaîne d'objets trouvés de Nîmes évoque sous certains angles des compositions duchampiennes de plus grande ampleur. On pense notamment aux silhouettes géométriques encastrées et machines délicates représentées sur le *Grand Verre* (1915-1923) ou à la compilation de ready-made qui figure sur *Tu m'*, toile commandée à l'artiste en 1918 dont émerge un irrévérencieux écouvillon.



Photo © David Huguenin

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Vettier, Elsa. « Abraham Cruzvillegas », *Zéro Deux*, Numéro 80, 2016.
https://www.zerodeux.fr/reviews/abraham-cruzvillegas/

Depuis une dizaine d'années, Abraham Cruzvillegas intègre les objets déclassés à une démarche qu'il qualifie d'*autoconstrucción* et qui s'articule autour des dynamiques propres à ce qui est soi-disant inerte : le sens et l'énergie que produit l'agencement de certaines choses dans la sphère sociale et politique. Le choix du terme « autoconstruction » résulte d'un rapprochement opéré par l'artiste entre sa pratique d'assemblage et le processus de construction *ad hoc* des habitations de son quartier d'enfance, Ajusco. Dans cette favela située en périphérie de Mexico, la configuration de la maison familiale évoluait au fil des trouvailles de bric et de broc qui venaient l'augmenter. Mais dans l'idée d'autoconstruction, il est moins question de bricole que d'édification de soi et de développement d'un langage plastique. Ainsi, suivant une logique dialectique, depuis quelques années les projets d'autoconstruction connaissent des pendants autodestructifs pour finalement trouver un nouveau développement à une lettre près au Carré d'Art : l'autoconstriction.

Si le titre donné à l'exposition, « Autoconstriction approximante vibrante rétroflexe », semble mimer l'œuvre en sa qualité d'amalgame d'éléments disparates, il signale également un resserrement autour de l'idée de langage. « Constriction » et « rétroflexe », renvoyant respectivement à la contraction de la gorge et à la flexion de la langue, concernent le fonctionnement organique de la parole et nous amènent à repenser l'installation comme une longue phrase articulée et ponctuée de sursauts. Quant à la vibration, qui pourrait déjà émaner de la friction et de la mise en équilibre des bribes, Cruzvillegas choisit de la souligner par l'intervention de deux *zapateados*. Ces danseurs, dont les mouvements de talon saccadés s'enracinent dans des traditions chorégraphiques précolombiennes, improvisent sur la sculpture. Leurs gestes, retransmis sur deux écrans à l'entrée et à la sortie de l'exposition, font résonner les qualités sonores de la sculpture et parler sa matérialité. Cette activation sonore et chorégraphique de l'installation peine pour autant à faire vibrer l'ensemble. Il est en effet difficile de lever les yeux du sol glacial sur lequel court la sculpture et de s'abstraire de la symétrie implacable du white cube conçu par Norman Foster qui fige le bric-à-brac habituellement réjouissant de Cruzvillegas dans une sorte de chaos muséal organisé. L'idée est belle pourtant lorsque l'on se replace dans la perspective de ces fragments biscornus qui composent l'œuvre et qui retourneront probablement à l'endroit où ils ont été ramassés. Ces trouvailles auront traversé l'existence d'une œuvre d'art avant que l'œuvre elle-même ne redevienne banal objet. Une parade modeste de choses déchues ou, pour reprendre le titre d'un projet antérieur de l'artiste, *an optimistic failure*[2].

[1] Marcel Duchamp, « À propos des ready-mades », *Duchamp du signe*, Paris, Flammarion, 1975, p.191.

[2] Abraham Cruzvillegas, « Autoconstrucción: The Optimistic Failure of a Simultaneous Promise », Modern Art Oxford, 2011.

- **Publié dans le numéro : 80**
- **Partage : f , 🐦**
- **Du même auteur : Dector & Dupuy, Playground festival, Lola Gonzalez, Veridis Quo, Falke Pisano, La Valeur dans les Mathématiques, Emotional Supply Chains,**

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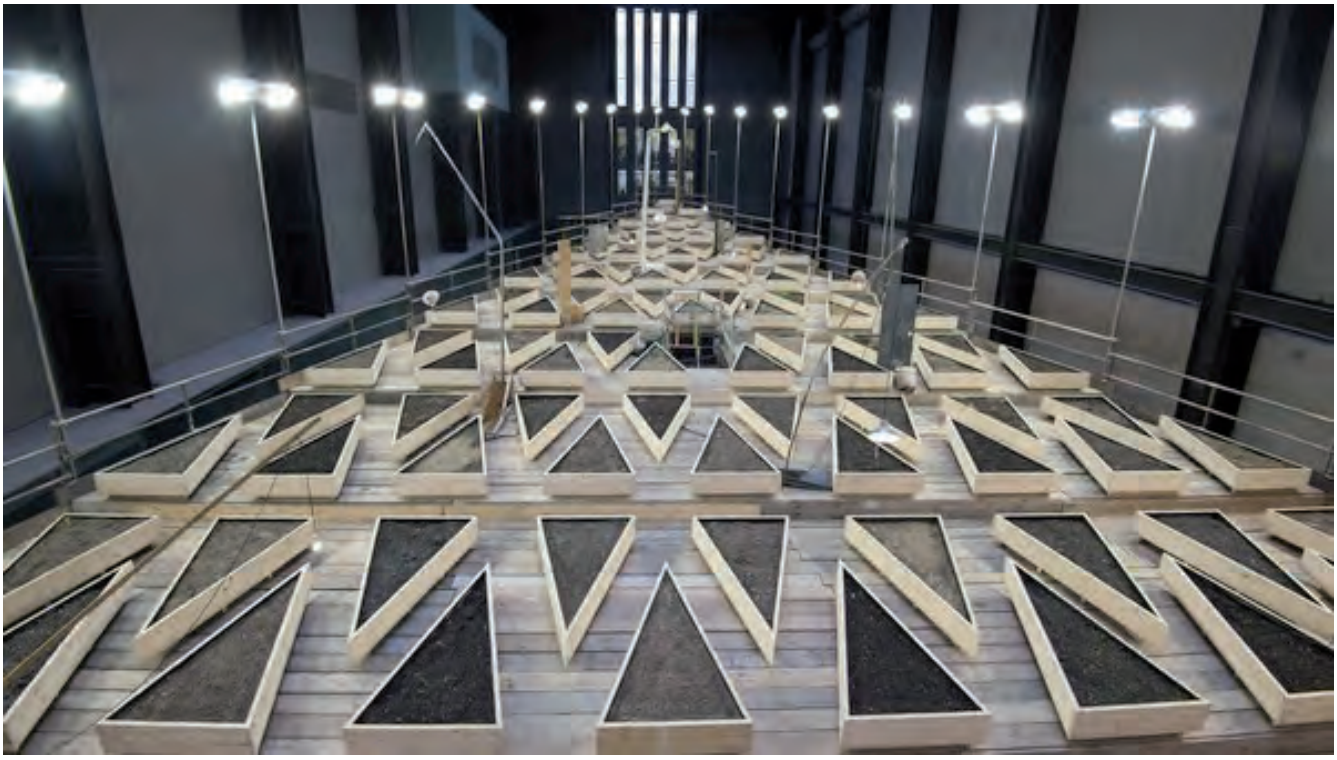
Rachel Spence. «Abraham Cruzvillegas: Empty Lot, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London», *Financial Times.com*, October 13, 2015.
http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/182600d6-71b0-11e5-9b9e-690fdae72044.html

FINANCIAL TIMES

Abraham Cruzvillegas: Empty Lot, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London

Rachel Spence

Galerie
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Abraham Cruzvillegas' 'Empty Lot' installation in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Photo: Lauren Hurley/PA

Even the poster which advertises Abraham Cruzvillegas' new installation at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall demands a double take. It's not an image which arrests our attention. It's the title. In a city where wasteland and wilderness have never been more precious nor more threatened, the phrase "Empty Lot" calls to Londoners with the promise of disappearing Eden.

The three-dimensional reality does not disappoint. Enter the Turbine Hall on the lower level and Empty Lot rears up above you like the prow of a vast ship, its triangular foredeck perched on a keel of scaffolding, its perimeters bordered by willowy lights that loom above it like illuminated masts.

The mezzanine level delivers a different perspective. Fore and aft of the viewing platform immaculate rows of triangular plots filled with soil, bordered by wooden frames, stream back through the hall's magnificent volumes on stepped terraces.

Squint out the detail and you are gazing at a contemporary, minimalist cousin of the Russian constructivists. Those tidy, blank triangles cannot but evoke the Utopian politics of El Lissitzky as he sent his "red wedge" boldly among "the whites".

A similar idealism animates Empty Lot. Each of its allotments has been filled with soil scavenged from

Rachel Spence. «Abraham Cruzvillegas: Empty Lot, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London», *Financial Times.com*, October 13, 2015.
http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/182600d6-71b0-11e5-9b9e-690fdae72044.html

FINANCIAL TIMES



Galerie
Chantal Crousel

a different locale including a shoal of London schools and parks, Hampton Court Palace, the Horniman Museum and Garden, London Wetland Centre and even the gardens of Tate staff. With quiet ingenuity, Cruzvillegas has brought the city's green spaces within one of its most popular cultural ones.

If our times were less out of joint, Empty Lot would lack the air of vulnerable yet hopeful melancholy which makes it so powerful. But when land is being gobbled up for oil, property development and industrial farming with such alarming disregard for social and environmental consequences, the sculpture is a clarion call to the consciences of developers across the world.

With a major exhibition at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis behind him and a host of showings at international biennales, Cruzvillegas made his name via the objet trouvé. He is best known for his autoconstrucción series, which assembles improbable roomscapes — as if Heath Robinson was channelling the Freudian uncanny — from scavenged junk. Influences behind Empty Lot include the Latin American protest movements which called for ordinary people to be granted decent land rights, the chinampas — cultivated agricultural islands created by Aztecs when what is now the city of Mexico was essentially a large lake — and pioneering contemporary land artists such as Walter De Maria.

Like De Maria, whose 1977 installation "Earth Room" covered the floor of a Manhattan building with earth, Cruzvillegas has chosen not to plant anything in his soil beds. Yet green shoots are already sprouting. Someone has thrown down an apple. Undoubtedly, guerrilla gardeners will scatter their own seeds over the coming months. The result is a work of art which works on more levels than the Shard: as process, as performance, as politics and as spectacle. Cruzvillegas says he hopes it will be somewhere "that something can grow out of nothing". Like a green-fingered Beckett, his less-is-more philosophy makes him a seer for our times.

'Hyundai Commission 2015: Abraham Cruzvillegas: Empty Lot' runs to April 3, tate.org.uk

María Minara. « El Escarabajo del Arte contemporáneo », *El País Semanal*, September 16, 2015, pp. 61-63.



EL ESCARABAJO DEL ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO

El mexicano Abraham Cruzvillegas es el segundo artista latinoamericano que se enfrenta al desafío de ocupar la Sala de Turbinas de la Tate Modern. En el 'hall' del museo londinense instalará sus esculturas, improvisadas y amontonadas, testimonio de su empeño por construir sin consumir.

POR **MARÍA MINERA**
FOTOGRAFÍA DE **EDGARDO CONTRERAS**

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

María Minara. « El Escarabajo del Arte contemporáneo », *El País Semanal*, September 16, 2015, pp. 61-63.

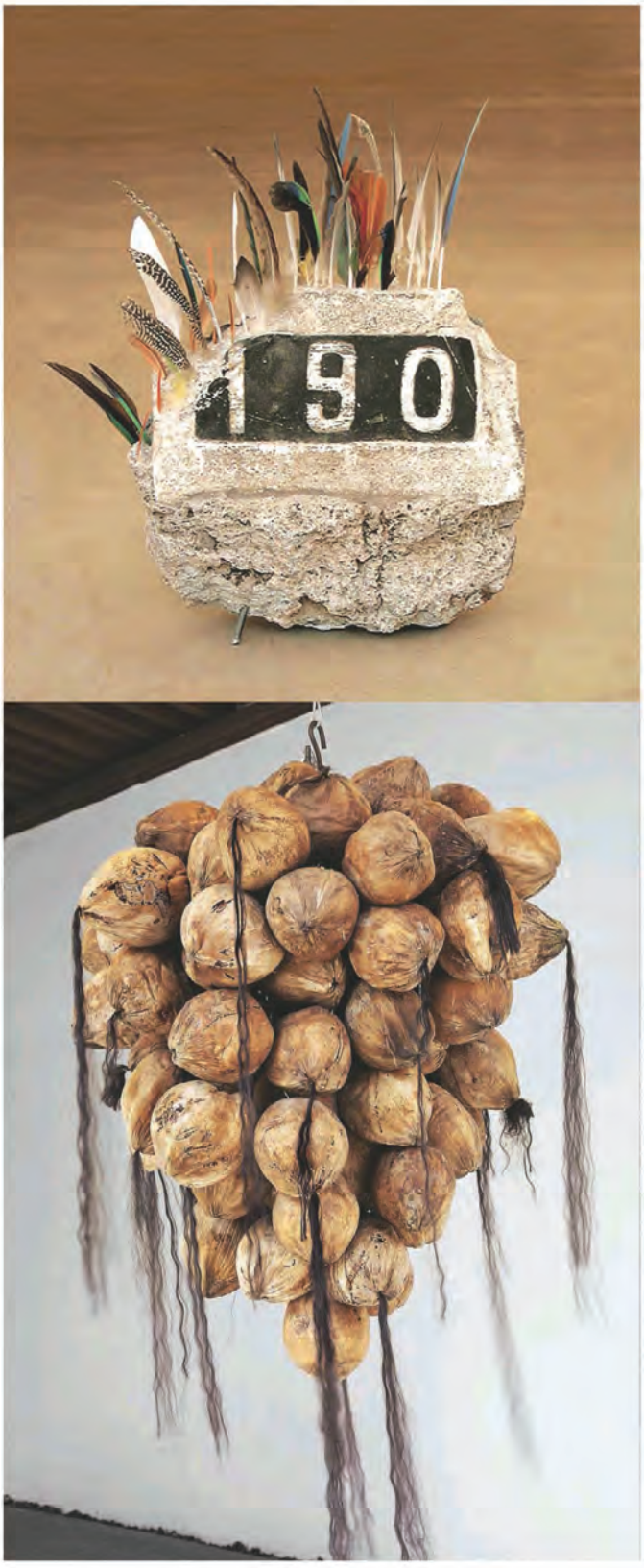


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Abraham Cruzvillegas (Ciudad de México, 1968) es un artista autodidacta. Lo cual no significa que no haya estudiado, y mucho, pero según un complejo programa educativo que diseñó para sí mismo, ajeno a las escuelas de arte, y que, además del paso por la carrera de Pedagogía, involucró una serie de viajes por el Estado mexicano de Michoacán, de donde es originario su padre, un indígena purépecha, para construir un modelo de aprendizaje "a partir del uso de las manos". Según relata, anduvo cinco años de comunidad en comunidad, acompañado por su abuela, "para aprender las distintas técnicas artesanales: desde martillar cobre, tejer un sarape o tallar piedra, hasta hacer queso". Lo que buscaba Cruzvillegas, sin embargo, no era trasladar directamente esos saberes específicos al terreno del arte; más bien se trataba de lograr una comprensión profunda de los procesos productivos artesanales y del papel que desempeñan las manos en la transformación de la materia prima en un objeto con valor, no solo utilitario, sino sobre todo simbólico, "de cosa casi mágica", añade. Esa experiencia formativa derivó en una obra, realizada en 1993, que ponía en relación, "muy à la Fluxus", un piano de cola con el telar con el que su abuelo y sus tíos llevaban décadas produciendo gabanes de lana. Los dos instrumentos –uno para hacer música; el otro, abrigos– aparecían conectados por una manta larguísima tejida por él mismo con lana de ovejas negras.

Así que, además de las lecturas de Heidegger, Freire o Lévi-Strauss, de una tesis escrita en torno al proyecto educativo de Joseph Beuys y de algunas clases sueltas de historia del arte y de dibujo, los viajes de la mano de su abuela –"que fue como un Virgilio, pues no es fácil que te dejen entrar a las comunidades indígenas. Eres visto como un →



DOBLE PÁGINA ANTERIOR
Aprendiz perpetuo. La obra de madera y formica *Subtly Miserable* (2007), y el artista, fotografiado en su casa en la colonia San Miguel Chapultepec de México DF.

ESTA PÁGINA
Objetos mágicos. Arriba, *The Invincible* (2002), y abajo, *La familia*, realizada con cocos, pelo artificial, cable de acero y pegamento.

PÁGINA SIGUIENTE
Autorretratos. *Blind Self Portrait as a Post-Thatcherite Deaf Lemon Head. For K. M.* (2011); abajo, *Self Portrait Giving a Generous Tip Forgetting about the Oil Crisis* (2012).

María Minara. « El Escarabajo del Arte contemporáneo », *El País Semanal*, September 16, 2015, pp. 61-63.



"Juego con los objetos, los apilo, y cuando están a punto de caerse me detengo. Me gusta esa inestabilidad provocada"



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María Minara. « El Escarabajo del Arte contemporáneo », *El País Semanal*, September 16, 2015, pp. 61-63.

turista"–ayudaron a Cruzvillegas a formular el modelo de trabajo en el que basaría sus investigaciones: "Siento que no he soltado la preponderancia del proceso de aprendizaje de esos años: cómo seguir aprendiendo como premisa principal". Y por eso, frente a algunas de sus piezas, uno puede tener la sensación de asistir a una suerte de lección de anatomía, pues a tal punto está puesta aquí en duda la noción de obra acabada que por momentos parecería que el artista ha diseccionado sus esculturas para mostrarnos más el funcionamiento que una fina envoltura. Algo parecido a la vista que nos ofrece un reloj que ha sido abierto y que, sin embargo, sigue marchando. Aquí tampoco la maquinaria se detiene, como si la escultura estuviera en vías de construirse a sí misma frente a nuestros ojos. Sus obras tienen también un aire de prototipos experimentales: aparatos que el aprendiz perpetuo construye, con lo que tiene a mano, para demostrar alguna conjetura (le gusta decir que su trabajo en realidad consiste casi únicamente en hacerse preguntas). Solo que, al contrario de lustrosos robots, lo que vemos aquí es la manera en que materiales en desuso –cajas de cartón, muebles, latas, palos de escoba, botellas, pedazos de madera– recobran un sentido práctico –piezas organizadas para sostener una estructura– según una estética de la improvisación y el amontonamiento.

El proceso que lleva a la obra puede llegar a ser muy largo, "porque, como el escarabajo", explica Cruzvillegas, "primero acumulo y acumulo y acumulo, hasta que en algún punto hago uso de algo de eso, pero porque lo necesito: un alambre me puede servir para amarrar dos cosas o un zapato para atorar una caja, por ejemplo. Pero no hay una estrategia, en el sentido de que vaya al estudio y haga un boceto de lo que voy a hacer". Más bien lo que hay es un trabajo cercano al del arquitecto: muchas veces de lo que se trata es de ir sumando capas o pisos. "En mi estudio juego con los objetos, los apilo, un poco como un Jenga, y cuando están a punto de caerse, ahí me detengo. Me gusta esa inestabilidad provocada, esos juegos de equilibrio, totalmente a propósito". Todo esto tiene lugar en la planta alta de una casa de la colonia Guadalupe Tepeyac, al norte de Ciudad de México, a la que el artista se desplaza (tarda una hora en coche, por lo menos) tomando el camino que lleva a la famosa basílica de Guadalupe. En ese segundo piso, él y sus asistentes llevan a cabo labores diversas: desde las propias del escarabajo recolector –que



ESTA DOBLE PÁGINA **Construir sin consumir.** Arriba, *Menu in Progress* (2005); en el centro, *A New Self-Portrait as a Mismeasured Punctuated Lack of Equilibrium (with Denim)* (2015). Abajo, a la izquierda, *Autorretrato muy enamorado y apretando el culo* (2010), y a la derecha, el artista, que en octubre desembarca en la Tate Modern londinense.

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"Como el escarabajo, primero acumulo, acumulo y acumulo, hasta que hago uso de algo. Pero no hay una estrategia"





hace cuidadoso acopio de reservas– hasta las del pintor –que, por ejemplo, cubre de acrílico la superficie de los papeles que la vida le va dejando (servilletas, sobres, notas de gastos, boletos de tren, envoltorios, recortes de periódicos)–. Por ahora, sin embargo, Cruzvillegas pasa más tiempo en su casa, en el barrio de San Miguel Chapultepec, debido a la llegada de su segundo hijo. Así que su mesa de trabajo está hoy llena de elementos contradictorios: libros y cuadernos junto al cojín y la manta para que el bebé haga la siesta. Nada que preocupe al artista, desde luego: su tema es precisamente lo caótica y fragmentaria que puede ser, a veces, la vida.

Y si sus esculturas parecen más los cimientos que el cascarón es porque, a grandes rasgos, eso es lo que está en la base de lo que Cruzvillegas llama "autoconstrucción"; un postulado que, dice, "tiene que ver con el desarrollo del capitalismo, con la modernidad entendida como consumo. He hecho propios estatutos de un discurso artístico de una generación anterior, que no tienen que ver con un arte proveniente del consumo, sino de la idea de reciclar". Sin embargo, a diferencia, por ejemplo, del arte *povera*, que buscaba deteriorar la experiencia del objeto dentro de la cultura de consumo de las galerías de arte, Cruzvillegas usa la precariedad para producir otro tipo de tensión, al retomar una serie de operaciones que más que del arte provienen del contexto en el que creció: una colonia que migrantes rurales –pioneros, los llama él– en busca de mejores oportunidades de vida establecieron en los sesenta sobre un terreno cubierto de roca volcánica a las entonces orillas de Ciudad de México. Allí, como en tantos otros asentamientos incrustados en los mapas oficiales de las grandes metrópolis del mundo, las casas se autoconstruyen de una manera intuitiva en "un momento en que se cruzan la voluntad visual, la urgencia del confort, el ingenio funcional y la escasez monetaria".

No cabe duda de que haber vivido en una casa en permanente autoconstrucción lo inspiró para incorporar en su trabajo algo de ese espíritu constructivo orgánico. Décadas de añadiduras, modificaciones y ajustes paulatinos que terminaron siendo "materia prima de una observación práctica". Pero, como ha dicho varias veces, no es que le interese "presentar modelos de arquitectura de la gente pobre" para el público de los museos o las bienales. Más bien la idea es producir un tipo de escultura que podríamos llamar de circunstancia: pues no es resultado de un diseño previo, sino de la pura contingencia y la capacidad para trabajar con lo que hay. En ese sentido, la autoconstrucción se refiere específicamente a una estética de la creatividad en condiciones restrictivas. Cómo construir algo sin consumir es la cuestión aquí.

Ciertamente, algo parecido a un estilo se deriva del principio estructural de las casas autoconstruidas, pues como los volúmenes se añaden a lo largo del tiempo, sin planeación alguna, la apariencia suele ser disparatada. Pero esto se debe a que las soluciones dependen, a decir de Cruzvillegas, de "necesidades y situaciones concretas, como hacer una nueva habitación, modificar un techo, mejorar o cancelar un espacio". De ahí que a una pared de ladrillos pueda seguir otra pintada de rosa; que los marcos de las ventanas sean muchas veces distintos, o que las varillas queden a la vista, para reanudar la edificación en un mejor momento. Y sin que sus esculturas sean espejos directos de esta lógica visual tendente a lo heteróclito, sí remiten vagamente a ella, a través de la acumulación de materiales con propiedades diversas y paradójicas. Texturas, tamaños, densidades, superficies y colores distintos que, no obstante, hablan solo tangencialmente de arquitectura, pues lo suyo es demostrar que "la actividad humana produce forma".

"Es cursi, si quieres, pues hay un grado muy alto de optimismo", reconoce el artista, "porque está vinculado a la esperanza, por lo menos en el ambiente en que crecí. Tal vez no tienes dinero, pero tienes otro capital. Un capital mucho más cálido que el monetario, y que en lo que toca a construir una casa significa mucho, porque no necesitas un arquitecto, no necesitas un presupuesto, no necesitas planeación, no necesitas permiso. El capital, siendo distinto, se hace entonces inmenso".

Un capital que pondrá nuevamente a prueba a partir del 13 de octubre, cuando inaugure el proyecto que ya prepara para la Sala de Turbinas que le ha encargado la Tate Modern de Londres. Cruzvillegas será el segundo artista latinoamericano, después de Doris Salcedo, en enfrentarse a tamaño desafío. La aproximación, sin embargo, será parecida a la de sus trabajos anteriores, solo que con una hipótesis un poco más extrema. "Incluso en las peores circunstancias, algo puede suceder". La cosa, entonces, será ver si sucede, y qué sucede, a partir de poner en juego las condiciones mínimas –y casi hostiles– en las que podría gestarse, o no, esa esperanza de la que habla ●

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ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS
Museo Jumex, Mexico City



Mid-career museum retrospectives can be deeply awkward occasions, a mid-life crisis of sorts. Abraham Cruzvillegas's first major museum presentation in his home country was certainly aware of the pitfalls: the catalogue was scrappy rather than tome-like; the explanatory wall texts not overly obsequious; and the work had an excitingly ad-hoc, anti-monumental appearance. This exhibition was nevertheless a mixed affair, with the most exciting social and political aspects of Cruzvillegas's work bubbling far below the surface.

Surveying a decade of sculptures, installations and other projects, the show included work made by Cruzvillegas under the banner of *autoconstrucción* ('self-construction'). The neologism is rooted in Cruzvillegas's upbringing in the district of Ajusco, in the south of Mexico City, which was built by poor immigrants from the surrounding countryside (his own parents included), who arrived there in the 1960s. More than a practice of re-purposing found urban detritus (scrap wood, metal, plastic) for home-building, *autoconstrucción* also invokes an ethics of mutual assistance and cooperation, of alternative economies. As an artist, Cruzvillegas has explored this ethical approach to materials within a global context, making sculptural works in London, Oxford, Paris and Gwangju that tap into local senses of place and identity.

Here lay a paradox. For while the rhetoric of *autoconstrucción* speaks of local or communal ecologies, this survey was nevertheless very much part of powerful art world systems. Part-sponsored by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, it was curated by Clara Kim, Senior Curator of Visual Arts at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and was on tour from the Walker Art Center and Haus der Kunst, Munich. It landed in Mexico at the Museo Jumex – a private space funded by a fruit juice manufacturer – with a smaller splinter show at the Amparo Museum in Puebla (which I did not visit). The Jumex and Amparo exhibitions included works borrowed from major collections in the US, Europe and Mexico; the Amparo show also featured an installation of found materials and concrete made with students from the local art college (*Reconstruction of the portrait of my Cholulteco twin ...*, 2014). (Puebla was not on my itinerary during my trip to Mexico, and is not covered in this review.)

At the Jumex, the gallery space was dominated by a cacophony of sculptural installations. *Atelier Autoconstrucción: The Innefficient Tinkerer's Workshop: Free Advice Behind Cinema* (2012) was realized for the 2012 Gwangju Biennial, and consists of a number of smaller sculptural works made from found materials including an old broom and a sickle (*Indecent and Fragmentary*, 2012), and glass bottles lined up with elegant twig spindles stuffed in their open tops (*Communal and Democraticist*, 2012). These sculptures were produced in parallel with workshops that Cruzvillegas staged in a house near an abandoned cinema in Gwangju, with local musicians, thinkers and activists invited to discuss the city's history, its industrialization and the suppression of the democratic movement in the 1980s. Key words that emerged from these discussions – 'communal', 'democraticist', 'contradictory' – were then included in the titles of the individual pieces. These works celebrate the social potential of urban flotsam: the sense that contingent matter can become the focus for communal discourse.

Unfortunately, transported from the site of creation, these invocations of complex histories seemed deracinated. Also hard to get to grips with was *Autoconstrucción Room* (2009), an installation first shown at Thomas Dane Gallery, London, featuring small plinth-like units made from found wood, and items evocative of Mexico, including an agave plant and a stone pestle. The original London show rooted these clichés of Mexican imagery with a split-screen video work featuring interviews with Cruzvillegas's parents, as well as a set of drawn musical scores that suggested a more raucous understanding of *autoconstrucción*; however, both of these elements were absent from the Jumex. More successful in this context was the inclusion of works made for an exhibition at Modern Art Oxford in 2011, which toyed with ethnographic clichés and opened up a more convincing space of critique: *The Optimistic Failure* (2011), a mobile-like sculpture that re-creates, using crude lumps of mud, the shrunken *tsantsas* heads displayed in Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum; and *The Simultaneous Promise* (2011) a tricycle equipped with an amp and speakers, designed to rudely blurt out music by local bands as it traversed the sedate streets of Oxford.

Haussmannian Leftovers: Richard Lenoir (2007), consists of wooden fruit and vegetable boxes found at the Marché Richard Lenoir in Paris, then painted with black paint on their undersides. Mounted on the immaculate white walls of the Jumex, the work looked graphic and punchy. More structurally impressive was *Autoconstrucción: à la petite ceinture* (Autoconstruction: The Small Belt, 2010), a large doughnut-shaped installation of ramps and scaffold-like edifices with a few vegetables (a beetroot, a leek, a piece of ginger) balanced haphazardly on its thin beams. Also made in Paris, this work references a now mostly abandoned tramline that delineates the rich core from the poorer outskirts of the city. (As I am writing this in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, the contradictions of religion, geopolitics and violence resonate powerfully in my memory of the installation).

Clearly, Cruzvillegas's work thrives when it is created in direct response to an exhibition's site, its local economies, people and histories. This retrospective chose instead a more conventional collection-based display of anti-monumental objects whose air of preciousness seemed at odds with the ethos of *autoconstrucción* as a shared social activity (the exception was the sculpture made with students at Puebla and exhibited in the Amparo Museum). This exhibition can also been seen as marking the end of the *autoconstrucción* project, which Cruzvillegas has moved away from in the past few years in order to focus on what he calls *autodestrucción* ('self-destruction'): the creative potential of negation, the need to destroy in order to rebuild (recent shows have explored anti-establishment subcultures such as punk, Zazou and Zoot Suits). While this exhibition featured only the more positive *autoconstrucción* works, the radical potential of *autodestrucción* opens a path for Cruzvillegas beyond the accumulated stuff of a mid-career retrospective.

COLIN PERRY

1
María Thereza Alves
'The Long Road to Xico (1991–2014)',
2015, exhibition view

2
'Abraham Cruzvillegas: Autoconstrucción', 2015,
exhibition view

Robert Preece. «A Conversation with Abraham Cruzvillegas», *Sculpture*, July/August 2014, pp. 26-31.

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Objects Are Alive

GENE PITTMAN, COURTESY WALKER ART CENTER

A Conversation with Abraham Cruzvillegas

Robert Preece. «A Conversation with Abraham Cruzvillegas», *Sculpture*, July/August 2014, pp. 26-31.

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Autoconstrucción, 2010. Installation of performance set and documentation, performance duration: 70 min. A project by Antonio Castro, Abraham Cruzvillegas, and Antonio Fernández Ros.

Robert Preece. «A Conversation with Abraham Cruzvillegas», *Sculpture*, July/August 2014, pp. 26-31.



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BY ROBERT PREECE

***Autoconstrucción (resource room)*, 2010. Maps, drawings, photographs, text, and found furniture, dimensions variable.**

Abraham Cruzvillegas's *Autoconstrucción* works ricochet back and forth between categories, from intriguing, aesthetically constructed, found-object compositions to emotionally charged, socioeconomic/political statements. Rooted in the real world situation of Mexico City specifically, and to some extent of Latin America generally, this ongoing series builds on the art historical vocabulary of Duchampian readymades, Arte Povera, and assemblage. It should be noted that Cruzvillegas sees *autoconstrucción* ("self-construction") as "a way of making things," a methodology that "exists in many places and cultures with specific differences."

Cruzvillegas has exhibited around the world. A 2013 mid-career retrospective organized by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis continued on to the Haus der Kunst in Munich earlier this year and will be shown jointly at the Jumex Foundation in Mexico City and the Museo Amparo in Puebla in 2014–15. In 2012, he won South Korea's 2012 Yanghyun Prize, which awards 100 million won (approximately $88,000), and exhibited several works at the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea. Back in 2003, he exhibited at the Venice Biennale, in a presentation curated by Gabriel Orozco. Cruzvillegas lives and works in Mexico City.

Robert Preece: *What led you to work so intensively with found objects?*
Abraham Cruzvillegas: I started working with objects in 1987, experimenting with things from my parents' house. I wanted things to become "themselves" after my appropriation.
RP: *Could you explain what you mean when you say that the "objects are alive"?*
AC: A work from the early 1990s, *Objeto útil pero bonito,* is a good example of the evidence of life in objects. I used a stair railing from my parents' house and a painting by my father. I did nothing but put them together. I wanted to test my ability to allow things to have a dialogue among themselves, not really making any transformation or using any technique. There's no way of interfering in their relationship besides adding our own voyeuristic gaze and interpretation.

Previous to my intervention, the objects had a life of their own, separately; and since then, they share a diverse circumstance—being together, as a whole. I'm not necessarily a believer in animism, but I'm sure that matter, energy, things, and ourselves, we all never die—much less when we belong to a whole.

RP: *I've grown to appreciate vernacular innovations in "self-constructed" environments that I've seen in Caracas and Manila and in concrete workers' houses in Busan, South Korea. In particular, I was intrigued by narrow stairwells between houses, certain walkways, and molded forms for structures and courtyards along creeks. Are there any innovations that you've seen over the years that stick out in your memory?*
AC: I don't think that *autoconstrucción* is vernacular. That term applies to architectural analysis, and *autoconstrucción* is not architecture at all—or at least it can't be critiqued

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BOTTOM: ESTUDIO MICHEL ZABÉ, 2010 / ALL: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KURIMANZUTTO, MEXICO CITY

Above left: ***La Familia*****, 2009. Coconuts, artificial hair, steel wire, and glue, installation view. Above:** ***Autoconstrucción: Fragment: Lattice Bureau*****, 2007. Bricks, iron, and wood, approx. 98 x 79 x 38 cm. Left:** ***Measure for measure*****, 2010. Wood, skateboard, brick, cotton, enameled acrylic, and nunchucks, 130.5 x 99.5 x 20 cm.**

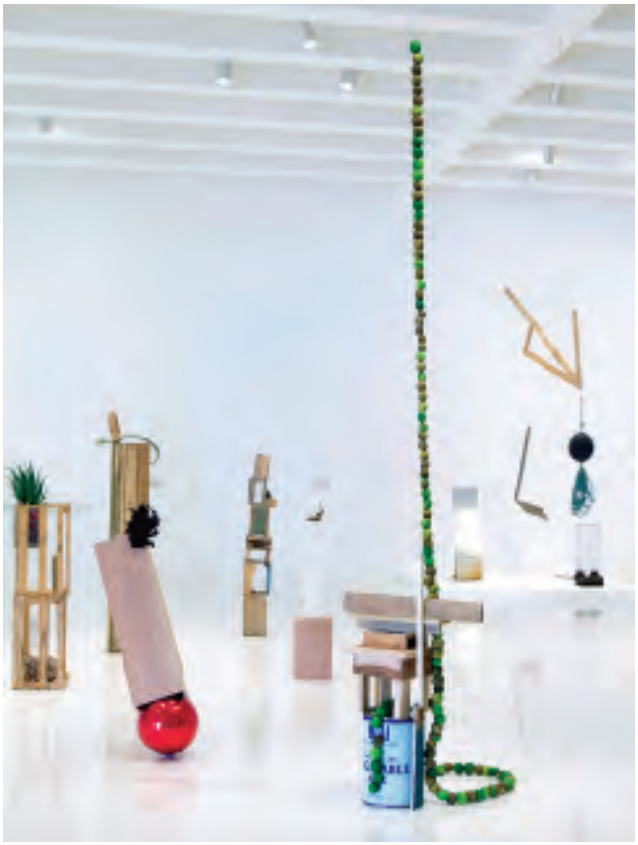
or understood within the categories or premises of architecture. For me, *autoconstrucción* is a way of making things. It's a form of understanding reality and of approaching things in a very specific economic, political, and social environment. It's not a technique, it is not a subject. For me, it comes from my own experience, and it became a platform for making projects. The work that I call *Autoconstrucción (resource room)* includes documents, books, references, and diverse information related to my experience. I didn't choose it from any agenda or catalogue.

On the other hand, I'm convinced that *autoconstrucción* exists in many places and cultures—with specific differences and with diverse names. For me, the concept refers not to building shapes—I'm not especially interested in architecture—but to the needs that produced those shapes. The context is also very important for me—the context in which certain needs become a determination for constructing, transforming, adapting, or destroying.

In my case, that context is called "solidarity." For me, approaching *autoconstrucción* is not to talk about my biography or about myself: memory exists in the shapes, materials, objects, structures, and in the other animals that inhabit them, as a whole, including myself.

RP: *How do you reconcile your approach and the resulting objects with the sociopolitical/socioeconomic context of self-constructed environments?*

AC: I don't need to reconcile anything, mainly because we exist in an ecosystem in which things fit together without exclusion, except when humans intervene. Struggle is everywhere, because we are ubiquitous. Then our eyes





Left: *Autoconstrucción Room*, 2009. Installation of 15 unique sculptures, dimensions variable. Right: *Chicas Patas Boogie (sweaty & needy)*, 2012. Rebar, fabric, feathers, chain, and meat, 100 x 80 x 93 in. Below: *An Affirmative Craft*, 2012. Folding bicycle, tools, extension cords, wooden ladder, wooden crate, coins, stainless steel, stones, acrylic sheets, ceramic dishes, cup and ashtray, rope, gloves, pillow, and mixed media, dimensions variable. From the Gwangju Biennale.



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TOP LEFT: GENE PITTMAN, COURTESY WALKER ART CENTER / TOP RIGHT: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND REGEN PROJECTS, LOS ANGELES / BOTTOM: COURTESY THE ARTIST

transfer our conflicts to other beings, things, and situations. On the other hand, pretending to be away from struggle is useless and a little bit naïve.

Beauty is also everywhere, and in my work as well, but not because of my intervention. This comes in part from my way of working: putting things together not because they are nice or ugly, but because they are useful. In the context of *autoconstrucción*, almost everything is useful, and people become resourceful and in solidarity. To make *autoconstrucción* yours, it's not necessary to take an introductory seminar or to immediately adopt an ideological position that doesn't fit with your own education, context, needs, or ideas; it's more interesting to think that the hermeneutics of *autoconstrucción* rest on these latent elements from any possible audience, rather than anything from me. It should be an open scaffolding to move through freely.

RP: *How political do you see your works in terms of supporting struggles to reduce corruption and inequality? Do you see the works as activist?*

AC: Like any other person, I believe that we must support the causes we identify with and fight against circumstances we don't agree with. But I don't believe in art as propaganda. Art produces knowledge, and that's politics. Beyond that, it's up to every person to add meaning to artworks. Artists just propose sentences to be completed.

Corruption and unfair distribution of wealth are some of the many factors that cause *autoconstrucción* to exist, but I don't address this content or put these messages forth to anyone. Instead, I like the idea of setting up optimistic exchanges in our society, and for this, humor is crucial. Everything fits together.

RP: *Could you explain your works in the Gwangju Biennale?*

AC: I can't explain, but I can describe. I used an abandoned house for some weeks as a studio and workshop, using only materials from the house. While constructing my sculptures, I organized meetings with people from the city—students, doctors, activists, artists, professors, curators, historians, and cultural agents—to learn about local history, life, religion, education, the economy, and culture. Those meetings were open to any audience and were recorded for a book that will be published soon. The sculptures remained in the house during the Biennale, after I left.

RP: *What did you learn from the process of developing these works? What did spending time in South Korea bring to your work?*

AC: I learned a lot from the people with whom I spoke in different public dialogues organized at the house, and I also learned a lot from life in the streets, from the specifics of everyday life, which is very effervescent and politically engaged. My mind is still organizing the many experiences that I took with me after my time there.

RP: *What are the things that you'd like viewers—art specialists and the general public—to walk away with after seeing your works?*

AC: One, a troubled mind. Two, a smile.

Robert Preece is a Contributing Editor for Sculpture.





Above: ***Communal and Democraticist*****, 2012. Wooden window panels, stainless steel, coins, tree branches, and beer bottles and caps, dimensions variable. From the Gwangju Biennale. Below:** ***A new self-portrait as a mismeasured punctuated lack of equilibrium (with denim)*****, 2011. Plastic boxes, paint, paper, aluminum paper, stainless steel, copper, iron, plastic, wood, denim, glass bottles, and masking tape, dimensions variable.**

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TOP: COURTESY THE ARTIST / BOTTOM: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KURIMANZUTTO, MEXICO CITY

Gabriela Jauregui. "Abraham Cruzvillegas: Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City" *Frieze*, September 2013, p. 170.



ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS
Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City

At the entrance to the Museo Experimental El Eco, Matias Goeritz's small gem of a museum (and a prime example of what Goeritz called 'emotional architecture'), wooden beams frame a long hallway. The start to Abraham Cruzvillegas's exhibition, 'Autodestrucción 2' (Autodestruction 2, 2013), was discreet and yet compelling, present yet somehow disappearing.

The beams looked like they might hold together the structure of the building – either that or suggested that the building was falling apart, from earthquake damage or termites. The wood was raw and stained – old rafters from the artist's current home. After walking through this archway, a path of cracked cantera limestone tiles led us into the main exhibition space where a series of old window frames formed a tower, connected to another accumulation of wooden beams like scaffolding. In the middle lay some debris: red *tezontle* (volcanic rock) tiles. In the corner of the space, two beams sat atop a pair of *huaraches* (traditional sandals) like giant stilts.

'Autodestrucción 2' was a sort of epilogue to the various 'Autoconstrucción' exhibitions and books Cruzvillegas has been working on for the past several years, most recently his large show at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. If auto-construction is the art of renewal then it also implies destruction: it's reliant on debris from demolished buildings and leftovers from construction sites. Self-construction implies a pilfering of previous structures and materials in order to make them new. Specifically here, the artist took materials from the house he is currently remodelling and created a new home inside the museum: a rat's nest, a sculpture, a junkyard, a construction site.

Outside the large windows of the main exhibition space, the construction site looked as if it continued. The first time I visited, the outside space, which housed the *Pabellón* (Pavilion, 2013) – a series of architectural interventions on the patio – was under construction. Here, just as inside, Cruzvillegas used typical Mexican building materials; terracotta tiles were placed atop a plywood structure, and the pavilion seemed to extend the piece endlessly outwards. It even included a wheelbarrow and a half-empty bottle of Coca-Cola sitting in the sun, as if belonging to the absent-minded worker who also left his *huaraches* behind.

There are shows you want to see and there are rare exhibitions that you want to visit again and again. This was one of the latter. The second time I visited, I went to do a poetry reading. The third time, the museum had become Cruzvillegas's home. He had invited his closest family members for a series of talks, where they presented the work they themselves do: human rights, politics, activism. Thus the household became an agora, school, public forum.

The piece was successful in its balancing of private and public. Like other works by Cruzvillegas, often rooted in his childhood neighbourhood on the outskirts of Mexico City – a community that started more as a survival strategy and which is now well-established – this piece is no exception: the *huaraches* in the corner were, at the same time, a nod to the many impoverished rural migrants who built and keep building such neighborhoods. They also echoed the text that was part of the piece, *La pendiente* (The Slope): a short story that Cruzvillegas wrote from the perspective of a window, perhaps one of those very windows that are piled up in the museum, a window that witnesses the fall and self-destruction of a *huarache* repairman with a mangled leg.

In Cruzvillegas's installation – as the accompanying curatorial text by David Miranda claims – 'debris speaks', letting us guess at the many stories of places and people behind them and reminding us also of how Mexico City is multilayered – one layer of buildings serving as grounding for another and yet another, from the Aztec to the Spanish to today. 'Autodestruccíon 2', as memorable as it is, and as solid as its thick wood beams and its metal frames appear, speaks volumes about the fragility of everyday life.

GABRIELA JAUREGUI

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Summer 2013 Bomb Magazine

BOMB

Abraham Cruzvillegas

by Haegue Yang



Installation view of *The Autoconstrucción Suites*, 2013, dimensions variable, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Photo by Gene Pittman. Courtesy of the Walker Art Center.

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Before I met Abraham Cruzvillegas, more than once I’d heard curator Clara Kim mention in passing that he was a special person. This piqued my curiosity. When I finally met him in Los Angeles in 2008, the rumors about him were confirmed. Five years after our first meeting, my sense of his uniqueness has not waned but rather continues to grow through our different interactions. We’ve introduced our respective home cities to each other and see each other’s shows whenever we can. So powerful are Abraham’s special qualities that they seem to be contagious—he influences people around him, alters their experiences and perception of what is possible in life.

As an artist, one may fall prey to feeling anxious, weak, and even terrified by a fear of failure, of falling short of one’s desire to be good to oneself and to share something with others. This pressure is self-imposed. Cruzvillegas’s body of work provides a daring and encouraging optimism. The physicality of his sculptures and works on paper can’t be considered without noticing how processes unfolding in time, commitment (togetherness), and a vital nature (spirit), give them shape. Like Duchamp, who was often praised for his modes and efficiency with time, Cruzvillegas exercises a specific mode of efficiency, even when it comes to emotion. The works grow out of fertile ground, from his being in this world, which requires a temporal engagement different from that of being in the studio. His thinking process accumulates depth while it takes inefficient, nonlinear paths. Yet the making of his works occurs in a miraculously swift and decisive manner—their graceful execution is full of wit and demonstrates respect for their materials’ origin.
—Haegue Yang

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HAEGUE YANG I remember your beautiful long hair when we met for the first time in LA in 2009. Don’t ask me why, but tonight in Dubai, this strange “island” in the gulf region, all of a sudden I found myself thinking about whether it meant anything to you to cut your hair.

In Korea, under Confucianism, hair was regarded as something inherited from your parents or ancestors. There were people who would rather cut off their heads than their hair. I guess it was about protecting their honor.

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS When I cut my hair, there was no symbolic meaning. I had let it grow because when my wife, Alejandra, and I went to live in Paris in 2005, my head felt cold in Europe. Prior to that, I had shaved my head every other week for nearly 20 years. The change was good. When I moved to Berlin in 2010, shampoo was expensive and I wanted a change, so I cut my hair. Change is very important for all of us—it’s not just something that happens, it’s something we must provoke.

When you first wrote, I was installing some works from my series *Autoconstrucción* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. *Autoconstrucción* means transformation to me. I apply the notion to houses being both built and destroyed simultaneously, according to the specific needs of their inhabitants. Change is the rule for the *Autoconstrucción* houses, and transformation of identity is behind my approach (or misuse) of the concept: self-construction is permanently unfinished. I love that idea.

And it so happens that hair affects people’s perception of us. Ah, yes—and the inventiveness of a new haircut. My haircuts can be a little Navajo, a little redneck, a little bit *microbusero*, a little bit *guama* . . . I like it when people don’t recognize me in the street—also when my work becomes something like a cumulative dialogue of inner identities that are constantly switching arrangements, opinions, and relationships. The exhibition at the Walker is like that: a sort of confrontation of groups of works that I get to witness.



Installation view of *Autoconstrucción*, 2009, Thomas Dane Gallery, London. Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

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HY I wonder whether I am too Korean to be your Mexican sister. What do you think about coming from the Third World, from a nonindustrialized country? Are we similar to each other, since we share this experience of the Third World?

AC I like it. What does that mean? I’m sure there are more worlds in our world: a fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh . . . In Baja California shamans are called *guamas*; they sit in narrow caves, covered with other people’s hair. People cut their hair and attach it to the heads of the guamas (like bizarre extensions, similar to dreadlocks). They remind me of Cousin Itt from the TV series *The Addams Family*; a funny character similar to a large walking wig with John Lennon glasses. My mother used to say that our family was more eccentric than the Addams family because we lived in the so-called Third World.

Very often I put diverse objects from contradictory contexts together in one work. This is like an economic clash—it’s having things on top of each other that are organic matter, industrially made, or handmade. They can be made in Taiwan, Marrakech, New York, Paris, or Mexico City. These objects have an internal system, and I like witnessing how they come together. I become a voyeur of their relationships. Between them there might be a conflict, or physical or conceptual instability, but also love, hate, gossip, power, and sometimes friendship. It’s the same for all of us; sometimes we have to accept our own contradictions in order to develop friendships. Or not.

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Aeropuerto Alterno (Alternate Airport), 2002, machetes, knives, and wood, 67×39 3/8×47 1/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

HY We are very privileged to work internationally and share friendships with people with various cultural and geopolitical backgrounds. However, it seems like we artists don’t hang out with each other so much. We visit each other’s shows less often than curators do. Are we hesitant to knock on each other’s doors? If we ever made an effort to stress the importance of the friendships among us, what would it be for? And why? I know of your friendship with Jimmie Durham, but also with your peers in Mexico, as well as of your activities with La galería de comercio.

AC I’ve cultivated strong friendships with some other artists who are like family now: Damián Ortega, Gabriel Orozco, Gabriel Kuri, and Jerónimo López, a.k.a Dr. Lakra. And, through them, extended relationships with José Kuri, Mónica Manzutto, and others. Also, teaching has provided me with many friends and accomplices. What I really like about these long-term bonds is that we can approach each other for advice, for help, or just to spend time together, without having any specific purpose or intention to plot something together. In Mexico everybody knows about our small community and our interests, since we’ve always been transparent and open. Our gallery, kurimanzutto, resulted from the development of our community. It is a commercial context and social sphere for the production of art, but also for the production of friendship. It has made our group bigger and more global. I would say—and maybe this is only my perception—that sharing experience, information, dialogue, time, energy, and love also leads to the production of knowledge.

In February 2010, when Nuria Montiel and I started La galería de comercio, my idea was to reconnect with some old students and friends to organize street events, essentially for the pleasure of working together. La galería de comercio is a nonprofit seven-headed entity—Alejandra España, Jimena Mendoza, José Luis Cortés, María Cerdá Acebrón, and Martín Núñez, in addition to Nuria and I—that presents free monthly events at the intersection of José Martí and Comercio streets, in the Escandón neighborhood. We’ve organized drawing, stamp, and sticker workshops, installations, performances, film screenings, demonstrations, and some other activities, but mostly what we do is channel the energy and collaborative force from the environment around us: school children, hobos, housewives, merchants, plants, roaches, and also some other artists. Edgar Arcenaux said that instead of fund-raising we do friend-raising.

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Martina Núñez reading texts by Alexandro Rodríguez that interweave probable tragic events and Mexican recent history in Wendy León, *TLQNSDEP*, 2011, at La galería de comercio, Mexico City.

HY Once we compared notes on our homelands’ recent histories. Astonishingly, there were lots of parallels concerning intense struggles and efforts for independence and democracy. I am curious about your own view of history after World War II and its impact on your upbringing, if it had one.

AC In my understanding of why I make things the way I do, not only as an artist, but also as a person and a citizen, history has been crucial. In Mexico, as in many other countries (now called underdeveloped, but when I was a child, President Luis Echeverría liked to use the concept Third World, accepting the exoticism associated with

belated development), we never encountered modernity proper, only its promise of consumption. The progress of Western civilization meant flattening every culture into the “American way of life.” In Mexico we missed the stage of producing our own scientific and technological languages almost completely; we simply became consumers of knowledge and industry. Of course we kept producing our own languages, but more as a means of survival in a never-ending economic, political, and social crisis. Ingenuity became the national currency, with occasional exemplary exceptions in art and culture that gave people abroad a reason to talk about the country. More recently, we’ve added new items to the possible conversation topics about Mexico: drug trafficking and the lack of public safety.

In your country you had many colonial interventions and, more recently, a dictatorship. The past has returned with the current presidency of Madam Park, daughter of the former military dictator. In my country we did not have a dictatorship, but a one-party system under the PRI—ridiculously named the Institutional Revolutionary Party—lasting over 70 years. After some struggles for democracy, thrown down the toilet by the PAN (the right-wing party that ruled Mexico for the last 12 years) the PRI has returned. So for both of us that past is still so present—we don’t have to feel sad that it’s behind us!

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HY I felt very frustrated when more than half of the population of South Korea preferred to “vote” for someone associated with political degradation and a violent totalitarian society, and no freedom of speech, instead of someone associated with progress and justice. What can we as artists do to get over such deep frustration with politics? I almost feel like my own people do not need or want my political activism. Would you help me analyze this feeling and give me some advice for getting over such pessimism?

AC What surprised me in the recent presidential election was that a lot of people voted mainly against the candidate of the old party (PRI), in favor of any alternative. There was a lot of enthusiasm, and we even witnessed something like a proto–youth movement (called “Yo Soy 132”) fighting for the right to have access to information, while officially controlled media manipulated everything to make the PRI candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, appealing and seductive. An extreme caricature of this was his marriage to a soap-opera actress. I personally find it very hard to sustain any kind of activism that does not just lead to cheap actions for good causes, or to propaganda. I think I can do more by discussing problems on a small scale, rather than trying to solve all of the problems in my city, country, world, and universe. If I can, I attend demonstrations, meetings, and public discussions because I’d like to become a political actor, but my art is not a political pamphlet.



Installation view of María Cerdá Acebrón, *Tapete*, 2011, a participative installation by the community residing and working near La galería de comercio, Mexico City.

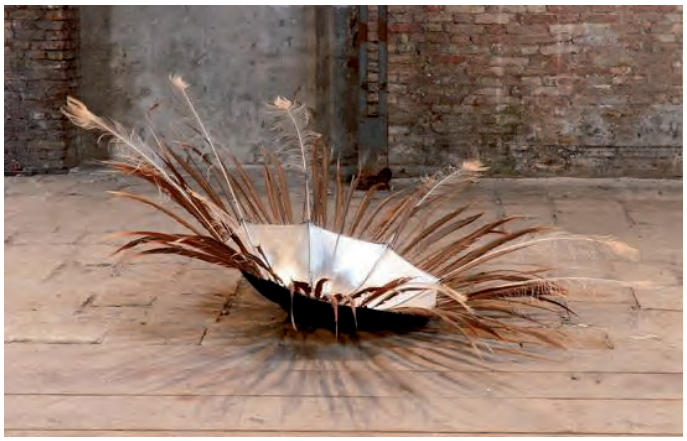
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HY I got to learn about Juan O’Gorman in Mexico City when you brought me to the Museo Diego Rivera Anahuacalli, which was built by O’Gorman for Diego Rivera’s collection of pre-Hispanic art. After you guided me through O’Gorman’s early works, it seemed to me that he underwent quite amazing transformations, ranging from rational modernism to postprimitivism. I’d like to hear your thoughts about those artistic metamorphoses. Have you, yourself, also experienced them?

AC You might know the story of the last house O’Gorman lived in. It was more like a cave than a building, and he decorated it with mosaic murals whose syncretic iconographic motifs are like the ones at the library of the National University (UNAM), only wilder and rougher. When he was younger, he was the most important representative of modernist architecture in Mexico, as his Bauhausian constructions prove: the studios of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in San Ángel, lined with a beautiful cactus fence, for instance. I like his process, not only as an artist. He turned against himself—not only metaphorically—by erasing or destroying his knowledge of architectural language, condemning it as man’s erection on earth. I don’t feel I’m going in that direction, but sometimes I like making work that’s not necessarily supposed to be seen as art. In fact, I feel like I am naturally more primitive; I don’t have to try too hard. I like to think of myself as an intergalactic indigenous, chatting with you on a Korean cell phone.

HY The neighborhood you grew up in is close to O’Gorman’s Museo Diego Rivera Anahuacalli, right?

AC Yes, I grew up in the neighborhood of Ajusco, which evolved gradually in a nonplanned area in the southern part of Mexico City. Back then nobody thought that it could be inhabited. The people there took over plots of volcanic rock and started building their houses slowly over time. They had no money and no knowledge of architecture or engineering, but lots of needs. This fueled them to weave a strong social fabric and become a very politicized community. People would work together to build a new wall, or march together to claim ownership of the land and demand basic services such as electricity and running water. They would demand education and the right to live dignified lives. I grew up in that environment: chanting slogans against the government and its corruption, supporting student movements, socializing and partying while working, and becoming an optimist—someone willing to be happy, even in the worst circumstances.



La Polar, 2003, umbrella and peacock and pheasant feathers, 43 5/16×78 1/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

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For many reasons, I remember the sentence “tomar el cielo por asalto” (to take the sky by assault), which I think Karl Marx said originally in German, but unfortunately my mother tongue is Spanish and, during the time I spent in Berlin, I never learned German. Maybe if I find the original quote it will mean something perfectly different from my version in Spanish; I prefer to keep it as I know it. Maybe you know it in Korean—I’m sure it comes across really different from the Spanish, not even considering how it is expressed in Hangul, the Korean written language (with its perfection and beautiful story). You and I both speak in English all the time, as we’re doing now, and, we can say whatever we want about agreeing or disagreeing, laughing or crying, being happy or sad, but if someone who wants to read about us doesn’t speak English, it doesn’t really matter. For some indigenous people from Mexico who have migrated to the US for economic reasons, it’s a tricky situation. They speak fluent English and their original language—Mixtec, Zapotec, P’urhépecha, or Hñhäñhu, for example—is not Spanish, which is the official language in Mexico. Interesting, isn’t it?

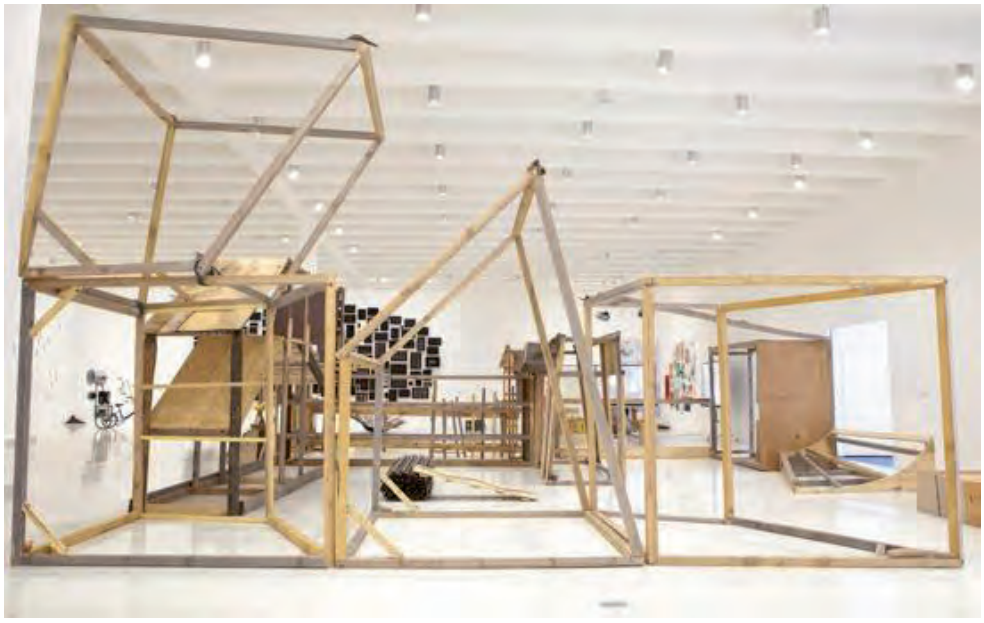
HY Back to the transformation of O’Gorman, it was reflected not only in his approach to formal language, but also in his use of materials. The “direction” of that transformation is also interesting. He seems almost against the modern idea of progress, which might be a paraphrase of what you said about him turning against himself by destroying his knowledge of architectural language. Here I have to ask you about the piece in dOCUMENTA (13) last year. Your piece was so radical that it fit what you said above: “I like making work that’s not supposed to be seen as art”—it was almost invisible.

AC Well, O’Gorman went really far: he killed himself. Me, I’m just in search of transformation as evidence of existence: nature and humans work together everyday on this with or without violence. For my project in Kassel, I made a project in a parallel environment to the main exhibition. I wanted to test if I was still able to make something without money or an audience, as I did when I was younger. I didn’t want to escape from myself. I made a set of rules out of ideas, intentions, and constant interests from my practice since I started working as an artist in 1987. I recovered notes and images from my notebooks to make a list of 34 concepts including the following: delirious, affirmative, sweaty, definitely unfinished, fragmentary, communal, empiric, coherent with the landscape, laughing, inefficient, unstable, happy, contradictory, generous, indecent, sensual, amorphous, warm, and blind date! Then I assigned a color to each concept, and I painted a bundle of pick-up sticks with those colors. Playing in the streets of Kassel with the sticks I would randomly select two colors/ideas and then improvise with materials

gathered from the surroundings. I documented some of my activities, but in the end decided not to have any register of them—it was too “efficient.” I’m still working on a book from that project, but I have nothing to show!

HY Speaking of big exhibitions, I was wondering about the show at the Walker right now. The exhibition’s complexity and scale make it seem like a survey show. Am I correct?

AC As I said before about my sculptures, I pile objects to create physical and conceptual instability, contradiction, fragility—everything is about to collapse. So the show at the Walker, organized by Clara Kim, is like piling exhibitions together. It gathers different projects I’ve been working on in recent years. All of them share the same title: *Autoconstrucción*. It was nice to see all of these installations in dialogue with each other, each saying their own thing. Now they are independent, and I like that.



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Installation views of *The Autoconstrucción Suites*, 2013, dimensions variable, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

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HY I am curious about all the vehicles in your work: they can be bicycles or carts. There is a mobile and romantic and humorous element in your sculptures. Are they vagabonds? I am also very curious about your sonic vehicles.

AC For me the vehicles are, first of all, objects. Because of this, they each have a specific weight, shape, texture, color, and size. Most of the time bicycles are industrially made, yet regardless, to me they are alive. When you buy one, you customize it according to your specific needs, adding a horn, a different saddle, a big mirror, a satchel, or a basket. Sometimes you can even paint or decorate it with a couple of tassels. In some extreme cases, you can turn it into a portable house, as some homeless people do. In those bikes people haul lots of bags and cases with things to protect them from the weather, other people, and other vehicles. I’ve seen customized bikes here and there, and I always wanted to have one.

In 2008 I was invited for a six-month residency in Scotland by Alexia Holt from Cove Park and Francis McKee from CCA in Glasgow. There I met John O’Hara, a wise man whose specialty is customizing bicycles. He works at the Common Wheel, an organization that runs workshops in which forgotten or destroyed bikes are salvaged. They also help people with disabilities by giving them related tasks as a form of therapy. With John’s help I made my dream come true: I used pieces of discarded bikes to make a portable sound system, like those from Jamaica I always liked, with lots of speakers to play music in the streets. Then I started thinking about writing lyrics for songs. I found that every Glaswegian is a musician, so I started asking local bands to create music for my lyrics. These lyrics tell stories about my neighborhood in Mexico City—very personal stuff became a music album. But it’s also a portrait of Glasgow as a city and the result of joyful, spontaneous collaboration.

By now I’ve made a group of four bikes. I developed a particular story for each. One I made with students in San Francisco when I was a visiting professor at the California College for the Arts. Another one I made when I was in Berlin on a DAAD—there I wrote a new set of songs with music by Gabriel Acevedo Velarde, Sebastian Gräfe, Valentina Jäger, and Maureen Tsakiris. We performed live in some of the city’s public spaces. Another I made in

Oxford. I appropriated some local music (especially from the collective called the Blessing Force) and some 1960s and ’70s protest music from Latin America, all of it whistled by me. This last bike was inspired by the motorcycles in the film *Quadrophenia*.



Performance view of *CRV: Collaborative Re-creation Vehicles*, 2009, parade and race, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, November 21, 2009, San Francisco. Photo by Johnna Arnold. Courtesy of the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts.

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HY There is one thing I unlearned thoroughly: how to draw. You seem like a genuinely talented draftsman. I have to think about your gorillas. They’re drawn eloquently, in an amazing variety of styles. They’re realistic but they also look like calligraphy or reliefs, like carvings on the wall! Do you think that’s just due to your talent or does this have something to do with the figurative tradition, such as mural painting in Mexico?

AC In the late ’80s, I worked as a cartoon artist. I’ve liked to draw since my childhood, as almost everybody else. I’ve unlearned the right way to draw, but humor is still a very important element in my work. Political cartoons have a strong critical element against state power, obviously not only in Mexico. Here we have an important tradition of newspaper cartoons that point to ridiculous attitudes and negative circumstances in politics—they become the opinion of the people. This has been a key factor in my education, not only as an artist, but also as a person. Recently, when I made a series of drawings of apes, I was also trying to highlight our genetic proximity to them; they’re our closest relatives. That’s why I gave the drawings the names of some family members: Ángeles, Rogelio, Jesús, Alejandra, Eréndira. I also wanted to remind myself that I cannot only hold something with my hand’s opposable thumb to make things, like a brush to make a drawing, but I can also destroy nature or myself with a gun, for example.

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above: *Nuestra imagen actual: Helena*; below: *Nuestra imagen actual: Alejandra*. Both images 2012, vinyl paint, ink, and water-based acrylic enamel on kraft paper, 118 3/25×157 24/25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

HY You are such a rich thinker; your thoughts have a high degree of complexity, fluidity, and vitality. That eloquence in thinking is also found in what you make. The first piece of yours I ever encountered was a sculpture—I double-checked the caption next to it to memorize your name, because I was so heavily impressed by its eloquence. Like everything eloquent, it looked so effortless. Is it really effortless? If it is not, what kind of struggle is behind your production in general?

AC When we find a way to communicate, eloquence happens. I like to use language as a live organism. It has its own existence beyond me. When I make a sculpture, I think it is alive as well. I see myself more as a matchmaker of sorts. Sometimes, when there are more than two objects in the sculpture, or project, or specific situation I’ve set up, it becomes an eloquent orgy in which I make no effort other than to play with the elements of the piece. I feel a bit like an animist voyeur.

HY Once you purchased books in Korean, which you can’t read. So what do books mean to you?

AC Yes, of course, I remember that visit to your studio in Kreuzberg very well. You shared some books on Rosemarie Trockel with me. Indirectly I understood your interest in her works. You also made some simple little dishes for dinner that were cooked easily: noodles and rice, a sort of quick *bibimbap* with some wine. We had some *makgeolli* to drink.

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The first time I went to Seoul, for the Media City biennial in 2010, I went out with Clara Kim, Doryun Chong, and Eungie Joo to sing karaoke and drink cheap beer and *makgeolli* all night long. I found some good books the next day walking around: one on Jogyesa (the chief temple of Seon Buddhism in Korea), and across the avenue, a nice bookstore with very beautiful handmade books. They all contained extraordinary drawings and texts, prayers, and other religious content. It was impressive to witness the long tradition in calligraphy that, as I’ve been told, is now in a sad moment, because younger generations are not so interested in it. The only problem I faced there was not being able to understand any of those exquisite signs and shapes, many in Korean but also many in Chinese.

I like books, as our dear friends the artists Mariana Castillo Deball and Manuel Räder do. Both of them make really good stuff, including that book he designed with you, with the twisted pages. I also like Damián Ortega’s generous project Alias, based in Mexico City, designed for sharing hard-to-find or out-of-print art books in Spanish. I also make publications myself. There’s a lot to learn through making decisions for a book: choosing fonts, images, captions, paper, ink, size, stitching, gluing . . . not to mention all possible textual content. I like books and magazines that are thought of as objects; the thingness of publications (including posters, flyers, stickers, album covers, boxes) is very important to me. As I feel them in my hands, I try to understand what they are saying. They have something that is absolutely beyond mere content, which ideally should cohere with their shape and materials, just like with any other artwork.

HY Are you a book collector?

AC I have no special criteria for acquiring books; I just let them seduce me. I prefer that they choose me by calling my attention. I almost never look for books; they find me. This happened during other trips to Korea, more recently in Gwangju, where I found some other books related to history, including one on the uprising of 1980 against the

dictatorship. In this case the content became more important than the object itself. Good books don’t necessarily have to be precious objects.

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Abraham Cruzvillegas

For the Mexican artist, the term 'autoconstrucción' has referred to a series of projects rooted in the ad hoc, self-built homes of his native Ajusco. What does it mean, then, that he's referring to his latest work as 'autodestrucción'?

By Chris Sharp

There is a fine line between what Abraham Cruzvillegas calls *autoconstrucción* and *autodestrucción*. Somewhat grammatically awkward, the former proposition (which might seem like, but isn't, a synonym for DIY) is the umbrella term under which the Mexico-born, Mexico City-based artist has been presenting and developing his rich and varied production since 2007 (he has been working as an artist since the 1990s). Seemingly a bit more linguistically at ease with itself, the latter proposition introduces a new phase in the artist's practice, inaugurated with his December exhibition at Regen Projects in Los Angeles, titled *Autodestrucción 1*. However, whether the work created under the prefix *de* radically differs from that created under the *con* remains to be seen. And that may be the point. Or one of the points. But before getting stuck in the koanlike matter of that philosophical conundrum, perhaps it would be useful to clarify our terms and ask just what *autoconstrucción* is. And where it comes from.

Autoconstrucción, for Cruzvillegas, refers to his parents' home in Ajusco, a neighbourhood to the south of Mexico City, and to the ad hoc method by which it was built. Constructed on notoriously inhospitable volcanic rock, Ajusco was originally settled by squatting families (Cruzvillegas's included) during the 1960s. These early settlers built their homes not all at once but in phases, adding parts and whole rooms when finances and material circumstances permitted, and with neighbours helping neighbours as needed. Such a progressive, collective and organic way of building ensured that the homes and neighbourhood in which they evolved were (and still are) 'definitively unfinished' – to use a favoured Duchampism of Cruzvillegas. Essentially unplanned, in a permanent state of flux, made with local and/or found materials and rooted in community, this style of architecture was the source of inspiration for Cruzvillegas's *autoconstrucción*.

If the political position behind *autoconstrucción* ever seems unclear, it is because the artist's dialectical attitude is fully present on every level of the work conceptually, politically and materially. Where most privileged Westerners, who have been culturally trained to condemn poverty, might perceive such conditions as nothing more than an affliction to be endured by the poor, Cruzvillegas sees extraordinary ingenuity, methodology and community-building through building. This, however, does not imply an uncritical embrace of these conditions. Rather, he seeks organically to account for the complexity, ambiguity and potential contradiction contained in any sociopolitical problem. All of which is to say, akin to Ajusco, that the so-called definition and even meaning of *autoconstrucción*, as well as the kind of work generated under its aegis, is in a continual state of expansion.

This is precisely why and how, under Cruzvillegas's auspices, *autoconstrucción* has been able to manifest in so many guises, places and modes: from small autonomous sculptures to large sculptural-cum-architectural installations; from mobile musical collaborations to an hourlong film, even a >

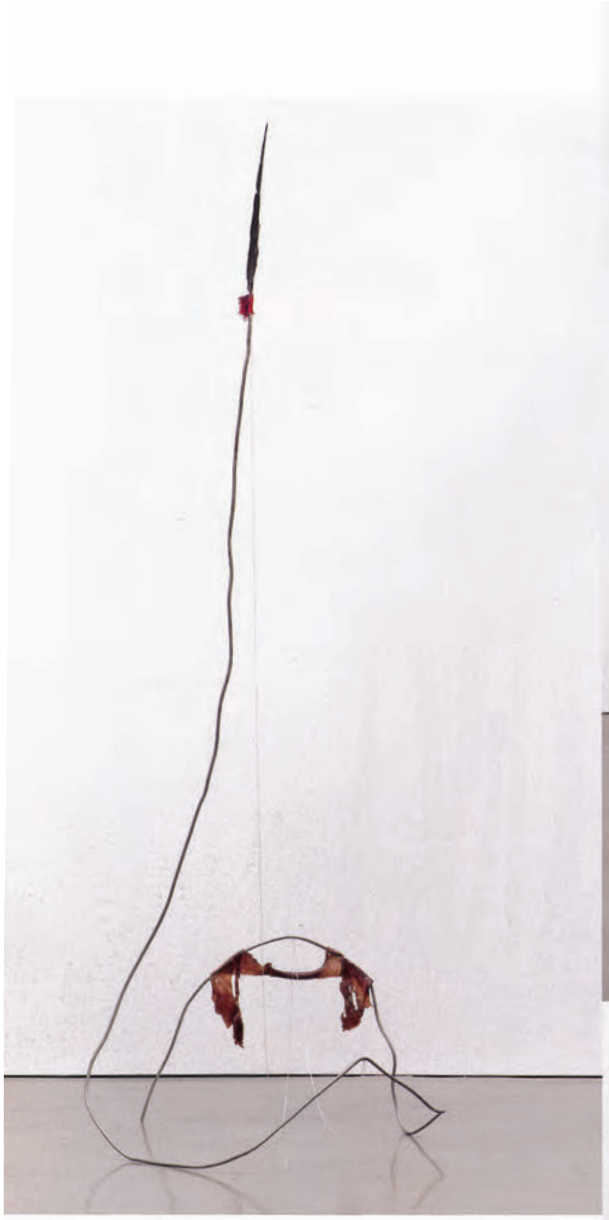
Autodestrucción 1, 2012 (installation view). Photo: Brian Forrest. Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Chris Sharp. «Abraham Cruzvillegas», *Art Review*, n°65, January - February 2013, p81.

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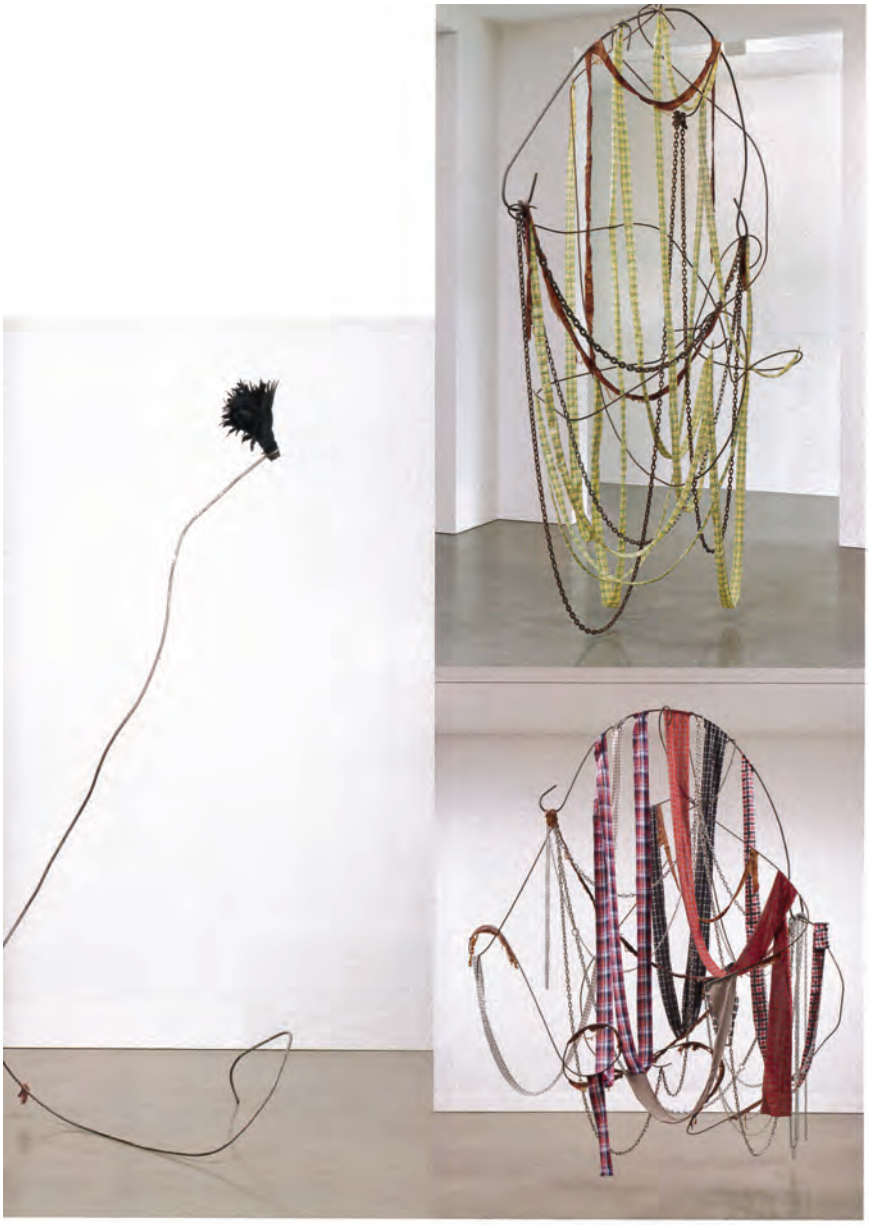


this page, clockwise from above: *El Travieso (An Emotional Craft)*, 2012, copper rod, fabric, jewellery chain, feathers, meat, 201 x 81 x 81 cm; *April in Paris (Brief & Delirious)*, 2012, rebar, fabric, feathers, chain, meat, 292 x 203 x 213 cm; *Chicas Patas Boogie (Sweaty & Needy)*, 2012, rebar, fabric, feathers, chain, meat, 254 x 203 x 236 cm. All three images: © the artist, courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles

facing page, first three images, clockwise from left: *Preso Me Llevan (An Affective Blind Date)*, 2012, iron rod, feathers, chain, fabric, meat, 325 x 147 x 97 cm; *Vendredi 13 (Affirmative, Written & Told)*, 2012, rebar, fabric, chain, feathers, meat, 381 x 234 x 165 cm; *Boogie Woogie (Handmade & Sensual)*, 2012, rebar, chain, fabric, meat, 381 x 353 x 203 cm. All three images: © the artist, courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles

facing page, far right: *Autoconstrucción: Departamento de Defensa*, 2007, wood, bricks, glue, broken glass bottles, 120 x 80 x 60 cm. Courtesy the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

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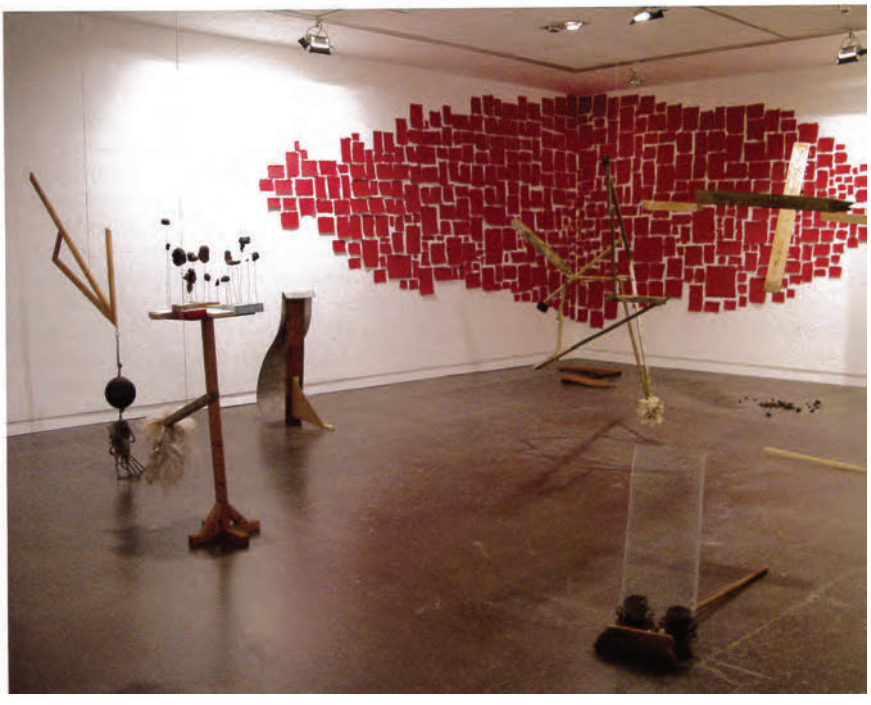




play. *Autoconstrucción* is multiplicity incarnate. Indeed, the term could be said to designate more of a spirit and an ethic than, say, a theory-driven aesthetic. And yet his works are often united by an identifiable formal sensibility, whose predominantly found-object or poor-material aesthetic influence is as indebted to Robert Rauschenberg, David Hammons and Jimmie Durham as it is to Gabriel Orozco. The difference between them and Cruzvillegas, however, is the highly personal, specific and inherently protean programme to which his cultural and material universe adheres. Thus does the freestanding sculpture *Autoconstrucción: Departamento de Defensa* (2007), which consists of a diminutive totem of wedges of wood stacked one on top of another, with a series of broken bottles glued to the summit, deploy such found aesthetics towards the end of representing homemade security devices as seen atop the outer walls of economically challenged neighbourhoods. Neither a condemnation or affirmation of poverty, such a work celebrates the ingenuity people are liable to bring to such circumstances. The spirit of collaboration and hybridity that informs the artist's evolving method can be seen in his musical projects titled – any guesses? – *Autoconstrucción*, at the CCA in Glasgow in 2008, and later, at the end of his DAAD residency in Berlin, *The Self Builder's Groove* (2011). At the core of both projects were songs the artist had written primarily about Ajusco, produced, in the Berlin project (in collaboration with Gabriel Acevedo Velarde and Sebastian Gräfe), 'in the space', to quote Cruzvillegas from the attendant publication, 'between a punk three-chord strategy, sample dub tradition, rebajada's slow motion earsplitting, hip-hop appropriation and Tyrolese-Tibetan electro-digital tunes'. In the Glasgow version, a pedal-powered vehicle (evolved from a bicycle) with speakers attached to it, made in collaboration with Glaswegian John O'Hara, roamed the city and broadcast the songs. In Berlin a band was formed by the artist, giving three concerts in different parts of the city (as is often the case with Cruzvillegas's projects, both incarnations were accompanied by publications, which are not so much catalogues as they are documents of the process, inspiration and community generated by and generative of each manifestation of *autoconstrucción*).







this page, from top:
Autoconstrucción, 2009, HD video, colour with sound, 1 hr 3 min; *The Self Builder's Groove*, 2011, mobile soundsystem, 170 x 130 x 400 cm; *Autoconstrucción*, 2008, mixed media, dimensions variable.
Images: courtesy the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

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this page, both images:
Untitled, 2010, wood, beer caps, bulbs, roots, fabric, iron, dimensions variable.
Photo: Florian Kleinefenn.
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris



Cruzvillegas directly portrayed Ajusco in *Autoconstrucción* (2009). Inspired by a childhood memory of witnessing his parents having sex, the artist created a 62-minute pornographic portrait of his neighbourhood which features four heterosexual couples of varying ages engaged in explicit indoor and outdoor sex, intercut with pans and shots of the buildings, textures and colours that make up Ajusco. Little or nothing to do with a drive to shock, its desire to portray sex links up with the artist's holistic and inclusive attitude, which registers elsewhere in his irrepressible embrace of marginalised or dissident subcultures.

All but returning to the inspirational roots of *autoconstrucción*, the most spatially expansive embodiment of the ever-mutating term took place in 2010 at Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris. Titled *La Petite Ceinture* (after the wall that formerly surrounded Paris and that geographically, economically and culturally delineated an inside and out), the plastic aspect of this exhibition comprised a large, architectural, circular structure that, made exclusively of found materials such as scraps of wood, was reminiscent of a skeletal favela and filled the entire main gallery space. This unruly object was complemented by a photocopied publication, which featured interviews (conducted by Cruzvillegas) with knitters, community gardeners, slam poets and other figures who issued from a cultural space that was alien to clichés of Parisian identity.

Questions of identity, its relationship to sub- and counterculture, and how it is constructed, inherited and displayed through fashion and subculture have played an important role not only in *autoconstrucción* but also, it seems, in the dialectical shift to *autodestrucción*. The first manifestation of it, at Regen Projects at the end of 2012, consisted of a series of hanging and freestanding sculptures made of rebar, wire, feathers, jewellery chains, textiles and curing strips of beef, and was heavily informed by the artist's interest in zoot suiters (or *Pachucos*, as they are known in Mexico) and their Second World War French counterparts, *Zazous* – subcultural groups whose rebellious nonconformity was made to visibly register in sartorial excess. As is often the case with Cruzvillegas, the interest has autobiographical roots: his great uncle, who might have been a character in a Julio Cortázar story, was a zoot-suiter jazz musician who ended up in France during the war. For Cruzvillegas, the formation of identity is the product of a complex exchange of paradoxical forces that bring into play both construction and destruction, separation and inclusion, a departure and ultimately a return, full of affirmation, negation and contradiction. This being the case, *autodestrucción* promises to be as much about creation as it is about destruction, and as such underlines the overall exemplary – to my mind – dialectical complexity of Cruzvillegas's practice.

While researching this article and reading through the abundance of material and artist writings, I was struck by the following handwritten quotation from Robert Smithson's *Hotel Palenque* (1969–72) in the Mexican artist's Documenta notebook (you may not have noticed him, but he was a 'participant', surreptitiously composing colour-coded, ad hoc sculptures every day from on-hand material on the streets of Kassel): 'Buildings being both ripped down and built up at the same time.' It seems like a note to self, a sage and compact reminder of the paradoxical nature not just of Cruzvillegas's work, but of the world in general.■