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# Oscar Tuazon

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**The Seattle Times**

## Seattle waterfront revamp includes new perspective from Native artists



These posts and beams were made by Oscar Tuazon and local Native collaborators for the revamped Seattle waterfront. The installation honors the Indigenous Coast Salish people. (by Ceballo / The Seattle Times)

On Seattle's reinvigorated waterfront, fresh rain pulls out the scent of Douglas fir from a new art installation: a series of posts and beams inspired by traditional Indigenous longhouse architecture.

The artwork, which stretches from Columbia to Spring streets and towers over plant beds and a new bike path, is a part of [Seattle's larger waterfront revitalization project](#). It's one of nine new and planned installations inspired by the history, ecology and communities of the land on which they stand. Three pieces of art were made by Native artists.

As Seattle's waterfront project carves a new chapter in the city's history, Indigenous artists are forging spaces for Indigenous people with their art. While the Alaskan Way Viaduct once bordered the city's waterfront, crowding it with stacked rows of traffic, the artists' sculptures reinforce a new vision of the space that invites personal interaction — and prods people to recognize Native culture, land and peoples in Seattle's past and future.

With the posts and beams already installed and more artwork on the way this year, here's a glimpse at how the project came to life.

Laura Isaza  
*Seattle waterfront revamp includes new perspective from Native artists*  
The Seattle Times, January 12, 2025.  
<https://urlr.me/Cm75TD>

## Evolving culture

Oscar Tuazon is the lead artist behind the posts and beams on the waterfront; he grew up in Indianola on the Suquamish Tribe's Port Madison Indian Reservation but is not Native himself. He now lives in Los Angeles and his work has been featured in installations and museums worldwide. But for Tuazon, the Pacific Northwest is special — he still has a small studio near the Hoh River on the Olympic Peninsula, in fact.

The waterfront project was a natural fit.

As a teenager, Tuazon felt inspired by the collaboration in Washington's Indigenous communities as they revitalized canoeing traditions during the [1989 Paddle to Seattle](#). A multiday canoe journey from La Push to Seattle's Golden Gardens Park, the journey kicked off an annual tradition focused on cultural revitalization and celebration. Tuazon admired how Coast Salish people "taught themselves how to make canoes because the chain of knowledge had been shattered by the prohibition on those practices."

Witnessing that collaboration was a slice of inspiration for Tuazon's new work on the waterfront.



These are longhouse-inspired posts and beams on Seattle's waterfront, to be framed by house posts at each end of the three-block piece. (Ivy Ceballo / The Seattle Times)

Tuazon consulted with the Muckleshoot and Suquamish tribal councils, who nominated Randi Purser (Suquamish) and Tyson Simmons and Keith Stevenson (Muckleshoot) to help. This month, a Muckleshoot house post made by Simmons and Stevenson and a Suquamish house post made by Purser will be placed on each end of the three-block installation.



Though he's now based in Los Angeles, Oscar Tuazon grew up in Indianola in Kitsap County. He still has a small studio space near the Hoh River on the Olympic Peninsula. (Max Farago)

One of the two house posts will complete a family in sculpture across Puget Sound. Purser's post depicts Sholeetsa, Chief Seattle's mother, holding Chief Seattle as an infant. Across the water, on Bainbridge Island, another of Purser's posts shows Schweabe, Chief Seattle's father.

"It represents a young family who faced a time of change," Purser said. "I wanted to convey that feeling within Seattle of an Indian woman facing the future."

Purser said these carvings represent a broader theme: confidently confronting challenges and change with grace.

While the posts are carved from cedar, the traditional material for Coast Salish house posts, the rest of the installation was created using Douglas fir. Tuazon chose to work with wood due to its historical presence in both Indigenous and industrial Seattle architecture — and with the goal of stoking collaborations with other artists in the future.

"What I was really interested in was this idea of wood architecture as a perpetual, infinite kind of process that, rather than building with a permanent material like concrete, that wood architecture actually has to be renewed and rebuilt by each generation," Tuazon said.

Sculpture, like culture, should be dynamic, Tuazon said: "It's about creating a space for people. Opening a space and creating a sense of place."

Longhouses, Tuazon explained, were modular structures that were reconfigured seasonally. The post and beam structures that inspired Tuazon's installation were permanent fixtures, but other components, like cedar boards, would be bundled up to build smaller houses during the summer months.

“There was this real misapprehension of these structures by the first European settlers who thought that these post and beam frames were abandoned buildings,” Tuazon said. “But they weren’t abandoned. They were just kind of buildings in motion.”

Tuazon said his intention in creating an evolving sculpture mirrors the resurgence of Salish cultures.

“It’s just this amazing renaissance of Salish culture happening right now,” he said. “I hope the structure is able to support other artists, other carvers, and also act as this incomplete structure that we can each imagine in our mind, or that’s completed in our mind.”

These new works reflect the dynamism of Coast Salish culture, which honors the past as it evolves. Qwalsius-Shaun Peterson (Puyallup), whose art will be installed across from Pier 58 this year, echoed that sentiment. In [his artist statement](#), Peterson says he hopes his work “will demonstrate that Native art is not static. Our people are part of this land and its history, but most importantly we are part of the present.” (Peterson did not comment for this story.)

Both pieces are part of the city’s [broader waterfront face-lift, an \\$806 million project](#) that will create a promenade park on the shoreline in addition to the Overlook Walk, playgrounds and a new bike path.

Angela Brady, director of Seattle’s Office of the Waterfront and Civic Projects, said these artists were tasked with representing various elements of the waterfront as the area gets a new look.

“We really wanted (the art) to be of this place. And so the artwork may address environmental issues related to the waterfront. Or they can be about the communities of the waterfront. That is really where the Indigenous artwork projects come in,” Brady said. “It’s about helping people understand this place and reinforcing it through the artwork.”

### **Weaving connection**

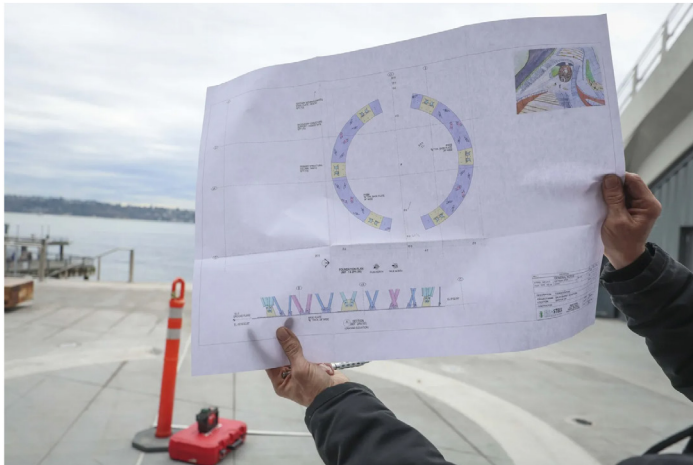
Farther north on the waterfront, near the Salish Steps on the [Overlook Walk](#), a large basket designed and woven by the MTK Matriarchs will be installed this spring. It will also invite viewers to consider the relationship between Seattle’s Indigenous past, present and future.

[MTK stands for Malynn Foster, Tamela LaClair and Kimberly Deriana](#). The trio have a palpable sense of respect and admiration for each other and for the role of women in Indigenous communities.

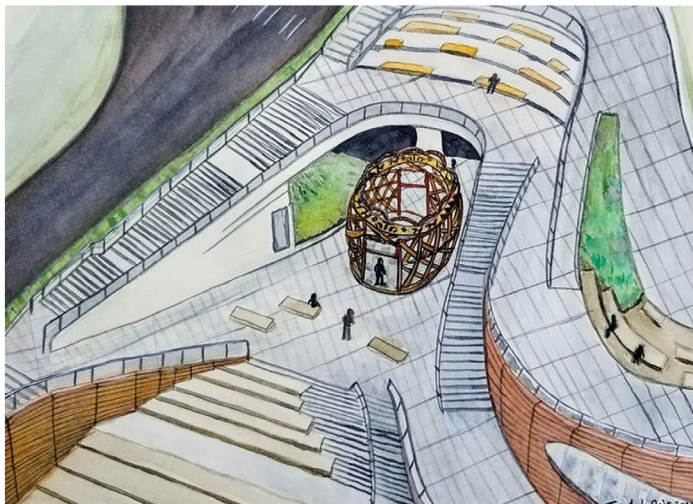
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1 of 3 | This is the site near the Overlook Walk's Salish Steps where Malynn Foster, Tamela LaClair and Kimberly Deriana (aka the MTK Matriarchs) will place a large basket sculpture this spring. (Ivy Ceballo / The Seattle Times)



2 of 3 | Patrick Nelson shows a diagram of the MTK Matriarchs' planned basket sculpture on the Seattle waterfront. (Ivy Ceballo / The Seattle Times)



3 of 3 | This is a sketch of the basket sculpture by MTK Matriarchs that will be installed this year on the Seattle waterfront. One of the artists explained its accessible design: "It's not this untouchable art thing that..." (Courtesy MTK Matriarchs) [More](#) ▾

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“That’s where a lot of our women are, with our work in our communities — in basket weaving,” Foster said. “These are the oldest stories of our women, these old designs that are passed down and the teachings that are passed down.”

Foster and LaClair are cousins who have Coast Salish heritage, while Deriana, who descends from the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes, grew up in Montana and now resides on Coast Salish land; she has a background in Indigenous architecture, planning, design and art.

“Tammy lives smack dab on the rez, I live between two reservations, Kim was raised without reservation,” Foster said. “We bring different perspectives, but the same teachings of our ancestors in this harmonious way.”

She and LaClair taught Deriana how to weave. Foster was excited to pass on knowledge that elders had shared with her, explaining the significance behind the weaving techniques as the artists worked on this project.

“I wanted to give homage to the way we do things and why we do those things,” Foster said. She added that “weaving the wisdom of all (of our) teachings together” as part of this project was meaningful, “being patient and connected instead of coming from places of self.”

Foster said sharing knowledge is a core part of the weaving tradition — and that art is an integral part of cultural learning for the Coast Salish. As a child, she said, “I could interact with these pieces because that’s how we learn and that’s how we become the weaver. Everything we do is that way.”

Given that the artists shared knowledge to create the sculpture, it’s appropriate that community and connection are central to how the Matriarchs want their work to be received, too.

“It’s a gathering basket. We created a space for people to gather,” Foster said. It’s a place “where people can come and have their ceremony, where they can come and have their special moments. I wanted my ancestors, as they’re walking through that space, to stop and see something familiar from their time.”



Patrick Nelson, left, chats with Kimberly Deriana of the MTK Matriarchs, whose basket sculpture will take its place at the Seattle waterfront's Overlook Walk. (Ivy Ceballo / The Seattle Times)

Deriana's architectural expertise helped meet the challenges of this artwork (namely, navigating weight constraints and aiming for a design that wouldn't block the view of Puget Sound at the Salish Steps). She added that people will be able to literally walk through and around the basket; "it's not this untouchable art thing that isn't for people."

For generations, Coast Salish communities have faced violence and attempts at cultural erasure. These new artworks make a clear statement: Indigenous people belong here.

"We need to see ourselves in the city and on this waterfront on the shoreline so that our past ancestors and our future ancestors know that this is their place and this place is for us," Deriana said. "That's been a big theme in the work — making Native people especially feel a sense of belonging and that we're united because we've been so separated through colonization."

## FRIEZE

### Oscar Tuazon Builds Activist Prototypes

At Franz-Josefs-Kai 3, Vienna, the artist presents a show whose engagement with water is inseparable from a deep sensibility towards Indigenous history



Emanating from a small monitor at the centre of the gallery, the voices of Goshute Chairman Rupert Steele and Ely Shoshone elder Delaine Spilsbury form the conceptual backbone of Oscar Tuazon's first solo exhibition in Austria, 'Words for Water'. The conservationists speak about the massacres of their ancestors, their fight against the Southern Nevada Water Authority's plans to pump groundwater from their native land, learning from 'mother nature' as our 'original teacher', and decentring human exceptionalism towards interconnectedness and respect. Their narrative sets the tone for a show whose engagement with water is inseparable from a deep sensibility towards Indigenous history and its relationship to nature.

The video is part of *Cedar Spring Water School* (2023), one of three architectural structures in the exhibition that function as stages for the audience to engage with socio-environmental issues, presented alongside a selection of sculptures and paintings. Steele and Spilsbury are collaborators in the Spring Valley iteration of Tuazon's project 'Water School' (2016–ongoing), in which the artist builds permanent learning spaces across the US, raising awareness of the political battles around water. *Cedar Spring* is a prototype for a simple dome structure made from cardboard, plywood and tape. With its polygonal, cave-like architecture, the work has a raw, retro-futurist aesthetic.



Oscar Tuazon, *Cedar Spring Water School*, 2023, cardboard, wood, tape, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris and STANDARD (OSLO), Oslo; photograph: Lisa Rastl

A personal highlight are the construction's powder-printed windows featuring delicate paintings of blue circles (*Cedar Spring Circle* and *Scholar's Circle*, both 2023). When daylight streams gently through them, they add a touch of sacredness to the otherwise-DIY look of the piece. Tuazon manages to create a surprisingly warm, inviting atmosphere that is simultaneously undergirded by a fundamental sense of fragility due to the structure's provisional nature.

With its modular construction, *Cedar Spring* references Euro-American architectural experiments around self-sufficiency and nomadic living of the 1960s and '70s. In fact, the work draws on key aspects of Steve and Holly Baer's iconic *Zome Home* (1971–72), which uses water in oil drums to create a passive heating and cooling system – a technology also familiar to Indigenous architecture. The Western counter-culture movement's primitivist appropriation of Indigenous building traditions didn't necessary go hand in hand with a long-term engagement with, and accountability towards, Indigenous people. The artist sets an important counterexample by not treating native American homelands as a blank canvas for his practice but placing Indigenous struggles at the centre of his activist projects.



Oscar Tuazon, *Oil on Water*, 2023, marble, polished aluminum, water, water pump and electrical components, 89 x 58 x 58 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Morán Morán, Los Angeles; photograph: Lisa Rastl

Tuazon's use of simple building techniques and materials often gives his works an open, unfinished appearance that invites audience engagement. Occupying the back of the gallery, *Building* (2023) is a half-scale model of the artist's family's home, the design of which was based on the Coast Salish longhouses of the Pacific Northwest. Stripped back to its wooden frame – with the exception of painted windows, a fireplace and benches – the space no longer functions as a private environment. These participatory works are proposals for interacting, imagining and thinking – a refreshing sentiment in Vienna, a city full of overly pompous and inflexible architecture.

Surprisingly, the exhibition opens with the ultimate commodifiable art form: an abstract painting titled *Pollen Transfer* (2024). It features the imprints of blue, black, purple and neon-orange marbling ink and enamel that were dropped onto the surface of water before they touched the canvas. Alongside comparable paintings on found topographical maps at the end of the show, this unexpectedly decorative work reflects Tuazon's engagement with water on a more poetic level. In a show that ranges between collaborative and educational action on the one hand and classical art objects on the other, Tuazon doesn't shy away from proposing the possible co-existence of different modes of art-making.

## Oscar Tuazon in Bielefeld **Architektur im letzten Hemd**



Foto: Philipp Ottendörfer, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Installationsansicht Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 2023

**In der Kunsthalle Bielefeld baut Oscar Tuazon auf die Gemeinschaft: Am liebsten würde der Künstler anderen Leuten dabei zusehen, wie sie die Arbeit nutzbar machen – womöglich gegen seine Intention**

Warum er nicht als Architekt arbeite, wo er sich doch so eingehend mit architektonischen Fragestellungen befasst, wird Oscar Tuazon im Künstlergespräch in der Kunsthalle Bielefeld gefragt, natürlich von einem Architekten. Die Frage führt mitten ins Œuvre des 1975 in Seattle geborenen und heute in Los Angeles lebenden Bildhauers. Beispielhaft etwa die Skulptur, mit der die Schau eröffnet: In prekärer Balance steht dort ein Vierbein aus schweren Holzbalken, provozierend rudimentär, leicht windschief, irgendwie entblößt. Wenn man so will: Architektur im letzten Hemd. Dass jenes Konstrukt vor einem blitzsauber abgezirkelten und farbstark strahlenden "Regenbogen"-Gemälde Frank Stellas aus der Sammlung des Hauses platziert ist, akzentuiert dessen Arte-povera-mäßigen Charakter zusätzlich. Es gehe ihm um die Erkundung der minimalen Bedingungen für das Leben, erzählt er, eben: "Was wir brauchen", wie die Schau titelt.

Der tuazonische Minimalismus verhält sich zur historischen Minimal Art allerdings wie deren Inversion: Nicht Spezifik, Kraft und Aura des "einen Ding", wie sie Großminimalist Donald Judd für sich definierte, werden stark gemacht. Sondern vielmehr das Publikum und sein partizipatorisches Potenzial. Am liebsten würde er anderen Leuten dabei zusehen, wie sie die Arbeit nutzbar machen – womöglich gegen seine Intention. Tuazon huldigt einer eigenen Philosophie des "Non-finito", des Unvollendeten, der "Anti-Form". Diese Brüche versteht er als Einladung, sich kollaborativ am Werk zu beteiligen. Der Modernismus des rechten Winkels ist seine Sache nicht; wenn eine Skulptur schon an Sol LeWitt erinnern sollte, dann doch bitteschön in "betrunkenen" Form, gibt er an.

In vielen Fällen hat seine Arbeit die museale Rahmung, den White Cube zur notwendigen Voraussetzung. Jener Kontext droht ihren partizipativen Anspruch allerdings zu unterlaufen, der dann bloße Anrufung bleibt, im Modus des Als-ob. Zwischen diesen Polen schwingt sein Werk und entfaltet seine Widersprüchlichkeit. Die Freiheit des "Amateurs" kostet er voll aus; es seien eben Vorschläge, so sein Credo – deshalb hält er die Vorgaben "echter" Architektur wohl auf Distanz.



Foto: Philipp Ottendörfer, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Installationsansicht Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 2023



Foto: Philipp Ottendörfer, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Installationsansicht "Reading Booth", 2016, Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 2023

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Foto: Philipp Ottendörfer, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Installationsansicht Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 2023



Foto: Philipp Ottendörfer, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Installationsansicht Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 2023



Foto: Philipp Ottendörfer, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Installationsansicht Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 2023

Jens Bülskämper  
*Oscar Tuazon in Bielefeld. Architektur im letzten Hemd*  
Monopol Magazin, October 4, 2023.  
<https://cutt.ly/wwnGaMZj>

# ARTFORUM

BERGEN, NORWAY

## Oscar Tuazon

BERGEN KUNSTHALL

The high-ceilinged halls of Bergen Kunsthall's 1930s functionalist building recently housed another, quite different take on functional architecture—one conjured by American artist Oscar Tuazon. Having dissected ideological, structural, and philosophical underpinnings of architecture, construction, and Minimalist sculpture throughout his career, Tuazon's inauguration of his ongoing "Water School" in 2016 marked a turn toward more explicitly incorporating activist themes and strategies. The project consists of impromptu "schools" on the knowledge of water, physically taking place in structures modeled on Holly and Steve Baer's dome-shaped Zome House, an experiment developed in the American Southwest in the early '70s. Intrinsic to these houses is their capacity for being heated and cooled by sunlight and water—a technology also familiar to Indigenous architecture. Tuazon credits the 2016 Standing Rock protests and its key figures as his inspiration and teachers for "Water School," stating that he first encountered the idea of such a phenomenon there, faced with slogans such as "Water is Life" and "Water connects us all."

The exhibition in Bergen featured four models of wooden structures from previous iterations of "Water School"—all of which have taken place in conjunction with political battles for water and land rights in the US—at 60 percent of the original size. Built of cardboard, plywood, and tape, these appeared lightweight, situated at seemingly random intervals throughout the four rooms. Their windows are decorated with motifs of the sun and moon, trees and fire, and other subjects, which are powder-printed onto the glass. Inside one of these structures, *Los Angeles Water School*, 2023, a fountain built into a tree from Mount

Oscar Tuazon, *Los Angeles Water School*, 2023, cardboard, wood, tape, tree, fountain. Installation view. From the series "Water School," 2016–. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.



Live Drønen

Oscar Tuazon, *Bergen Kunsthall*

Artforum, Volume 61, N°10, Summer, 2023, p.263.

Fløyen in Bergen was peacefully circulating water and recalling the lake right outside the kunsthall's building. As I walked in and around the models, their strange, irregular geometric structures seemed to change as I moved—sometimes appearing as shelters or playhouses, sometimes as sculptural articulations.

Accompanying the models was a selection of new and older sculptures and wall works, and five splendidly crafted masks by Tuazon's friend and mentor, Native Alaskan artist Lawrence "Ulaaq" Ahvakana. The exhibition offered a density of information: The history and illustrations of the Baers' Zome House, Indigenous architecture and knowledge, as well as specific political battles for waterways and land were thoroughly explained—in wall texts, a handout, and materials from the accompanying publication—as a theoretical framework for Tuazon's project and its previous iterations. Especially valuable in this regard was the video *Cedar Spring Water School*, 2023, which features an interview with two prominent Newe people. As they speak of their physical and spiritual relationship to the water and land around Spring Valley, Nevada, and of the massacres of their ancestors that took place there between 1850 and 1900, a framework for historical awareness and thinking differently around ecological issues opens. As a relational project, "Water School" incorporates various means for activation, such as a library built into one of the models, as well as lectures and conversations. Despite interesting titles, the library seemed a bit gimmicky, or at best symbolic, both because of the abundance of information elsewhere and because it is insufficiently comfortable for longer studies. Exploring "the dynamics and power plays that regulate access to land, water, and infrastructures," the programming included local practitioners and revolved around water, ocean studies, and Indigenous communities in Greenland. Although issues of Norway's colonial history were mentioned within some events and mediation, I wished that there had been a discussion specifically devoted to this topic—especially as large-scale protests against ongoing government exploitation of land and violations of the human rights of Sámi people in Fosen were taking place in Oslo just as the show was on view.

The fragility of Tuazon's cardboard models points to their impermanence; attending one of the conversations inside a "Water School" work, I didn't dare lean back on the tenuous material. The objects embody the precariousness of both natural resources and cultural diversity within a colonial capitalist system. The exhibition's strength lay in how Tuazon emphatically communicated this with an intelligent aesthetic awareness.

—Live Drønen

émergent magazine



You grew up in the woods of 1970s Indianola, Washington, in a geodesic dome built by your parents. Surrounded by craftspeople, writers, and poets, it sounds like someone's version of the American dream. Do you recognise the roots of your upbringing in your work today?

Today I look back and realise that what made that environment so creative were the tensions and contradictions in that community at that time. Yes, it was a cultural moment of experimentation and some attempts at liberation— but this came out of the tragedy of the war in Vietnam and frustration with the oppressive response to the civil rights movement by Nixon and Reagan era politics. So this little town was a microcosm of some of those things, both an attempt to escape, and some efforts to use culture to heal.

Due to the large scale and functional potential of many of your public installations, such as *Burn the Formwork*, installed in Münster (2017), you are in a privileged position to get to experience quite directly a lot of the theoretical announcements of postmodern and poststructuralist theory - Barthes comes to mind. The handing over of the work to the observer/participant and allowing it to develop outside and beyond your hand. How do you approach this tension of power, ownership and hierarchy in your practice?

I hope my work is incomplete until you use it. And you're right that this comes out of a theoretical desire to extend the work beyond my own agency, to give it to someone else. But never have I experienced that as a lived reality as I did in Münster. I remember the moment when the construction barriers were taken down, and people began to approach the work. There was no hesitation, no contemplation, people came together and built a fire. It was exhilarating, knowing the work no longer belonged to me.

You've spoken about wood as a living material in a state of continuous becoming "changing from seed, to plant, to tree, to log, to board, to frame, to building, to pulp,

to paper, to ash, to dirt, and back again." It is hard to escape the dichotomy of time and permanence in your work. This cyclical narrative seems to be a recurring theme; could you talk about its importance to you.

Ideally, an artwork is not a form at all but a process. The work can initiate a chain reaction or provide a framework for other activities to take place, and this necessarily has a temporal dimension. Trees are a good model; they do this very well. Instead of making an enduring form, it becomes interesting to contemplate the death of the work. Sculpture has a life cycle.

## Interviews

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The architect and inventor Steve Baer plays a significant role in your recent projects. Could you talk about his influence for those who aren't familiar with Baer and his work?

Baer was one of the architects of Drop City, the first hippie commune. He was part of a vital movement of self-taught solar innovators in the American Southwest, an engineer who developed some of the most influential active solar design practices prior to photovoltaic solar technology. His Zome House (1969-72) is an energy-efficient architecture designed to

they age, degrade, and decompose. Are the decay and destruction something you consider in constructing them?

Yes, and another way of seeing that is as a kind of infinity. The sculptural tradition of the place I am from, the Pacific Northwest, is monumental works in wood. Within that, there is an implied renewal, an idea of sustainable building that needs to be maintained and replaced regularly. You can see it in the contemporary architectural practices in the region like James Cutler or the great OlsonKundig. And of



Water School. Exhibition view, Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, Michigan, 2019, Courtesy the artist and Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum

be heated and cooled with sunlight and water. Though we come at the work from very different directions, Baer and I have been in a somewhat contentious dialogue for over twenty years now, working in the gap between architecture and art.

In part directed by materials found in your work, concrete, recovered organic and industrial materials. It is hard not to view the pieces in terms of their material permanence, the time these works have taken to be built, how long they will stand, and how

course, these techniques stretch much further back into the Indigenous Salish Longhouse tradition. It is a very generous idea of a blueprint as a shared idea of a building form that is like a musical score to be interpreted by each generation of builders.

Does it all start with water? When looking at the steel, wood, glass cinder block, and concrete in your work, should we be thinking about water?

Reuben Beren James

*Oscar Tuazon*

émergent magazine, N°08, June, 2022, p.31-52.

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Oscar Tuazon



Reading Bench [Leonard Peltier], 2018  
painted steel, acrylic, xerox on paper 67 x 71 x 64 cm  
© Oscar Tuazon, courtesy Maureen Paley, London

## Interviews

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Water is the ultimate sculptor. It is a fascinating material to work with, a liquid mirror that reflects everything around it. It is what connects us all.

How do you feel the relationship between the viewer and the work changes between your public sculptural works and your gallery exhibitions?

In most ways, there is no difference, people encounter the work in so many ways, and it doesn't really matter how or where that happens. I consider working in public a special responsibility, though, for the reasons we were discussing earlier — in public space, people can contribute so much more, they can become active participants in the reality and the meaning of the work, people give something of themselves to the work. Whatever form that takes, I value that exchange.

You've spoken about the importance of the senses in your work, tactility and texture are both very evident, but you also utilise smell and sound; can you expand on this a little bit.

**The work should touch people, and I take that very literally. I just think of sculpture as an inherently physical experience.**

Can we touch on sacredness? There seems to be an air of ritual, myth, and spirituality despite the industrial nature of the materials you use. Your exhibition last year, 'PEOPLE' at Luhring Augustine, highlights these themes, with works like Cedar (x̣́páy?), 2021 and natural man, 2015/2021. How do you understand these themes throughout your work? And how, if at all, are they important to you?

There is something sacred in the relationship between sculptural bodies and

human bodies. Both are impermanent and subject to change, though at different rates or subject to different processes, and I think this space of regard between people and inanimate objects is poignant. Cedar (x̣́páy?), in particular, is a work that comes out of my collaboration with the poet Cedar Sigo and our interest in the sculptural language of the Housepost, a sculptural form unique to the Coast Salish communities in Northwest Washington. There are specific prohibitions around what can be shared or known about the meaning of these works, and by whom, which in practice creates an incredible richness and spaciousness around their interpretation. Sculpture then becomes in a very real sense, alive, beyond meaning, a living being.

Your body of work spans a multitude of mediums, scales and materials, from pieces like The Water School, 2019, being a large scale architectural installation, to works like Square Panel, 2013, which comfortably sits in a gallery; what do you see are the next challenges in your practice? Is the focus outside of the gallery space?

The next challenge is always how to connect to people. At the moment, Water School is a medium that seems large enough, amorphous enough, and fluid enough to really include people on their own terms, without imposing a fixed form. What I find so inspiring is that I don't feel that it is an idea I have any ownership over, it isn't something I invented or discovered. It is an idea that kind of belongs to all of us, and everyone has their own connection to water.

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Oscar Tuazon

Studio, Exhibition view, Le Consortium, Dijon Courtesy the artist and Le Consortium  
Dijon Photo: Andre Morin





Studio, Exhibition view, Le Consortium, Dijon Courtesy the artist and Le Consortium  
Dijon Photo: Andre Morin

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Fire, Exhibition view, Maureen Paley, London, 2018 © Oscar Tuazon, courtesy Maureen Paley, London



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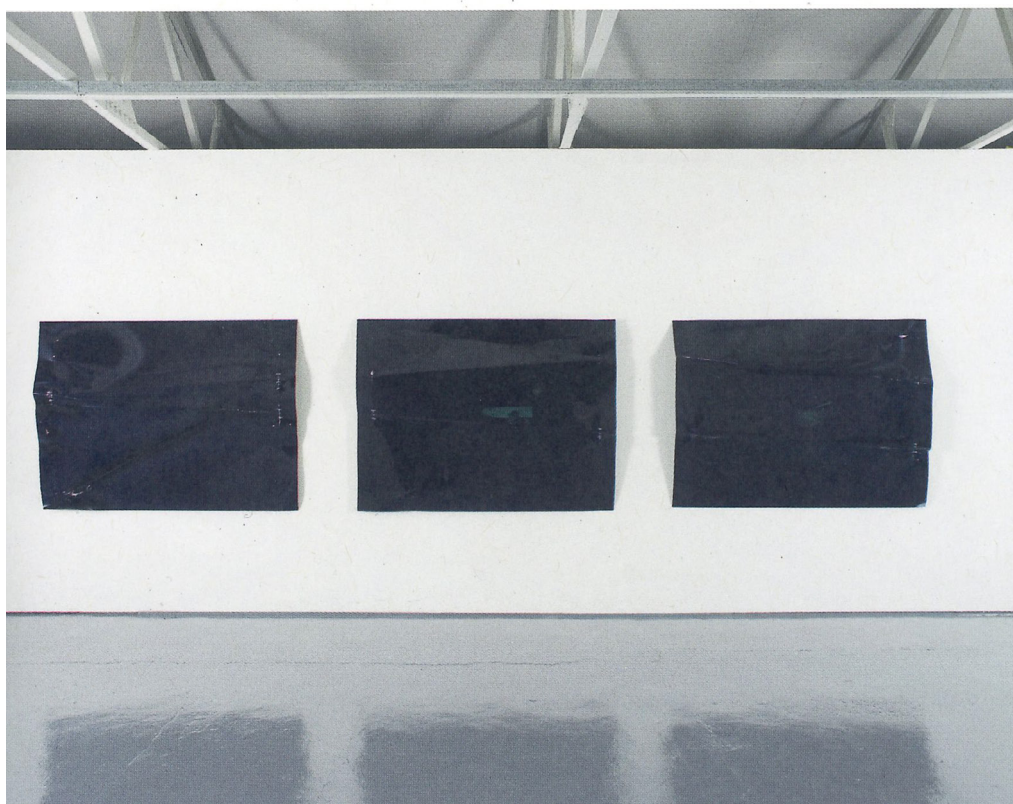
## Oscar Tuazon

(FIRE) for Winona La Duke [Peter van den Berg, Antoine Rocca] 2018, stainless steel, refractory brick, wood, fire 250 x 60 x 60 c © Oscar Tuazon, courtesy Maureen Paley, London



## Interviews

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NIGHT VISION 1, NIGHT VISION 2, NIGHT VISION 3, 2012 c-print on aluminium, 118 x 160 cm each © Oscar Tuazon, courtesy Maureen Paley, London

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Oscar Tuazon



Burn the Formwork, 2017,  
Exhibition view, Skulptur Projekte, Munster, 2017  
Courtesy the artist and Skulptur Projekte, Photo: Henning Rogge

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émergent magazine, N°08, June, 2022, p.31-52.

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*Oscar Tuazon*  
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Oscar Tuazon



## Interviews

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Square Panel, 2013, plaster, steel, wood, 165.1 x 165.1 cm  
© Oscar Tuazon, courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Fire, Exhibition view, Maureen Paley, London, 2018  
© Oscar Tuazon, courtesy Maureen Paley, London



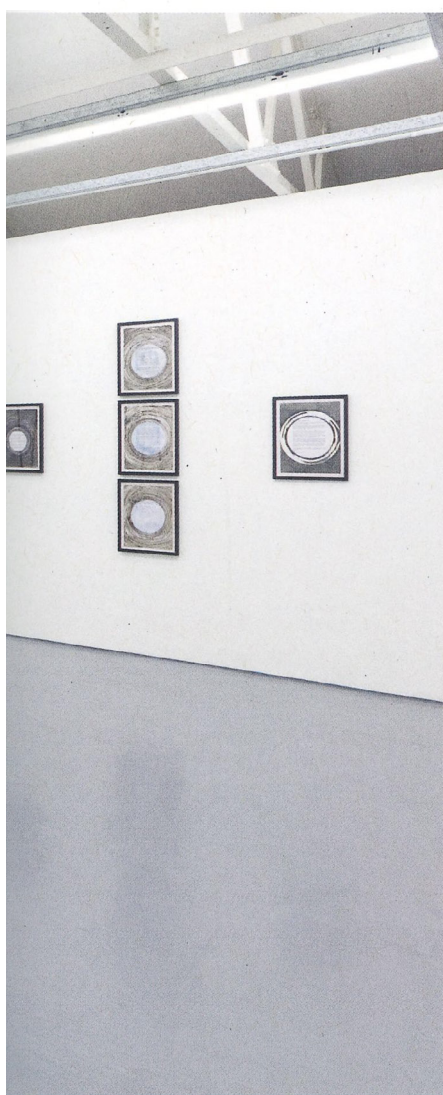
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Oscar Tuazon



## Interviews

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Fire, Exhibition view, Maureen Paley, London, 2018  
© Oscar Tuazon, courtesy Maureen Paley, London

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Studio, Exhibition view, *Le Consortium*, Dijon Courtesy the artist and Le Consortium  
Dijon Photo: Andre Morin

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Oscar Tuazon



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Interviews

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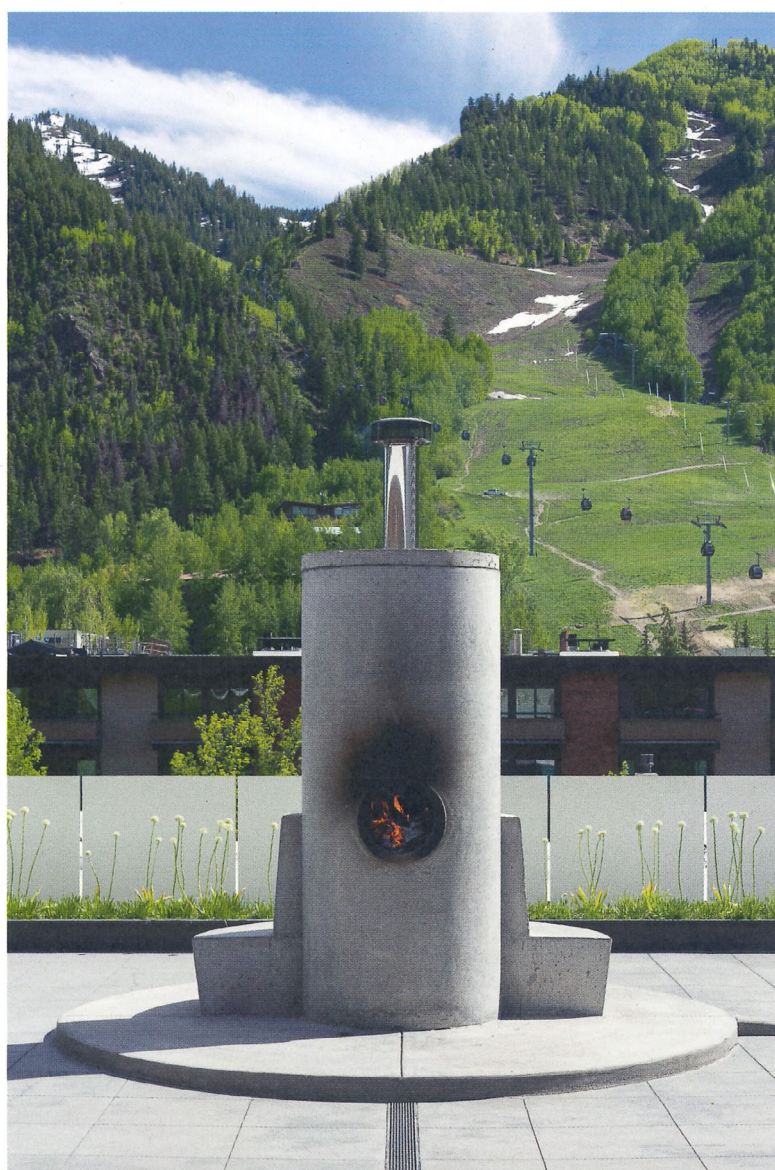


Studio, Exhibition view, Le Consortium, Dijon Courtesy the artist and Le Consortium  
Dijon Photo: Andre Morin

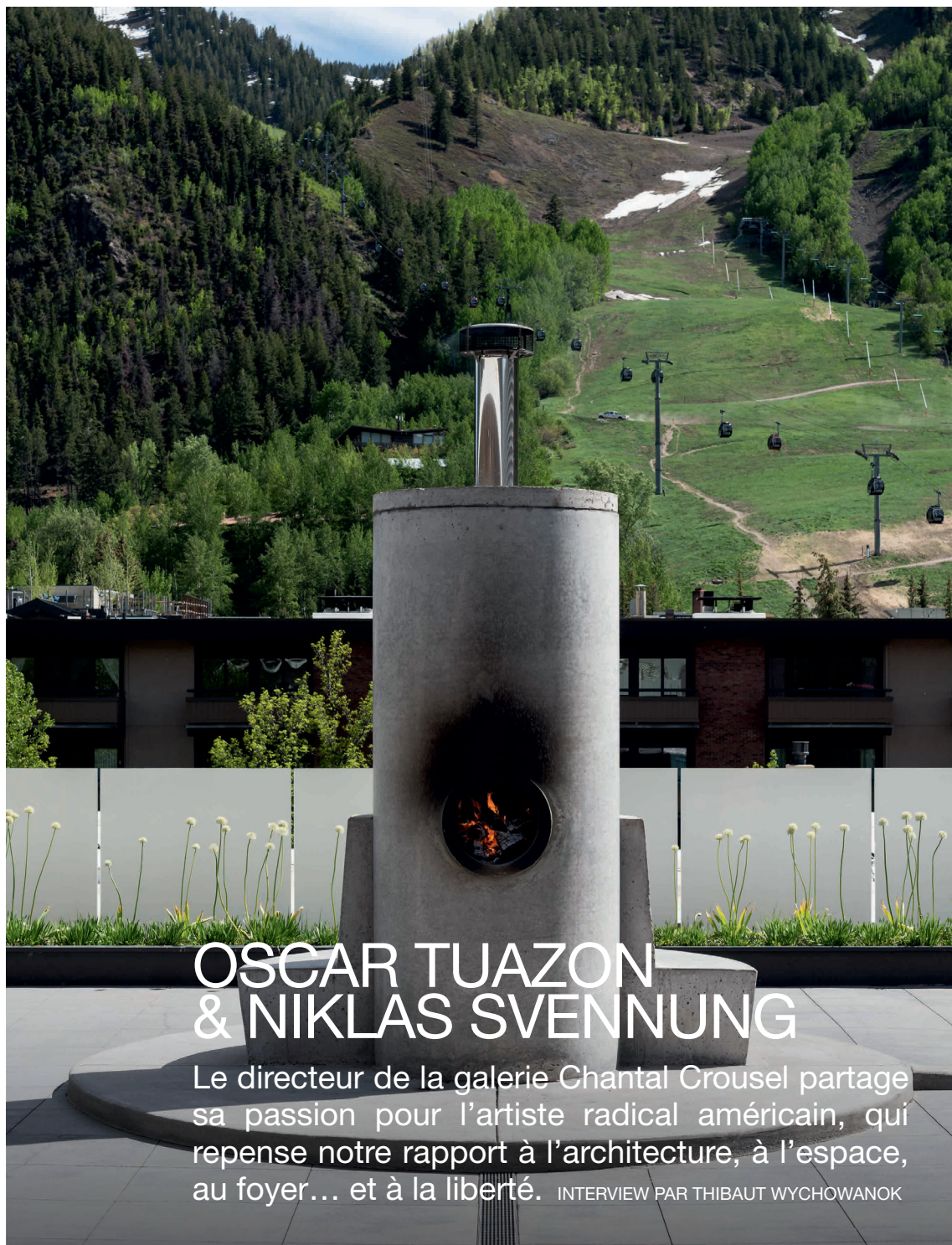
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## Oscar Tuazon

Fire Worship, Installation view, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, 2019  
Courtesy the artist and Aspen Art Museum Photo: Tony Prikryl



## Numéro art



### OSCAR TUAZON & NIKLAS SVENNUNG

Le directeur de la galerie Chantal Crousel partage sa passion pour l'artiste radical américain, qui repense notre rapport à l'architecture, à l'espace, au foyer... et à la liberté. INTERVIEW PAR THIBAUT WYCHOWANOK

FACE-À-FACE

OSCAR TUAZON

CHANTAL CROUSEL

FR

**Numéro art :** Une anecdote en dit beaucoup, je crois, sur Oscar Tuazon. En 1975, l'Américain naît à Seattle dans un dôme géodésique – l'une de ces constructions hémisphériques en treillis popularisées par l'architecte Richard Buckminster Fuller dans les années 50. Quarante-cinq ans plus tard, le voilà qui réalise des constructions tout aussi singulières...

**Niklas Svennung :** D'une manière plus générale, ses origines de la côte Ouest américaine l'ont profondément marqué. Ses parents défendaient un esprit de liberté, une liberté d'expression et d'écriture. Il a pu suivre un programme scolaire qui conciliait art et nature. Oscar s'est isolé dans cet environnement naturel où il ne pouvait que s'en remettre à lui-même et apprendre par lui-même. Cette grande autonomie l'a affranchi des règles conventionnelles occidentales, c'est-à-dire du rapport enfant-famille ou individu-société. C'est un homme discret, indépendant et assez imprévisible. Il peut disparaître plusieurs jours sans donner signe de vie. Il est capable d'absorber le monde qui l'entoure et se contenter de très peu de choses. Oscar s'est inventé et défend à travers ses œuvres la possibilité de choisir les rapports que l'on veut avoir les uns avec les autres. Sculpter l'espace comme il le fait est sa manière de définir les rapports qu'il veut avoir avec les personnes qui l'entourent.

**Ses interventions dans les galeries, les musées ou en extérieur mêlent des constructions et des réaménagements qui donnent l'impression d'entrer en lutte avec l'espace préexistant.**

Une lutte s'engage en effet pour s'approprier les lieux dans lesquels il expose. L'impression de "physicalité" provient notamment de son emploi du béton, du bois, de l'acier soudé, moulé ou coulé. L'effort physique est nécessaire pour s'accaparer l'endroit et le faire sien. Mais au-delà de cette physicalité, il y a chez lui le besoin de construire ou de se reconstruire un espace. Oscar a quitté Seattle pour New York, puis pour Paris, avant de s'installer à Los Angeles. C'est un voyageur. Il évoque à travers ses œuvres un intérieur, un chez-soi. Le chez-soi, c'est le lieu où il essaie de se trouver lui-même pour ensuite trouver les autres. Il a ainsi réalisé récemment des cheminées à Münster, en Allemagne. La cheminée, c'est le foyer, l'endroit symbolique où l'on se réunit tous. Un lieu de rencontre où les gens peuvent se retrouver. Pour sa dernière exposition à la galerie, *Shelters* [en 2016], Oscar avait installé des habitacles, une autre forme d'architecture générique. Chacun peut s'y réfugier temporairement. Cependant, ces dernières années il s'est investi dans différentes formes d'art, un art militant et généreux. Je pense à son projet de Los Angeles *Water School* [2018], un centre éducatif visant à informer sur la manière dont l'eau forme un tissu reliant les gens à leur environnement.

**Sa pratique du "do it yourself" prend racine en réalité dans une histoire de l'art très large. Ses sculptures évoquent l'arte povera, l'expressionnisme abstrait et bien sûr le minimalisme. Quel rapport entretient-il avec ses aînés ?**

Oscar s'inscrit dans une lignée d'artistes très radicaux, américains pour beaucoup. Ceux des grands espaces de l'Ouest, Michael Heizer

EN

**Numéro art :** I think one anecdote in particular says a lot about Oscar Tuazon. He was born in a geodesic dome, one of those structures made popular by the architect Richard Buckminster Fuller. Forty-five years later he's building equally strange structures...

**Niklas Svennung :** His West Coast American origins have, generally speaking, greatly marked him. His parents championed a spirit of freedom, freedom of expression and writing. He went to a school that reconciled art and nature. Oscar isolated himself in this natural environment where he could only rely on and learn by himself. This great autonomy freed him from conventional Western rules, by which I mean child-family and individual-society relationships. He's a reserved, independent, rather unpredictable man. He can disappear for days at a time without giving a sign of life. He can absorb the world around him and be happy with very little. Oscar invented himself and, through his works, defends the possibility of choosing the relationships one wants to have with others. The way he sculpts space is his way of defining the relationships he wants to have with the people around him.

**His gallery, museum and outdoor interventions combine structures and reconfigurations that give the impression of a struggle with the preexisting space.**

There is indeed a struggle to appropriate the spaces where he exhibits. The impression of "physicality" comes particularly from his use of concrete, wood and welded or cast steel. Physical effort is required to take over a place and make it his. But beyond this physicality, he also feels the need to build or reconstruct space. Oscar left Seattle for New York, then went to Paris, before moving to Los Angeles. He's a traveller. Through his works, he evokes an interior, a home. Home is where he tries to find himself so that he can then find others. He recently created fireplaces in Münster, in Germany. The fireplace is the hearth, the symbolic place where we all gather. For his most recent exhibition at the gallery, *Shelters* [2016], Oscar installed little cabins, another form of generic architecture. Anyone can take refuge there temporarily. In more recent years, however, he's thrown himself into other forms of militant, generous art. I'm thinking of his Los Angeles *Water School* project [2018], an educational centre about how water creates a network that connects people to their environment.

**His DIY approach has a long pedigree in art history. His sculptures evoke arte povera, abstract expressionism and of course minimalism. What is his relationship to his predecessors ?**

Oscar is part of a long line of very radical artists, many of them American. Those of the great open spaces of the



Est Pomgranate Photography

**PAGE PRÉCÉDENTE** *FIRE WORSHIP*, D'OSCAR TUAZON. VUE DE L'INSTALLATION AU ASPEN ART MUSEUM, 2019.  
**CI-DESSUS** *WATER SCHOOL*, D'OSCAR TUAZON. VUE DE L'INSTALLATION À THE ELI AND EDYTHE BROAD ART MUSEUM, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, 2019.

## FR

en premier. Je me rappellerai toujours d'un voyage que nous avons réalisé ensemble. Depuis Los Angeles, nous sommes allés sur les lieux du *Double Negative* de Michael Heizer, pour ensuite nous rendre via Las Vegas dans le Nevada. Un roadtrip d'une semaine pour aller voir les *Sun Tunnels* de Nancy Holt, la compagne de Robert Smithson, qui avait lui-même installé la *Spiral Jetty* non loin de là [sur le Grand Lac salé, dans l'Utah]. Les *Sun Tunnels* sont des structures en forme de tube, en béton, posées dans le désert. Elles sont alignées avec le soleil à une certaine heure de la journée, ce qui provoque des effets d'ombre magnifiques. Évidemment, cela rappelle la *Colonne d'eau*, le projet d'Oscar pour la FIAC 2017 sur la place Vendôme. En plein Paris, Oscar avait installé d'énormes pipelines en plastique noir et bleu, très beaux. Il avait fait remonter à la surface, dans le champ public très luxuriant d'une belle place parisienne, toute la réalité souterraine et essentielle de l'eau.

### Quels sont vos projets communs ?

Une exposition est prévue pour le début de l'année 2021, qui va reprendre l'idée du foyer, c'est-à-dire du feu. De ce qu'il représente depuis la nuit des temps. Plus que jamais, cette idée d'être ensemble autour d'un élément commun est importante. On le voit ces jours-ci. Nous allons aussi montrer une collaboration réalisée avec son frère, Eli Hansen, qui est sculpteur verrier. Oscar aime beaucoup travailler avec lui, et l'aspect collaboratif de cette exposition lui tient à cœur.

## EN

West, first and foremost Michael Heizer. I'll always remember a trip we took together. We went from Los Angeles to the site of Heizer's *Double Negative*, and then to Nevada via Las Vegas. A week-long road trip to see the *Sun Tunnels* by Nancy Holt, Robert Smithson's partner. Smithson himself had built his *Spiral Jetty* nearby [at the Great Salt Lake in Utah]. The *Sun Tunnels* are tube-shaped, concrete structures in the desert that, at a certain time of day, align with the sun and create magnificent shadow effects. Obviously they're reminiscent of *Colonne d'eau*, Oscar's project for FIAC 2017 in Paris's place Vendôme. He installed these huge, very beautiful black and blue plastic pipelines that brought all the underground and essential reality of water to the surface in the perfection of a Parisian square.

### What are your joint projects?

We're planning an exhibition for early 2021 that will take up the idea of the hearth, or fire more specifically, and what it has represented since the dawn of time. This idea of gathering together around a common element is more important than ever. We're seeing that now. We're also going to exhibit a collaboration he did with his brother, Eli Hansen, who sculpts glass. Oscar really likes working with him, and really likes the collaborative dimension of this exhibition too.

THE SEEN



[ THE SEEN ]

"East Lansing, huh? I have an uncle out there," the taxi driver tells me en route to Union Station. I am making the trip to the small town nestled halfway between Grand Rapids, MI and Detroit. "Not much to do."

— This seems indicative of all Chicagoans who I told of my travels; a general nod to a distant relative who attended Michigan State University in the last thirty years, or a place once stopped at for lunch when the end goal was another place. The town is unassuming and quaint, similar to nearly every college town I have visited, with a beautiful campus and a massive student body of 50,000. But the reason I travelled from Chicago to a much more comforting snow-stricken East Lansing was for their contemporary art museum, the MSU Broad, which has surprisingly placed itself as a world-class institution.

— Their lead exhibition

the artist pulls influence from 1960s–70s countercultural icons, namely Baer, Buckminster Fuller, and Robert Frank, among others. Copies of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* line display cases next to an early copy of Baer's *Dome Cookbook* (1969)—if anything, these intangible objects draw a conceptual link to the long history of radical and countercultural publishing. Through these influences, Tuazon draws together his own sculptural and artistic practice, while simultaneously revealing a long lineage of environmentalists-turned-inventors, and vice-versa.

— The *Alloy* first found its home at the Art Basel Messeplatz, as part of the fair's outside installation program, yet was unoccupied, whereas in its current existence at the MSU Broad, the piece is positioned as a library with seating—allowing instead for a further investigation into the histories of land rights and water.<sup>1</sup> In this state, the



currently on view, entitled *Oscar Tuazon: Water School*, enacts a community-based educational model within the museum, which surrounds the LA-based artist's practice. A large, light-wood honeycomb structure entitled *Zome Alloy* (2016)—shaped after American inventor and pioneer of passive solar technology Steve Baer's early waste-free *Domehomes*—overtakes the gallery, placing importance on the ability of architecture to create and foster space, and houses the 'school' within which public programming occurs. The adjacent galleries of the museum display additional sculptural works by Tuazon, most with some utilitarian use, that

work is more readily able to explore the cultural ways in which water bridges communities, but more importantly the often (quite deliberately) unseen political history that water and its infrastructure has.

— The installation at the MSU Broad is one of several iterations of the *Water School*, which at its core seeks to connect vast distances through informal learning and conversation surrounding these issues through a metaphorical proposal that investigates the ways in which a river connects communities. With satellite schools in both Minnesota and California, Tuazon's *Water School* here feels especially





timely with the ongoing water crisis in Flint, Michigan, less than an hour's drive away; prints done by the artist line the wall and stock the small museum store, tracing maps of where clean water runs in the state.

One gets the feeling that both the university and museum are generally concerned with environmental efforts—not only do the parking garages turned solar farms

give some indication of this, but the view from the MSU Broad looks directly out towards a Moosejaw, a retailer specializing in outdoor wear, and around the corner lies a Birkenstock store. Not quite belonging to a hippie classification, as that era has passed, *Water School* instead brings together the types that are concerned with new-wave environmentalism. The archival material included within the exhibition sparks an element of nostalgia for a



**“Through these influences, Tuazon draws together his own sculptural and artistic practice, while simultaneously revealing a long lineage of environmentalists-turned-inventors, and vice-versa.”**

time that viewers of a younger generation have never experienced—nodding to the massive popularity of present archival practices in contemporary art, the programming surrounding *Water School* is perhaps the most interesting aspect of this exhibition.

*Water School* convenes twice a month, with weekend events interspersed, and the library within always open during the museum's hours.

backgrounds affect one's relationship to sustainability,' mirroring the ways in which grassroots organizing convenes; and a reading of a poem by Jessyca Mathews, an English teacher in Flint, MI. The weekly sessions range from small discussions to writing workshops.

As curator Steven L. Bridges explains of the focus of the museum's outreach, "Some of the core values at play here



An important element of the exhibition is also an eleven-page bibliography available on the website—the curated selection includes titles close to my heart (that I was surprised to find within a museum), such as Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Writing on the Wall: Selected Prison Writings*, Alexander Vasudevan's *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting*, and the ever-popular *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. If anything, the library is a nice change from the world of artist books and catalogues advertised in nearly every art museum. To give a taste of what the school is like, its first session included an Anishinaabe blessing, acknowledging whose land the Broad sits upon; a sculpture-making workshop utilizing recycled materials; a breakout session with guest artists, educators, architects, and activists to discuss 'how different sociopolitical

are notions such as reciprocal learning and making a concerted move away from more authorial and authoritarian modes of address. Certainly, the artist, the curator, and the museum educator all have knowledge to share, but it is not the end-all be-all. The bottom line is to try and create a space where people come together and share the knowledge they have—a space in which different forms of understanding and learning are valued."

In the most positive sense, these community outreach and engagement initiatives work to move the museum away from the rigidness of white-walls and ever-present guards towards the ability of art and learning to incite change. On the other hand, I am quite hesitant towards the art museum as a space for organizing—not only are these spaces entrenched in the capital that radical politics are often

## “That perhaps through alternative pedagogy, an environmentalism will come—one that acknowledges indigenous land rights and the destructive nature of colonial capital.”

positioned against, but the popularity of the museum-turned-activist indicates the marketability interwoven with ‘activist art.’ All of this said, *Water School* remains most compelling use of a contemporary art museum as a space for political dialogue I have yet to see. Guides walk through the space making it clear that should viewers have any questions, they would happily answer—so many conversations were happening around me, I was delightfully surprised by the interactions.

My lodging was perhaps the best indicator that there may be some disconnect between greater Michigan culture and the community-oriented learning that the *Water School* presents. I unintentionally stayed in the ‘Indian Summer’ suite at a local bed & breakfast. Various totem poles and troubling caricatures of the ‘universal’ Native American man à la the white imaginary surrounded my bed. The reading list and Anishinaabe blessing pinned on the wall of the *School* burned in my mind as I fell asleep knowing the same museum that housed the library facilitated my stay in this room.

But I think this is the optimism that *Water School* and its programming enacts, one where learning and community-building is key to solidarity; with that I agree. That perhaps through alternative pedagogy, an environmentalism will come—one that acknowledges indigenous land rights and the destructive nature of colonial capital. One that engages young people to stop the destruction that the wealthy few have put in motion. The question is how to move it from the museum into the unsettled space beyond its walls.

—  
*Oscar Tuazon: Water School* runs at the MSU Broad through August 25, 2019.

<sup>1</sup> It is troubling to consider how, if at all, the audiences for the work in Basel, Switzerland have ever been concerned about their access to clean water.

#### IMAGES:

*Oscar Tuazon: Water School*, installation view at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. Photo: Eat Pomegranate Photography.

## Numéro



## Qui est Oscar Tuazon, l'artiste qui a métamorphosé la place Vendôme?

La FIAC ouvre ses portes au Grand Palais avec, dans son sillage, un foisonnement de projets artistiques. L'installation de sculptures monumentales de l'artiste Oscar Tuazon place Vendôme est, sans conteste, l'un des plus passionnants.

**Les probabilités sont minces, lorsqu'on naît en 1975 sous un dôme géodésique à Seattle,** de se voir confier la place Vendôme à Paris en 2017 pour y créer une installation monumentale. Le scénario, à vrai dire, semble un peu tiré par les cheveux. C'est cependant l'histoire vraie d'Oscar Tuazon, artiste d'ailleurs très chevelu (réminiscence probable du choc que lui causa la rencontre, à la fin des années 80, avec la musique de Nirvana, groupe phare de la scène grunge de Seattle) qui naquit sous un dôme construit par ses parents hippies. *"Comme maison, c'était une catastrophe, mais en tant qu'objet, c'était fascinant"*, m'explique-t-il avec ce calme serein dont il semble ne jamais se départir. Et en effet, le voici aujourd'hui devant une tâche particulière : occuper, à l'occasion de la FIAC, l'une des places les plus spectaculaires de Paris avec l'une de ses sculptures monumentales.

**Aujourd'hui, les artistes se définissent volontiers comme tout un tas de choses,** sautant allègrement d'une discipline à une autre (comme si c'était possible). Pour Tuazon, c'est un peu plus simple : c'est un sculpteur. D'autant plus remarquable que ses œuvres savent s'imposer pour ce qu'elles sont : des constructions, avec une indiscutable évidence. Peu de bla-bla les sous-tendent, même si l'inspiration prend appui sur un récit, une situation, un contexte... Très vite, cela laisse place au langage propre à l'art et aux formes – il est vraisemblablement l'un des derniers à faire confiance à ce langage spécifique, et à le parler avec une curieuse grâce.





Oscar Tuazon, UNE COLONNE D'EAU 4 tuyaux thermoplastiques, troncs d'arbres / 4 thermoplastic pipes, tree trunks Life  
Prototype : 866 x 210Ø cm – Rainwater : 225 x 210Ø cm – Water Column : 800 x 210Ø cm – Sun Riot : 1025 x 210Ø cm Courtesy  
de l'artiste/ of the artist et/and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Eva Presenhuber, Zürich/New-York; Luhring Augustine, New York

**Ceci pour dire que le projet qu'il dédie à la place Vendôme**, qui semble littéral et même bavard, saura probablement pulvériser le texte un peu scolaire de ses sources pour atteindre une dimension plus artistique. Les grands segments de canalisation en polyéthylène qu'il entend utiliser, d'un diamètre suffisant pour qu'un spectateur y pénètre et les traverse, servent d'ordinaire à l'alimentation des villes en eau. Ces canalisations forment un réseau sous-terrain qui permet la vie en surface. Tuazon transpercera ces segments de troncs d'arbres. Il affiche, via ce projet, son intérêt pour les problématiques environnementales en général, et la question de la raréfaction de l'eau en particulier. Mais il faut lui faire confiance pour que ce noble dessein ne se transforme pas en assommante leçon sur le sujet.

**Il a déjà fait preuve de son étonnante capacité à transformer une idée en forme** et à faire que cette forme prenne le pas sur l'idée. Le monument qu'il réalisa l'an passé non loin de Belfort, à l'invitation du programme Nouveaux Commanditaires de la Fondation de France, en est la preuve éclatante. Il a été commandé par une association d'anciens combattants et des enseignants de collège pour célébrer la mémoire des combats meurtriers qui ont eu lieu dans le bois d'Arsot en novembre 1944 contre l'armée allemande. La sculpture prend la forme de deux pontons en bois imbriqués et qui se croisent. L'un regarde en direction du lion de Belfort, symbole de la résistance de la ville au cours de la guerre de 1870, premier épisode de l'engrenage qui a conduit aux deux conflits mondiaux du siècle suivant. L'autre, en direction de l'Algérie, d'où sont partis les mille deux cents soldats des commandos d'Afrique pour débarquer en Provence, où ils seront rejoints par d'autres volontaires. Mais ce dont on fait l'expérience, c'est une structure en bois de plusieurs dizaines de mètres, une construction extravagante, un réseau de poutres enchevêtrées soutenues par cent deux piliers fichés dans le sol, qui qualifie le paysage et défie l'entendement – une de ces constructions humaines entre sculpture et architecture qui ne laissent pas l'esprit en paix, justement parce qu'elle savent s'émanciper de leur "texte" initial pour atteindre un "état de sculpture".



Oscar Tuazon, UNE COLONNE D'EAU 4 tuyaux thermoplastiques, troncs d'arbres / 4 thermoplastic pipes, tree trunks Life  
Prototype : 866 x 2100 cm – Rainwater : 225 x 2100 cm – Water Column : 800 x 2100 cm – Sun Riot : 1025 x 2100 cm Courtesy  
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**Le projet de Belfort et celui de Paris prennent leur source**, comme tout le travail d'Oscar Tuazon, dans la rencontre décisive qu'il fit en 2001 avec l'artiste-architecte américain Vito Acconci, auprès de qui il travailla pendant deux ans après l'avoir rencontré tandis qu'il était étudiant au Whitney Independent Study Program du Whitney Museum de New York. *"J'avais déjà 28 ans, mais j'étais encore novice. Pourtant, Acconci appréciait de débattre pendant des heures avec moi, comme il le faisait avec des architectes seniors du studio. Sa manière de tout questionner était passionnante : dès le début d'un projet, mais aussi à la fin. Il n'hésitait pas à abandonner un travail abouti pour mieux repartir sur une autre piste, c'était impressionnant"*, se souvient l'artiste. Ce qui laisse entendre que le projet pour la place Vendôme prendra peut-être une forme très différente de celle qu'il décrit aujourd'hui.

**Tuazon travaille avec des ingénieurs, des techniciens, des ouvriers**, dont l'expertise enrichit sa pratique mais ne la contraint pas. Sculpteur, son rapport aux matériaux est presque charnel, et le recours à plusieurs corps de métier n'est en aucune manière une entrave à ce dialogue avec les formes, qui ne se fige jamais totalement. L'installation de la place Vendôme s'annonce, en somme, comme très éloignée d'une autre : la tristement littérale *"butt plug"* de Paul McCarthy [Tree étant son titre original] qui, elle, décrivait un rapport à l'art diamétralement opposé à celui d'Oscar Tuazon.

## Numéro





19 OCT.

PARIS

OSCAR  
TUAZON,  
DES HIPPIES DE  
SEATTLE

À LA PLACE  
VENDÔME

LA FIAC OUVRE SES  
PORTES AU GRAND PALAIS AVEC, DANS SON  
SILLAGE, UN FOISONNEMENT DE PROJETS  
ARTISTIQUES. L'INSTALLATION D'UNE SCULPTURE  
MONUMENTALE DE L'ARTISTE OSCAR TUAZON  
PLACE VENDÔME EST, SANS CONTESTE, L'UN  
DES PLUS PASSIONNANTS.

PAR ÉRIC TRONCY

Éric Troncy

*Oscar Tuazon, des Hippies de Seattle à la Place Vendôme*

Numéro art, N°1, September, 2017—February, 2018, p.133-136.



#### LES PROBABILITÉS sont minces,

lorsqu'on naît en 1975 sous un dôme géodésique à Seattle, de se voir confier la place Vendôme à Paris en 2017 pour y créer une installation monumentale. Le scénario, à vrai dire, semble un peu tiré par les cheveux. C'est cependant l'histoire vraie d'Oscar Tuazon, artiste d'ailleurs très chevelu (réminiscence probable du choc que lui causa la rencontre, à la fin des années 80, avec la musique de Nirvana, groupe phare de la scène grunge de Seattle) qui naquit sous un dôme construit par ses parents hippies. *"Comme maison, c'était une catastrophe, mais en tant qu'objet, c'était fascinant"*, m'explique-t-il avec ce calme serein dont il semble ne jamais se départir. Et en effet, le voici aujourd'hui devant une tâche particulière : occuper, à l'occasion de la FIAC, l'une des places les plus spectaculaires de Paris avec l'une de ses sculptures monumentales.

Aujourd'hui, les artistes se définissent volontiers comme tout un tas de choses, sautant allègrement d'une discipline à une autre (comme si c'était possible). Pour Tuazon, c'est un peu plus simple : c'est un sculpteur. D'autant plus remarquable que ses œuvres savent s'imposer pour ce qu'elles sont : des constructions, avec une indiscutable évidence. Peu de bla-bla les sous-tendent, même si l'inspiration prend appui sur un récit, une situation, un contexte... Très vite, cela laisse place au langage propre à l'art et aux formes – il est vraisemblablement l'un des derniers à faire confiance à ce langage spécifique, et à le parler avec une curieuse grâce.

Ceci pour dire que le projet qu'il dédie à la place Vendôme, qui semble littéral et même bavard, saura probablement pulvériser le texte un peu scolaire de ses sources pour atteindre une dimension plus artistique. Les grands segments de canalisation en polyéthylène qu'il entend utiliser, d'un diamètre suffisant pour qu'un spectateur y pénètre et les traverse, servent d'ordinaire à l'alimentation des villes en eau. Ces canalisations forment un réseau sous-terrain qui permet la vie en surface. Tuazon transpercera ces segments de troncs d'arbres. Il affiche, via ce projet, son intérêt pour les problématiques environnementales en général, et la question de la raréfaction de l'eau en particulier. Mais il faut lui faire confiance pour que ce noble dessein ne se transforme pas en assommante leçon sur le sujet.

Il a déjà fait preuve de son étonnante capacité à transformer une idée en forme et à faire que cette forme prenne le pas sur l'idée. Le monument qu'il réalisa l'an passé non loin de Belfort, à l'invitation du programme Nouveaux Commanditaires de la Fondation de France, en est la preuve

Paris

#### OSCAR TUAZON: A SEATTLE HIPPIE AT THE PLACE VENDÔME

AS FIAC OPENS AT PARIS'S GRAND PALAIS, ALL SORTS OF COROLLARY ART PROJECTS ARE TAKING PLACE, INCLUDING OSCAR TUAZON'S MONUMENTAL TEMPORARY SCULPTURE IN PARIS'S FABLED PLACE VENDÔME.

The chances are slim, for a boy born under a geodesic dome in Seattle in 1975, that one day he'll be asked to create a monumental installation in Paris's mythic Place Vendôme. Indeed the whole scenario seems particularly far-fetched. Yet it's the true story of Oscar Tuazon, the American artist who was born in a dome built by his hippie parents. "As a home, it was a catastrophe, but as an object, it was fascinating," he explains with his habitual quiet serenity, when we talked to him about the giant sculpture he's been commissioned to create by FIAC for the chicest of Parisian squares.

His serenity extends to his vocation: he is a sculptor, nothing more nothing less. Moreover his works are constructions that convince the spectator without the slightest blah blah, even if they take inspiration from a story or a context. But what comes through loud and clear is a language that only art and forms can speak – and Tuazon is probably one of the last artists to trust in that language and to write it with such curious grace. At the Place Vendôme he plans on using a vocabulary of polyethylene pipes, big enough for the public to walk through, of the sort that allows life to exist in the city by channelling water or sewage. Tuazon intends to pierce his segments of pipe with tree trunks as a way of addressing environmental questions in general, and the increasing

PAGE PRÉCÉDENTE ET CI-DESSUS À GAUCHE *BLUIN THE FORMWORK (FIRE BUILDING)*, 2017, BÉTON, PRÉFABRIQUE, CIMENT RÉFRACTAIRE, ACIER, ACIER INOXYDABLE, BOIS, FEU, 350 x 350 x 500 CM. ŒUVRE PRÉSENTÉE DANS LE CADRE DE SKULPTUR PROJEKT 2017, À MUNSTER EN ALLEMAGNE (JUSQU'AU 10 OCTOBRE).

CI-DESSUS À DROITE ET CI-CONTRE DESSIN PRÉPARATOIRE POUR LE PROJET FIAC HORS-LES-MURS, PLACE VENDÔME, 2017.



Éric Troncy  
*Oscar Tuazon, des Hippies de Seattle à la Place Vendôme*  
Numéro art, N°1, September, 2017—February, 2018, p.133-136.

OSCAR TUAZON

19 OCT.

PARIS

CI-CONTRE VUE D'INSTALLATION À LA KUNSTHALLE DE BERNE, EN SUISSE, 2013.



Courtesy de l'artiste et de la galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

éclatante. Il a été commandé par une association d'anciens combattants et des enseignants de collège pour célébrer la mémoire des combats meurtriers qui ont eu lieu dans le bois d'Arsot en novembre 1944 contre l'armée allemande. La sculpture prend la forme de deux pontons en bois imbriqués et qui se croisent. L'un regarde en direction du lion de Belfort, symbole de la résistance de la ville au cours de la guerre de 1870, premier épisode de l'engrenage qui a conduit aux deux conflits mondiaux du siècle suivant. L'autre, en direction de l'Algérie, d'où sont partis les mille deux cents soldats des commandos d'Afrique pour débarquer en Provence, où ils seront rejoints par d'autres volontaires. Mais ce dont on fait l'expérience, c'est une structure en bois de plusieurs dizaines de mètres, une construction extravagante, un réseau de poutres enchevêtrées soutenues par cent deux piliers fichés dans le sol, qui qualifie le paysage et défie l'entendement – une de ces constructions humaines entre sculpture et architecture qui ne laissent pas l'esprit en paix, justement parce qu'elle savent s'émanciper de leur "texte" initial pour atteindre un "état de sculpture".

Le projet de Belfort et celui de Paris prennent leur source, comme tout le travail d'Oscar Tuazon, dans la rencontre décisive qu'il fit en 2001 avec l'artiste-architecte américain Vito Acconci, auprès de qui il travailla pendant deux ans après l'avoir rencontré tandis qu'il était étudiant au Whitney Independent Study Program du Whitney Museum de New York. *"J'avais déjà 28 ans, mais j'étais encore novice. Pourtant, Acconci appréciait de débattre pendant des heures avec moi, comme il le faisait avec des architectes seniors du studio. Sa manière de tout questionner était passionnante : dès le début d'un projet, mais aussi à la fin. Il n'hésitait pas à abandonner un travail abouti pour mieux repartir sur une autre piste, c'était impressionnant"*, se souvient l'artiste. Ce qui laisse entendre que le projet pour la place Vendôme prendra peut-être une forme très différente de celle qu'il décrit aujourd'hui.

Tuazon travaille avec des ingénieurs, des techniciens, des ouvriers, dont l'expertise enrichit sa pratique mais ne la contraint pas. Sculpteur, son rapport aux matériaux est presque charnel, et le recours à plusieurs corps de métier n'est en aucune manière une entrave à ce dialogue avec les formes, qui ne se fige jamais totalement. L'installation de la place Vendôme s'annonce, en somme, comme très éloignée d'une autre : la tristement littérale *"butt plug"* de Paul McCarthy [Tree étant son titre original] qui, elle, décrivait un rapport à l'art diamétralement opposé à celui d'Oscar Tuazon.

FIAC, du 19 au 22 octobre, Grand Palais, Paris.  
Oscar Tuazon, FIAC 2017 hors les murs, Place Vendôme, Paris.

scarcity of water in particular. He has already shown a surprising capacity for transforming ideas into form and then allowing form to supersede the ideas, the monument he realized last year in the Bois d'Arsot near Belfort being a brilliant example. Commissioned to commemorate the bloody battles against the German Army of November 1944, it consists in two interlocking wooden structures, one pointing towards the Lion de Belfort – a symbol of the city's resistance in the 1870 Franco-Prussian war (the mother of both the 20th century's world wars) – and the other towards Algeria, from where, in 1944, 200,000 soldiers left for France to fight the Nazi occupant. This tall, extravagant wooden structure, with its endless criss-crossing beams supported on 200 pillars, changes the landscape and defies understanding. It's one of those human creations somewhere between sculpture and architecture that troubles the spirit precisely because of its ability to emancipate itself from its original "text" and to attain a "state of sculpture."

The source of Tuazon's extraordinary art lies in his decisive 2001 encounter with the artist-architect Vito Acconci, who he worked for over a period of two years. "I was already 28, but I was still a novice. Yet Acconci liked to debate with me for hours, just as he did with the senior architects at the studio. His habit of questioning everything, from the beginning of a project to the end, was impressive." Today Tuazon employs engineers, technicians and builders to realize his work. For an artist whose relationship to materials is practically carnal, such recourse to several construction trades is in no way a hindrance to the creation of a rich and meaningful dialogue of forms.

## PURPLE FASHION

# OSCAR TUAZON

## on art and political resistance

interview by CAROLINE GAIMARI

photography by INES MANAI



CAROLINE GAIMARI — What is happening at Standing Rock, the Dakota Access Pipeline protest camp where the Cannonball and Missouri rivers meet in North Dakota?

OSCAR TUAZON — It's an organized action to stop the continuation of the Dakota Access Pipeline. There were two proposed pipelines routes: one to the north, which would avoid the water of the Missouri River, but pass near the city of Bismarck. The current route chosen by Energy Transfer Partners was diverted around Bismarck and directly under the Missouri at a point on the treaty lands of the Standing Rock Sioux. The Native Americans objected to it from the very beginning, in 2014. The ETP has gone ahead with the plans, backed by the Bismarck police force via the Army Corps of Engineers, which are supporting this oil pipeline that would go under the Missouri River — which drains all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. This river provides water for drinking and farming for 18 million people. The idea of putting an oil pipeline under that is unacceptable, especially when it goes through sovereign tribal land. The broader issue here is maintaining the treaties that have been established and are in the process of being broken, and respecting the sovereignty of these tribal nations.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — This situation is also putting the question of clean drinking water at the forefront.

OSCAR TUAZON — Yes. Instead of providing the infrastructure for people to have clean drinking water in cities, our government is putting its resources behind oil companies, or becoming an oil company. We can't trust big oil to essentially determine what clean drinking is going to be for the rest of us. So far, they have a terrible record, with hundreds of burst pipelines all over the country.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — The main fear is that the pipelines will burst?

OSCAR TUAZON — It's not a fear! It's now basically a fact. In California, just up the coast above Malibu, at Refugio State Beach, there was a pipeline that burst offshore and polluted sea birds and destroyed beach environments all the way down to San Diego. That was two years ago. Environmental regulations in the US are already pretty low to begin with, so there is not too much stopping these projects. In regards to North Dakota, at this time

of exceptionally low gas prices, it's obvious that this pipeline is not needed. There is already an over-production of oil on the market.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Tell me about your first trip to Standing Rock.

OSCAR TUAZON — I went there first at the end of September. I had a couple of days during a break from a teaching assignment in Washington to go over there and volunteer. At that point, things were already heating up; there had already been 40 arrests, and this was after the Labor Day attacks with the German shepherds being sicced on protestors. The pipeline was a little bit further back from the camp. People were chaining themselves to the construction equipment and getting arrested. While I was there, we did a direct action with about 100 cars. We left camp and drove through the pipeline area and managed to shut down the work on the pipeline that day. At that point, there were 2,000 or 3,000 at the camp, and now it's over 10,000.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — You stayed overnight?

OSCAR TUAZON — Yes, I camped by the river. I had to go back the next day, but already in a very short time I saw some of the incredible leaders of the movement speaking around the sacred fire. David Archambault II, the Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux, was there around the fire from morning until night.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Did that first visit inspire you to go back?

OSCAR TUAZON — It was really an incredible experience. When I got back from Standing Rock, I started to think about how I could contribute. This is a movement that is much bigger than me, of course. I am trying to participate as an artist is able to, but keeping in mind that labor and donations are what they need. One of the things that is so beautiful about the camp is that there is really an egalitarian spirit — each person's contribution is valuable, at the level that you are able to contribute.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Did you provide structures for the camp?

OSCAR TUAZON — I'm working on it. Unfortunately that hasn't happened just yet. I chopped wood. I worked in the kitchen making coffee. I donated my

Caroline Gaimari

*Oscar Tuazon, on art and political resistance*

Purple Fashion, Volume 3, N°27, Spring—Summer, 2017, p.92-93.



SHELTERS, EXHIBITION VIEW, 2016, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST  
AND GALERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL, PARIS

tent, my sleeping bags, and all the supplies that I had brought on my first visit. I donated more supplies on my second visit. I had intended to build a tent; it's kind of a Quonset-type structure. Last April, I did a show at Chantal Crousel called "Shelters," and the main structure there was a Quonset tent. It was kind of a model shelter.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Did you have this kind of emergency scenario in mind?  
OSCAR TUAZON — I didn't make it for any one particular need or destination. I was thinking about a specific problem, however: a space for one family. At that time, in Paris, it really resonated with the camps in Calais that were about to be cleared at that point. Coming back to the US — when I became aware of what was going on at Standing Rock — a light bulb went off in my mind: that tent really belongs at Standing Rock. But by being there, I understood that coming up with a simple process of building was more important than a finished product. Trying to make an architectural toolbox, using what's available. This tent is smaller, more efficient, easier to build on site. A set of bent steel tube frames make an ellipsoid half-circle about 6 feet high, 8 feet wide, and these frames can be extended as long as you want the tent to be. Something you can set up in a day and, with a small stove and the proper insulation, should be able to be used as shelter and sleeping space in North Dakota winter.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — What kind of emergency structures did you find at the camp?

OSCAR TUAZON — The structures being built there are really interesting. It's been an amazing seminar in temporary emergency architecture, in a lot of different forms. Of course, tipis predominate, and you can see why they have worked in that environment for thousands of years. But there are also wigwams, yurts, geodesic domes. And now, more and more heated, semi-permanent wood structures. In just that one month in between my visits, I could see how this informal camp had become a town of its own. There are streets, emergency services, a school. There's commerce without money. Everything except weapons, drugs, and alcohol. It's utopian urban planning in action, and the energy of this makeshift city embodies so many of the things I try to do in my own work.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Is this your main focus right now?

OSCAR TUAZON — I think it is an environment where my work can be useful. Thinking as an artist — what I think about the most is function and utility, and the apparent paradox of a useful artwork. It's not a paradox. This is a real-life situation where the models that we've developed in the art world can really be tested out. For me, it's important to extend the range and power of what an artwork can do beyond the confines of an art context. Art and culture play a huge role in the movement — from the singing and ceremony at the camp to the banners that are being produced, the media that is being created, the structures that are being put up. It's an incredibly rich context in which to work.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Is there a risk or a necessity for art to become so closely linked to a political context?

OSCAR TUAZON — Being an artist and making an artwork is inevitably a political act. Sometimes you think about it less than at other times, or you can try to deny it, but it's always there. I've always thought that an artwork has to be tough. It has to be able to fend for itself in the world. Of course, there is a risk. As an artist, you have a voice, and if you can't risk working in public, then you probably shouldn't be working. As an artist, you have to know who your audience is; you need to know whom you're working for. And you need to be realistic about what the work can actually do. The kind of work that I have always been interested in engages the public, happens in public — Vito Acconci, Group Material, Felix Gonzales-Torres. The things that capitalize on the public spheres of the art world to do something more interesting than simply produce objects.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Who is present at the camp?

OSCAR TUAZON — It's a broad coalition. There are over 300 native nations represented there, and many of them have permanent camps. The camps are drawing people from all over the world. I met people from Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Japan ... it's such a universally resonant environmental message. It's so basic, really. Clean drinking water. Especially here in California, water rights and water struggles are a forefront topic. And it's no different in other countries — the issue affects us all.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — Why do you think Americans don't make environmental protection a priority?

OSCAR TUAZON — It's always framed in really deceptive ways. It's framed on short-term economics; like the whole idea of reopening coal plants — it has a short-term economic effect, but it leaves a long-term environmental cost that eventually has to be cleaned up, so we sign ourselves up for years of destruction that will have to be paid for eventually. DAPL [Dakota Access Pipeline] is a perfect example of this: a \$3.8 billion pipeline that will make a small circle of investors some short-term money, but it would create environmental devastation that will last for generations. And I think people are finally sick of paying that long-term environmental cost.

CAROLINE GAIMARI — What may be the outcome of these protests?

OSCAR TUAZON — Whatever happens in North Dakota, the movement crystallizing here has set a precedent of historic importance. There is a consistent pattern in America of genocide, disenfranchisement, land grabs. This touches really close to home, having grown up on Suquamish treaty lands in Washington State, and seeing how tribal water rights and land rights have played a pivotal role in environmental protection. The Fish Wars of the '60s and '70s established the power of native sovereignty to protect fish habitat and clean water, something we all benefit from. Veterans of the Fish Wars are there now. Being at camp is an incredible intellectual experience where these histories and struggles across generations are coming together, peacefully. There is a pan-tribal movement growing; it's been growing for decades, but now we really see the strength of this movement at Standing Rock — over 300 native nations standing together to defeat this pipeline and build enthusiasm for the fights to come.

END

# Flash Art

REVIEWS

## Oscar Tuazon

Chantal Crousel / Paris

Urban pandemonium pullulates. Lagos, Shenzhen, Calcutta and Mexico City are the nightmare of anti-metropolitan ideologies, from the late nineteenth-century Lebensreform movement to Situationists who sanctioned the city as a “concrete cemetery.” Even though, in his latest solo show at Chantal Crousel, Oscar Tuazon’s exploration of the neo-Thoreauvian forces of the 1970s could at first glance fall into that category, he manages to inject ambiguity into a scene that could have been dulled by romantic nostalgia.

The exhibition is dominated by three metal structures directly inspired by survivalist architecture. Installed in the center of the gallery, *Quonset Tent* (2016) borrows its semi-circular shape from the ephemeral modules used by military or polar expeditions. Unlike the archetypal model, the sculpture’s transparent surface emphasizes occupants instead of hiding them. Here, the metallic skeleton does not parasitically merge with the architecture, as in Tuazon’s solo show at Kunsthalle Bern, but enters into metonymical interplay with the gallery space. Reading rooms stand on each side of the structure. Built out of metallic panels sutured together, they offer a suspect moment of isolation in the monitored space of the white cube. Benches, sporadically installed, serve as reading platforms for the magazine *Vonulife*, a cult libertarian fanzine published in the '70s that indexed tips, schemas, political analysis and small ads for the survivalist community.

Despite abhorring the very idea of superstructure, the latter cherished an almost irrational faith in architecture. Appropriated from Buckminster Fuller’s designs, the dome became an emblem for their cult of paranoia, the temple in which the threat of nuclear war and the military-industrial conspiracy could be relentlessly adored. Images of hunters and animals are displayed sparsely within the exhibition. They were shot in the forest by cameras equipped with motion detectors, normally used to prevent poaching. In this context, they seem to act as the depleted emblem for a community that has been offering perpetual amnesia instead of iconography.

by Charles Teyssou

100 — MAY 2016



From top:  
**Oscar Tuazon**  
Wall shelter (2016)  
Courtesy of the Artist and  
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photography by  
Florian Kleinfenn

**Ceal Floyer**  
Helix (2015)  
*Courtesy of the Artist and  
Esther Schipper, Berlin*  
*Photography by  
Andrea Rossetti*

*"The Playground Project"*  
Installation view at  
Kunsthalle Zürich (2016)  
Courtesy of Kunsthalle Zürich  
Photography by Annik Wetter



## ARTFORUM

### Oscar Tuazon

Galerie Chantal Crousel



View of "Oscar Tuazon," 2016.

Oscar Tuazon's current exhibition, appropriately titled "Shelters," examines the twinned specters of hope and idealism through industrial design through the lens of his Pacific Northwest upbringing.

The nucleus of this show is *Quonset Tent* (all works 2016), a semicylindrical structure of aluminum and glass, which has been kitted out with floor planks, a door with a porthole window, and a suspended table, all made out of wood. This utilitarian-looking domicile is modeled and named after a style of prefab military hut popular during World War II. It's a versatile space and could function as anything—from provisional disaster housing to a backyard hobby shed. (It also looks a lot like the charging stations for Autolib', Paris's electric-car-sharing service.) Walking through its invisible walls stirs up visions of the many promises—and failures—of utopian architecture.

Installed throughout the gallery are ten of the artist's cantilevered white steel *Reading Benches*. Each Plexiglas-covered seat and backrest holds an issue of *VONUlife*, an anarchist paper from Oregon, published from 1971–72, that espoused a sustainable, radical existence and the "search for personal freedom" by "opting out" of modern life. Trying to glean the periodical's super-tiny, jam-packed texts makes one feel at once roused and lost—perhaps like *VONUlife*'s editors, who apparently just dropped off the grid one day and disappeared into the woods. Maybe the best kind of shelter for a contemporary survivalist—or pragmatist—is simply a resolute state of mind.

## Wallpaper\*

### Pipe dreams: Oscar Tuazon emulates LA's aqueducts in his latest body of work



The Los Angeles aqueduct, constructed in 1913, serves as inspiration for architect/artist Oscar Tuazon, who is revisiting the 233 mile-long pipe for an exhibition at Hammer Museum.

Pictured: Vena Contracta, 2015  
(Image credit: TBC)

Who would have thought a story about an aqueduct could be so salacious? Riddled with corruption, intrigue and drama, the story of the first aqueduct in Los Angeles – completed in 1913 and led by William Mulholland – is well known, thanks to Roman Polanski's 1974 film *Chinatown*. Now it has piqued the interest of architect/artist Oscar Tuazon, who is revisiting the 233 mile-long pipe for an exhibition at the Hammer Museum.

Comprising four elements spread across different areas of the museum, Tuazon has created concrete and aluminium sculptures inspired by a monument to Mullholland that Tuazon came across in the neighbourhood of Los Feliz.

Charlotte Jansen

*Pipe dreams: Oscar Tuazon emulates LA's aqueducts in his latest body of work*

Wallpaper, February 10, 2016.

<https://urlr.me/EAgJSH>

'Mulholland was a strange figure. His aqueduct is the infrastructure that created Los Angeles, a transformative piece of geo-engineering,' says Tuazon. 'It's a massive earth work; you can trace its path on Google Earth like a line drawing. But Mulholland was also responsible for the worst civic engineering disaster in California history: the collapse of the St Francis dam, which flooded the valley with 12 billion gallons of water and killed hundreds of people. The central feature of the Mulholland memorial park is a large Art Deco fountain. Placed in front of the fountain is a piece of the aqueduct, an empty section of pipe. A portrait of Los Angeles.'

He continues: 'I had started thinking of a pipe as a kind of space – not quite architecture because it doesn't have a flat floor – but at the scale of a room. I was building crude models of pipes in the studio, imagining them as apertures, viewing devices that could be placed in a landscape, ways of making connections between places. Plumbing is pure infrastructure. Water pipes, oil pipelines, plumbing – the Hammer is in the former Occidental Petroleum building (now owned by UCLA), so these are not metaphorical connections but they are usually invisible.'

In Southern California, water issues continue to be contentious, and those connections are quickly made with the opposite extremes being experienced on the East Coast and beyond, to the environmental crisis beyond that around the world. Tuazon's work often dismantles – literally and conceptually – the idea of a stable, safe domestic space. (In a recent 2015 work, he crushed a whole freestanding building as a performance at Paradise Garage in Venice, California.)

His new site-specific work unavoidably articulates our troubled relationship with our surroundings and questions the impact of our industrial constructions on the environment. But it isn't simply a cynical critique. His approach to architecture is somehow hopeful. He says, 'An artwork can create spatial situations that don't exist anywhere else, things that would literally be illegal to build as architecture. There are very real practical benefits to this kind of privilege, I try to take advantage of that and build things that should not be built.'

Charlotte Jansen

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Wallpaper, February 10, 2016.

<https://urlr.me/EAgJSH>

GALERIE  
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Recently Tuazon, originally from Seattle, acquired some land near the Washington coast, where he is constructing an artwork that will also function as a home. Much like his work at the Hammer, water is a literal and conceptual source, and Tuazon's approach is largely an attempt to reharmonise a relationship to the environment, practically and politically. 'It's a house with one room, on the Hoh River in the Olympic rainforest. It is surrounded by water, it rains constantly, and that defines the house. One of the first things we did was a plumbing project – a rainwater collection tank and a filtration system. It was a good way to understand what water does. Water is the best material for making sculpture, it has a mind of its own, it's alive.'



The artist explains: 'I was building crude models of pipes in the studio, imagining them as apertures, viewing devices that could be placed in a landscape, ways of making connections between places.'  
Pictured: *Natural Man*, 2015  
(Image credit: TBC)



Process view of *Sun Riot (scale model)*, 2015  
(Image credit: TBC)

Charlotte Jansen  
*Pipe dreams: Oscar Tuazon emulates LA's aqueducts in his latest body of work*  
Wallpaper, February 10, 2016.  
<https://urlr.me/EAgJSH>

GALERIE  
CHANTAL CROUSEL



The new site-specific work expresses our troubled relationship with our surroundings and questions the impact of our industrial constructions on the environment. Pictured: *Pipe Prototype*, 2015  
(Image credit: TBC)



Tuazon says, 'An artwork can create spatial situations that don't exist anywhere else, things that would literally be illegal to build as architecture. There are very real practical benefits to this kind of privilege, I try to take advantage of that and build things that should not be built.' Pictured: *An Error*, 2011, installation view  
(Image credit: TBC)

Charlotte Jansen

*Pipe dreams: Oscar Tuazon emulates LA's aqueducts in his latest body of work*  
Wallpaper, February 10, 2016.

<https://urlr.me/EAgJSH>

## Frog

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Interview

# Oscar Tuazon.

**T**

*here's this funny story about you being sort of born in a geodesic dome or something, would you like to comment on that?*

I'm not sure what I can say about it. The geodesic dome did fascinate me for a few years not only as a geometrical issue but also as a cultural relic, you know. I was very interested in that stuff for a while but beyond that... My childhood was also about construction and building houses and things like that.

— *Your parents did built that structure, right?*

They were hippies [laughs]. I mean, at first, I didn't know anything, I had no idea what they were doing, and you know as a house it was a disaster but as an object it's fascinating. It's still there! It's funny because I think a lot right now about how to make a building, like would it be possible to make a building or a house as a sculpture. I have not really figured out what that means yet but it's in this tradition really, a non-functional house, I think about it as a sculpture.

— *The geodesic dome is an epic story, but the serious one is probably the time spent with the Acconci Studio, right? Do you still have good memories of your time there?*

Great memories. I keep a lot of memories, very good memories. What impressed me working with Acconci was just how difficult it was. Everything he was doing was really cautious.

— *When was that?*

2001-2002.

— *So it was a bit before the big Acconci Studio thing?*

Yes, this island in Graz [Mur Island, Austria] was the only building that had already been built when I was there, it was like eight or ten people working there, the rest were architects and I played this funny role where I restored the other works, started some others and worked with architects. But yeah, he made a huge impression on me and also just in terms of how the studio functions, for me it was interesting. I was already 28 but I was really junior and it was always about debate with Acconci, he was interested in talking with someone like me like he was with senior architects of the studio, and I thought it was really interesting to always question everything, at the beginning of a project but also at its end, he had no problem to take a project that was totally finished and just scrap it and start again, that was great.

— *How did you end up there?*

He needed somebody to unpack his library from a studio to another one in DUMBO [District Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass, a Brooklyn neighborhood] and at that time I was studying in the Whitney Program [Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art]. It was supposed to be a freelance job but I loved it so much I just found a way to stay [laughs]. I made a job for myself.

— *Has this been an important moment in the construction of your work?*



Éric Troncy  
*Oscar Tuazon*  
Frog, N°15, Fall—Winter, 2015-2016, p.146-151.



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I think so because I was always looking for a way of doing sculpture in a certain scale that relates to a physical experience with the body, and watching what he was doing with architecture gave me some of the tools and means to think about space, I guess. Also I was still a student and it was my first work experience. It was a different way of thinking about what it is to be an artist and an architect and it was very active. There was not a lot of reflection; it was an active process.

— *Would he inform your perception of the scale of the structure/sculpture?*

Yeah, he's also always using his body even when it's not during his performances, and I noticed each architecture project was described in a page. The description was like a description of walking through something, a phenomenological object description, really straightforward.

— *Who were the artists you did admire when you were a student?*

[Long pause].

— I'm asking because I'd like to know if you always knew you would build things. When you decide to be an artist, you don't necessarily know which medium is going to be yours.

No, no, I think I was much more interested in photography at school even if I was also doing sculpture. I wanted to do something that effects reality and that's an impossible project. I didn't really know what that meant and I guess it was what I was probably trying to do with photography. It was not until much later that I had the means to do things in space. And in a way I think the piece "Goodbye" (2008), which is a tent, pretty much marks the beginning of my work in my mind. Before that...

— *When did you start these big constructions going through the entire space and through the walls? Was it around that time?*

I guess it was that time, yeah. In 2007 I did that big geodesic dome that I made in cardboard. I first showed it at the Whitney Program in an exhibition space and then during the exhibition I took it and moved it outside. It's a structure of three or four meters in diameter and it was mobile so then I started to do this kind of things, and in the next few years I keep doing that.

— *Some of your works are made in the studio and some are more, I wouldn't say "site-specific" or at least let's say they deal on a very intimate mode with the space where they are exhibited. Are you really going to the studio everyday, and work everyday and build things everyday?*

[laughs]. Yeah, I go nine to six everyday.

— Seriously?

[laughs]. Yeah. It's a job and it's a particular job. The way I work, you can't put in really long hours. Physically you can't do much more than eight or ten hours a day, that's enough. But I like, not the routine of it but just being able to focus on one problem and have time to really develop it. The studio itself is something new for me because at first I was mostly building on site, and now I'm trying to understand what can be done in the studio and what's interesting about that. This may be because I'm in LA, but I see the studio itself as a space, as a social space or as an exhibition

space even, as a living space. It was kind of a revelation for me, coming to LA, that the gallery scene has not that a fundamental strong role and in a way the studio has a bigger role. We're also talking about bigger spaces and a history of people working in that way, using the studio as a kind of hybrid space. It's really exciting to me.

— *Why would you call it hybrid?*

I don't know if that's the right word but it can serve several different roles. You know that it can be a social space, or an event space like what Jason Rhoades was doing, it is the best context for the work he was doing, rather than a gallery, rather than an exhibition space.

— *Why did you move to LA? It was quite a decision as it also involved your entire family.*

Well it was partly about the family also, I had the feeling the kids would like it there and would be able to be outside more often – and that's true. On the work side, we had visited for a few years before moving there, and every time I would rent a studio just for a month to get materials, to get things fabricated, because I guess it's built here around the entertainment industry and there's this ability to get anything at anytime.

— *In Paris you were part of a scene, and when you decided to leave to go to LA, you were not a part of any scene anymore, you had to rebuild everything... Or maybe it was a nice way for you to be alone and quiet?*

Yeah definitely. That's a classic LA thing, you can go and be by yourself and nobody cares, nobody really sees people and it's okay.

— *Was it also about going back home to your country, because you were born in Seattle, right?*

Yeah, and I lived a long time away from Seattle so I think there is a certain amount of, not like going home or anything, but things are familiar, things are easy.

— *Do you work alone? How many people do work with you in the studio?*

It depends, from two to eight people at the very most. It fluctuates based on projects, it also fluctuates based on the people I work with because there are artists, musicians, architects and each have various things going on so it depends on their availability.

— *Was music as important as art for you when you were younger? You have mentioned many times discovering Nirvana when you were a kid.*

Sure, it was impossible to avoid.

— *I'm asking because many people say this Nirvana record was a shock, because they loved music but it didn't inform their work. In your case, I think, this particular energy, which is probably the same energy as in a concert, is very present in your sculpture.*

Well, it's interesting because I never really fed off music, even now that I have strong connections or associations with house music, but I think you're right. The live element is always something that is really fascinating to me in music. I feel like the live songs are always divergent from the original in one way or another. I think it is part of why I insist so much on working in situ, producing

things specifically for an exhibition, because of this pressure. Decisions have to be made spontaneously, the thing develops in different ways that expected; there is some fatality to the work.

— *When you're doing a show, do you decide on everything before?*

No, never, never, although it used to be like that.

— *But in architecture you decide something, and then you build it.*

I would usually start building before I have a plan or before I finish the plan, and the plan of the construction would converge in some point. Now we have to plan something out but it's not a primarily architectural process, it comes also both ways and we adapt somehow the architectural design process to our way of working and leaving room for improvisation.

— *Is there room for improvisation when you're working on a show?*

I think. In a way having something planned out, I mean as soon as you walk in the space there is a completely different feeling.

— *Do you think a great place for your work to be experienced is outdoors?*

I think so, it's very different though, I feel like in an exhibition space you always respond to the space, but outside there is nothing to respond to. I'm not sure how to explain it. The advantage and the interesting thing with the outside and one of the reason I'm trying to work more and more with public spaces, is that a thing doesn't have to be named, like an object doesn't need to be identified or as quickly identified as in an art space, firstly because nobody knows it's an artwork, secondly because there is a kind of specific visibility and it's really possible for things to disappear and reappear outside.

— *Does the scale of nature also define the scale of the work?*

Yeah, and it's great. There's much less control on it and the element of nature, the element of the weather and the time.

— *This work seems to be more comfortable outside also because nothing is new in the materials you use, nothing ever seems brand new, except maybe some wooden elements, everything seems to be already used, that puts those used elements in their element.*

Yes.

— *You've been working a lot with concrete and wood.*

Concrete, I ask myself why I do it, it's so difficult and it's so painful every time. The reason I like concrete is that it is the material of the building environment; it's the most common. Maybe it's also something to do with the unfinished aspect of it, letting things unfinished. Some materials, techniques or ideas I'm working with are basic, sort of basic construction techniques that normally are finished. I'm trying to work with structures and spaces without finishing them. I like the openness of an unfinished object, which could diverge in so different directions. It's something I can't stop thinking about, looking at all my works together here in the show at le Consortium, it's the first time I see so much in one only place like this and there's some kind of temporality or something like that. But it probably comes from the handmade aspect and leaving the marks of the process on the

work. Doing things by hand it's –I hope– important, it's interesting, it's exciting and engaging because that's where you see the struggle of the conceptual thinking process and the difficulty of translating that into materials. An idea is just an excuse to build something and the construction process is to me more stimulating, strangely. Even something in a really monumental scale, it's like a really direct relationship, the relationship of touch when you can see somebody's fingerprints on something and that you can put your hand on the same spots. We live in a very manufactured environment that has been almost completely manufactured by machine.

— *It was very smart, you avoided the music question quite smoothly.*

[laughs].

— *Like the one about artists you admired.*

[laughs] It's true [laughs]! Well the music thing, I feel like, I have a strong relationship with the music of that time, The Melvins, Nirvana... the grunge scene of Seattle, I did have a little band myself.

— *Well, you grew up in Seattle... And before being international these people also were born somewhere and that somewhere is the same city.*

Exactly, and it's totally interesting to see the places and the people who made that scene happen, it's fascinating, but at the same time it was twenty years ago. I had a discussion with one of the students the other day and he asked me a similar question, he asked me what kind of music would you like to listen to during the show, and I wouldn't point to one particular scene or style.

— *Are you working on many things at the same time or do you need to focus on one thing at a time?*

I'd say, many different. The nice thing about the work I do is that I love to work on long cycles.

— *What do you mean long cycles?*

Well, for example Belfort [An Endless Brige, 2015], it's already been two years that we have done that.

— *It's a very ambitious project actually, it's very big.*

Yeah, it's huge, it's already amazing we got to that point and have the support of everyone to build and follow through a project like that, there's always little decisions to be made along the way and then it will be a very important monument.

— *Do you like it when projects take time?*

Yes, and at the same time, I produce things very fast also. But yeah, I like to have time to things to develop. The first ideas are never the good ones. It needs time. Even if the project, like Belfort, I don't think the project is really going to change at all, but the details needs more focus, more time, more people attached to it, I'm able to understand the project, the site, the context, the materials. Then one decision might screw over the year, it's probably totally bullshit but at least for me it will take some consciousness and signification, and I will finally be able to say "that's the one, this is exactly what we have to do". I think it's also because finally what I do is so reductive, I really try

to take things really simply and really elementarily, to do that really well I think it takes a long time.  
I'd say the things I would edit out of my catalogue are the things I did too quickly, in one shot.

— *What do you mean « edit out », was it a metaphor or was it serious?*

[laughs]. No, seriously, there are mistakes. You can never stop to make mistakes but I guess the projects I consider failed projects are the ones I can't keep on thinking about.

— *It would be boring to just do very successful things, anyway.*

Exactly. I think that if you already know what the result is going to be when you do it. The experimental, this idea of doing something to see how it works out, that's what interests me.

— *That's what art can be about.*

Yes, I think.





## How To Build a House

Jorge Pardo in conversation with Oscar Tuazon

Color images: Jorge Pardo, *Tecoh*. Yucatán, México.  
B&W images: Oscar Tuazon, *White Walls*.  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

What do two artists who share common visions talk about when they meet for the first time?

The Cuban artist Jorge Pardo, whose groundbreaking work at the limits of design, architecture and art have redefined these fields and the spaces between them, is asked a very simple question by the American artist Oscar Tuazon: "How do you go about building a house?" Although the work of each is marked by aesthetic differences, they both follow a remarkably similar train of thought in the process of making art. The following conversation—which focuses on the story of Tecoh, a hacienda in the Yucatán Peninsula that Pardo restored and transformed into an art experience—is the perfect illustration of the playful nature of their unconventional approaches to work.

An original commission by Emma Reeves,  
Creative Director of MOCAtv.  
Link to the film on YouTube:  
[bit.ly/MOCAtvPardoTuazon](http://bit.ly/MOCAtvPardoTuazon)



JORGE PARDO

What're you thinking?

OSCAR TUAZON

[laughs] To be honest, I just bought a small house. It's not even really a house, it's a cabin—a cabin in the woods, up on the Olympic Peninsula, where I'm from. Right now, it's just a box, like a roof, and a floor, and walls—nothing else, no plumbing, no nothing, not even interior walls. And so, I'm at this point where I have to design the house, somehow. And I know it's something you've done, in many different ways. How do you go about it? How do you start that process?

JORGE

I start very conventionally. The first thing I do is, I probably put it on my computer. That's usually the way I start. And I try to sort of understand what it is, how big it is, how big it feels, how big I think it's going to feel. Then I just start programming things. And as you program things, relationships start to emerge. And when I say program, I don't mean necessarily this is what it's going to be. I mean more in terms of, "Do I like rooms to be this big, or what's going to happen here?" Once I have a decent understanding, to some degree, of how it has to happen spatially, I just start to elaborate more. It depends. Most of the places that I've built, they all have an eccentric relationship to exhibitions, or something like that. There's always that, on the back end—everything you're thinking. You propose what you want to make, in your head, on paper, or on the computer, whatever. And then I start to think about the motions between things I've done, things I'm interested in, things that are there. I think about what would be an interesting way to interface with a local tradition, and with an eccentric tradition that maybe it has some affinity with. And I just start to bring things in. That's pretty much how it starts.

OSCAR

Do you work with a floor plan? What kind of drawings do you do?

JORGE

I do it on the computer. I build it really simply. I have a sense of how big things are, how small they are, where is this door going to close. I usually start with that. And when that gets understood, then I start to change it.

OSCAR

Change it? Say, you're working on the kitchen. How do you place the ...

JORGE

I cook a lot. So, I have a pretty clear understanding, a preference, for how I like to move in the kitchen. I'll just program that into the space, given the configuration you have to work with. It's very pragmatic, in terms of laying out the kitchen. That kind of stuff, I control all those things. And people will help me architecturally with the more difficult stuff, which is filling in all the

information you have to fill in that you don't want to draw. In general, I have a certain idea about what kind of bathroom I want to take a shit in. [laughs]

OSCAR

As you get into this process of designing a space, what's the point where you're willing to let some of the other decisions be made or taken care of by someone else?

JORGE

Well, there's never really a clean threshold of where you stop making decisions and where somebody else starts. There's always a lot of back-and-forth, in general. Since I generally can make really rudimentary drawings on the computer about what I'm interested in and what I want to do, I usually have a pretty good baseline to begin with. The thing's not going to change dramatically once I understand what I want to do. It's going with walls, and you add doors, and you add everything down to what you need. What kind of plumbing do you want to have? Do you want to have a common wall in the bathroom that services the kitchen? There's all kinds of really pragmatic things that you do that, for me, come more from a tradition of building than from more traditional conceptual architectural stuff. I do like, sometimes, to invert or divert traditional relationships with things like that, but not all the time. It depends. There just seems to be a lot of languages going on inside your head when you're conceiving these kinds of spaces.

OSCAR

How much is drawn out? Are there things that you are able to describe to the contractor as you walk through the space?

JORGE

It's pretty free. We do a lot of things, we make a lot of things. A lot of the finishes get worked out physically in the studio, and sometimes we'll actually do the finishing ourselves. And even when we don't, we'll usually provide some pretty extensive prototyping, in house. It's in the studio, so I have a pretty good idea of what's coming down the pike. And more importantly, I have a lot of control in terms of editing, and installing a kind of investigatory process in developing something. It's not necessarily even driven by drawing, or anything like that. But it's more driven by ...

OSCAR

It's physical.

JORGE

Yeah. They're things. You find the material. You figure out a way to use it, and things like that.

OSCAR

Is the work ever done? When a space is finished, and you're using it, do you find yourself changing it?

JORGE

Yeah, all the time! I think what I've done with build-

ing, to some degree, is I've figured out a way to install a kind of very eccentric reflexivity in it. In the sense that, if somebody approaches a work of mine—which could take the form of an architectural object—the question you ask is a logical one within the repertoire of how to read it, let's say. It's not a typical question you would ask of an architect who is designing your house. Because, generally speaking, when an architect designs your house, you feel like there are ideas that belong to the architect, and you really decide if you can live with them or not. Generally, I don't really work that way so much. Most of the things that I've built, people have asked me to do in a way where they stay kind of sidelined in that process. For reasons that are strange, to some degree. You're hiring an artist to make a place for you to be. A lot of people hire architects because they feel overwhelmed about all the decisions required to put together a space to live.

OSCAR

[laughs] Yeah, I'm feeling a little bit that way myself with this project I have.

JORGE

But they usually hire me because they want a "work" of some sort. And I don't even know what the fuck that is. Generally speaking, this is what I want to do—if you're interested, great, if not, well ... But it's not overwhelming to function like an architect.

OSCAR

It's not?

JORGE

It takes time. It takes a long time to build something. The thing that's nice about that is, if you understand that, you actually use that duration of the time as a space to make decisions. And it's actually like fun.



OSCAR

This is really interesting because, up until this point, I think most of the work I've done has been episodic. For exhibitions, basically. And to finally have a space that might take three, five—who knows how many years. To be working in that time frame while working on it at the same, that's pretty exciting. You get to literally live inside the idea. It's cool. There's also this thing, sort of related to being inside of a computer. The process of thinking about a space where you go from macro to micro, where you're designing your house, and at the same time designing a lamp. You're coming in and out?

JORGE

I don't really think about scale that way. I think about scale physically. When I design lamps, one of the things I think about is how much space will they make? What happens when you turn the light bulb on? It actually permeates and makes patterns on the walls and things like that. I think of it as more like this kind of a filter, or something, to make different painterly qualities on the wall. Or sometimes it's the opposite—sometimes it's like the lamp is sort of an object, or something like that, that has an odd relationship to how it negotiates the way it glows versus the way it is. I don't think of that necessarily as any different than any other series of effects you might be interested in trying to achieve when you make a space. They both invoke the kind of thinking of something that's read through your body, or something like that.

OSCAR

The place in the Yucatán is called Tecoh?

JORGE

Yeah. It's a Mayan name, I think. If not a Mayan name, then Spanish. But it doesn't sound Spanish.

OSCAR

One of the things that really struck me about the project in Tecoh, if I remember it right, is that you were designing the place without a program. That's kind of incredible. Maybe you can just talk some more about that.

JORGE

What I mean is that the programmatic in a project like that is so vague, it's really not a program in that sense. No one quite knew what it would eventually be used for. And generally, programs are—if you build a library, you're part of a library. There are still a lot of default programs that happen when you build a place for people to be. But we didn't really know how it was going to be used. And that, to me, is interesting and important. Usually, in architecture, programs are used as a very important organizing principle for how you make decisions about what you're doing. And we didn't really have that, so we were making decisions more in terms of what the prior decision was, and things happened in procession. We would make up space for a room and something would get developed there and that would get reiterated and developed more in another space. It sort of happened like that. All we really knew about Tecoh was that



it was going to be a place for people to be, or spend time at—but not necessarily what it was going to be, or what type of place it was going to be.

OSCAR  
There are functional elements?

JORGE  
It's highly functional. It's very straightforward. There are no cues in the building that make caricatures about what its function is supposed to be or not be. That's not really an issue. It's not like a Robert Wilson piece, it's not like a giant chair that nobody can sit on. Everything is always kept in the realm of accommodating people—in real life. I think what is eccentric about the project is that it is a series of follies. It's a series of places, and rooms, and gardens which set off intense aesthetic relationships between one another. Ultimately, that probably is its organizing principle, to some degree.

OSCAR  
Right. So the experience, in a way, takes the place of the program. Experience isn't really designed *per se*, is it?

JORGE  
I don't know if it's designed. But I think it sort of evolves. Because one thing gets built and then something else gets built. And maybe there is a deficiency in something that gets built that gets re-evaluated and developed further in some other part of the building. It's got a couple of pool areas. One pool area started one way, then it went another, and went another, then it went underground.

OSCAR  
This is also a really interesting question to me—Tecoh had some existing walls or ruins, right? There was

something that you were building on. You were building on the foundation?

JORGE  
Yeah. Very little of it, though.

OSCAR  
And, obviously, you responded to that component of the site. There's an interesting question about the status of an artwork. Do you imagine it getting renovated again at some point?

JORGE  
Sure, why not?

OSCAR  
It has a kind of continuous ...

JORGE  
Absolutely. It really depends on how much fidelity the people who own it steward over it. All the emotions that the site has are about an effect. There's never anything traumatic or tragic about that becoming something else, with me or without me—it doesn't really matter. It's not really something I think about. When I build something, I don't think about something's duration beyond my general interest in it at the time that it's being made. You build it in a way that it's going to be around for a while. You want it to be. You know, the jungle's pretty brutal in the sense that, if you left the place on its own, for five years, you'd have trees growing out of the buildings, and stuff like that. It's just the nature of that climate.

OSCAR  
But, to me, it's really fascinating because the material status of that place is in constant flux, right?



JORGE  
All houses are.

OSCAR  
Exactly. All houses are. And, to me, it's very different than a painting where you more or less expect it to have a fixed material identity, and to exist through time. That's one of the things that's so powerful about a painting, I guess.

JORGE  
It depends. It depends on how you look at it. A painting's an image. Historically, people have had different relationships with those images. At certain times, history needed to have a sense of stability that I don't think is really required anymore.

OSCAR  
True.

JORGE  
And it's not about downplaying. I don't believe that things have agencies, or any of that stuff. I don't believe that things are autonomous. I don't believe that an artwork, if it's worked and shaped in a serious or important enough way, is going to contain something that will endure.

OSCAR  
Even through transformational form?

JORGE  
No, nothing. I think that's all magical thinking. To give you an example—I don't know your work very well, but if somebody doesn't really take care of that work, it could end up as a beam in someone's project. *[laughs]* It's very clear why these things endure, why they stay visually intact. And I've never thought that that was something that somebody could really control.

OSCAR  
No, of course not.

JORGE  
So, why should that be so essential in the principle of how you think about producing things or making something? If something is relevant, it's relevant. And if it's not, it's not. If it's relevant, it's probably going to be around for a while. And if not, it will probably degrade in some way. It's not any different from an oxygen/water relationship. *[laughs]* It's pretty basic.

OSCAR  
I feel like Tecoh relates to the history of Land Art, and Earth Art, in a really interesting way. Even though the



Land Art projects all have a kind of very particular physical identity, there is also this photographic image, an iconic kind of status. You couldn't really capture Tecoh in a picture, could you?

JORGE

No. It's got too many parts. At the end of the day, you'd have a hard time orienting yourself—if you're trying to orient yourself as being "there," versus making images or shooting a film. There're still so many differences, there's not much fidelity. I don't think a project like mine happens without Land Art. But, the difference is that a project of mine is made with a very different ideological construction. Land Art is something that is like a general frame to hold this thing as a kind of artistic gesture. So, that goes away, and it helps you read it. But at the same time, it doesn't go away, it stays there. The work operates very differently. It wants to muddle it up, with all the things you're not supposed to see, or all the things you do see. It's already a compromised thing. It's not like something you put in nature—an object that's so clearly not a place to live, not a place to do something. It's more like it frames the landscape. There are things to do in it that are different. You can eat at Tecoh, you can sleep there, you could commission a video about discussing it. There's a million different things you could do. I think traditional Land Art is art that has a much clearer perceptual task, which is destabilize or intensify your experience in nature. And this is com-

pletely indifferent to that. It doesn't really require that type of faith between what's supposed to be there, or what's not, or nature, or any of those things. It's in collusion with all these things, but it doesn't always pay tribute to it.

OSCAR

It's a very impure experience, right? It's very diffused.

JORGE

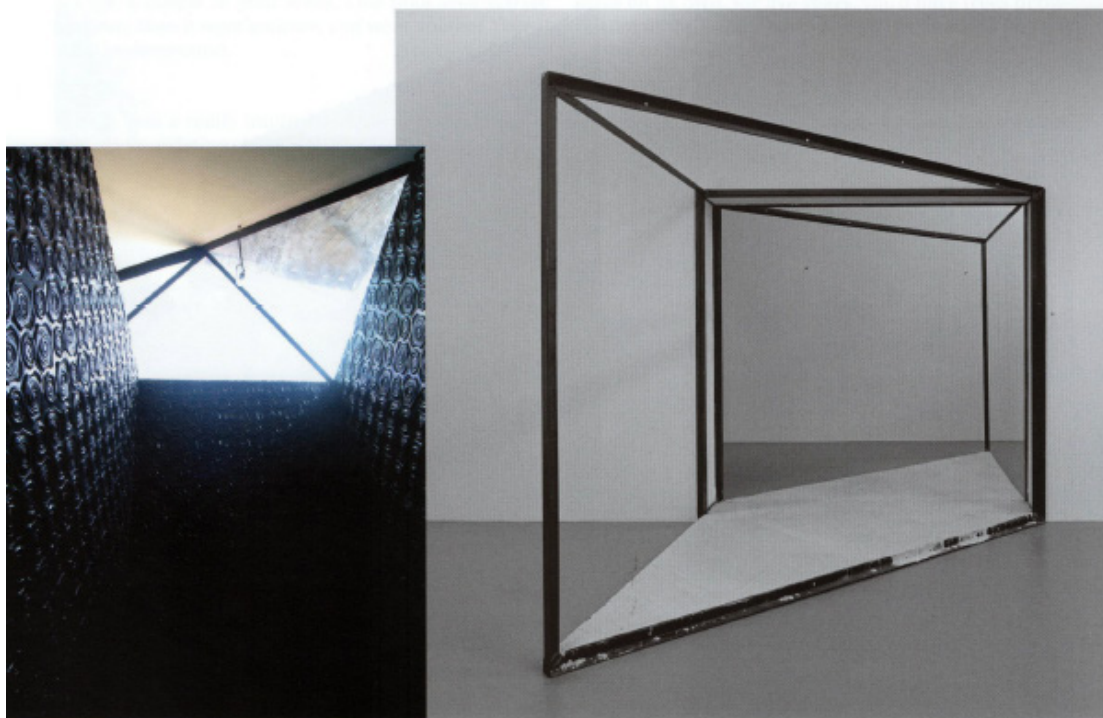
Yeah, it's very diffused. It wants to talk about a lot of things at the same time.

OSCAR

The Land Art project was to bring a gallery space out to the middle of the desert and set up a white cube in the middle of New Mexico.

JORGE

But it was also addressing a kind of deficiency in the white cube, to some degree. What happens if you bring a perceptual project—a project about intensifying perception or using it in some way or directing it in some way. Instead of using a wall, or a door, or some sort of entrance, what if you use a mountain ridge, or the sky, or water, or a lake or body of water? It was always a heroic kind of gesture to want to do that. To enlarge and amplify things that were—to me anyway—diminutively done in exhibition spaces. That always seems odd to me.



OSCAR

What do you mean "diminutively done in exhibition spaces"?

JORGE

Done in smaller form. Controlled. It always seems like it's about turning up the volume, or accessing this phenomenon in a much more direct way, with less mediation. It's always different things.

OSCAR

The Land Art work is so framed, I always wonder what's outside the frame.

JORGE

I don't know how useful Land Art is to a project like Tecoh. It is useful in a sense, as a polemic. As a way to read it in relation to what it's not. Or what it is or how it's a paradox. But the aspirations are so different. And the belief system is so different. The problems in the work are so different.

OSCAR

The last thing I want to ask you is about the visibility of the work, and that question of framing and scale. Where does the work end?

JORGE

I think the work begins with a kind of an interest by someone. An opportunity, a proposition. Someone asks you to do something. I think it probably ends when it ceases to be relevant. The work is sited in this place that most people will not go to. So, it's really kind of dependent on reproductions of it—whether they be verbal ones, or visual ones, or oral ones. I don't think that there is a real consuming of a place like Tecoh. I think, when you're there, things happen very differently. If you were sort of ideologically disposed, you could argue for it being the real thing when you're there. But, I'm not there, so my interest is more in terms of how it reverberates when I'm not there.

OSCAR

Is it a domestic space? Do you consider it a domestic space?

JORGE

Yeah. It's completely domestic. It's basically a place to eat, and sleep, and swim, and look at the sky, and talk ... and cook. [laughs] And to be in this jungle, be in this region, that brings with it a whole litany of historical problems. It's funny to talk about it as if it were a ghost.

OSCAR

But it kind of is. For everyone, it's a ghost. Except for you and the people who have been there.

JORGE

To me and the people who built it—and the people who live in the area. And it's kind of nice to make works that only accommodate so much.

OSCAR

I know you're taking people there. I'm looking forward to going there.

JORGE

Yeah.

OSCAR

Is it a place where people are going to make a pilgrimage together? I don't know if you can even answer that question.

JORGE

I have no idea. People do the weirdest things in simple places. Maybe, maybe not. It really depends on how long the attention span on a project like this sustains in the culture that I work in. And it depends on whatever relevancy the work, the project, may or may not have. It wasn't planned as a place of pilgrimage. I always thought about it as something I was making. I never thought I was making a destination. So, if it's that by default, then okay.





THE ART NEWSPAPER

## Interview with Oscar Tuazon: Sculptures you are supposed to play with

Artist Oscar Tuazon on his Public Art Fund project for Brooklyn Bridge Park



Oscar Tuazon's architectural sculptures burst through gallery walls, block doorways and spread across rooms in any way the artist sees fit—providing that the gallerist gives him the carte blanche to do so. The freedom of working outdoors allows for a different dynamic. For his latest project, the Washington-born, US-and Paris-based Tuazon has been commissioned by New York City's Public Art Fund to install three new sculptures in Brooklyn Bridge Park, a recently-constructed green space designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh, a landscape architect whom Tuazon greatly admires. Tuazon says that he enjoys navigating the problems posed by working in a public space, not the least of which is the imposing Manhattan skyline in the distance. As we went to press, Tuazon was planning to construct the sculptures on-site, over a ten-day period in late June using two of his characteristic materials—concrete and trees. The exhibition, "People", is due to run from 19 July to 26 April 2013. Tuazon spoke to The Art Newspaper in early June from a taxi to his studio in the Parisian suburb of Sèvres.

Eric Magnuson

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The Art Newspaper, July 16, 2012.

<https://urlr.me/ACV9df>

*The Art Newspaper:* How different is it creating work for a park as opposed to a gallery space?

*Oscar Tuazon:* Specific to this location: the skyline of Manhattan is incredible. The first thing I realised when I visited is that it's pointless to try and do something massive because you'll never be able to compete with the skyline. So, I decided to do something that was human in scale. And to me, trees are human scale. They're bigger than people, but even on a monumental scale, I think a tree is still something that's quite approachable because it has human qualities. The tree is also an interesting object in terms of its verticality. Like a totem pole, it doesn't necessarily have to be massive to do something interesting to the space around it. Its verticality [makes it interesting]. These three pieces are trying to almost function as utilitarian objects within the park. They should be used.

*How do you see people interacting with the sculptures?*

There's a fountain, a small room and a piece that comprises a basketball hoop and a handball wall. The basketball hoop will be a typical Parks Department basketball hoop, and I tried to replicate a handball wall so that it's almost a found object. To me, these are very typical New York things. I hope the hoop is a piece that gets used and has a completely different function apart from being a sculpture. At the same time, you may look at that basketball hoop and the game played using it as somehow being part of the sculpture. Those boundaries are going to be lost or suspended temporarily. One of the things that I've been thinking about is making objects that can function with a certain invisibility so people can use them without necessarily even thinking that they're works of art. With the fountain, I think you'll be able to play in it a little bit.

*Have you ever done anything like that?*

Yes, another public piece in New York [an outdoor installation titled *Use It For What It's Used For*, 2009, created with his brother Elias Hansen]. It was something that didn't look very playful, but it was meant to be occupied and had this playfulness: there was a lamp; it could rain; there was water. I'm interested in creating spaces that aren't programmed and aren't really operating on the same logic as the rest of the space that we're accustomed to. I think it's a nice rupture or void within the city when you find something that hasn't been purposed and is kind of useless and useful at the same time.

*In 2005, you wrote: "An occupation evicts the existing function of a building." Do you consider these three sculptures to be an occupation that alters the park's existing function?*

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Yes. In a way, I hope that they enhance the functions of the park. There is a space under the basketball hoop that overlaps with a path, and you could say that this will create a change in the way the space is normally used. The pieces actually determined where they'll be installed. I came up with these three pieces, and very quickly it was obvious that the fountain would be in the valley area of the park. The other two, because of their dimensions, needed a certain amount of space around them. There were other options, but I wanted to keep the three works within sight of each other.

*Do you differentiate between what is commonly referred to as site-specific work and your own work?*

I would say that the way I work is definitely site-responsive. I wouldn't really call it site-specific because I feel like a lot of the characteristics of any site are arbitrary. There are things that the work needs to respond to, but it doesn't necessarily form the work. For these three works, I would say that the relationship to the site is very open. They're not responding to anything in particular about the site other than the fact that it's outdoors.

*These pieces have a utility to them, but you've said of some of your other work that "they can be left outside, all alone. They don't even need to be watched. They don't need anybody." Have you considered whether anybody needs a sculpture that doesn't need them in return?*

I think that goes to the autonomy of a work of art. Nobody really needs a work of art. (Laughs.) And vice versa, I guess. But it's true that these [three works] are very inviting somehow. And [they're] inviting a pretty open-ended range of possibilities.

*Before you first visited the park, did you have any ideas for what you were going to build? Or did that evolve after visiting?*

After I visited the park, I was immediately thinking about trees. It doesn't really have trees of any real scale because it's such a new park. I've worked a lot with trees and so I thought that it [would be an] interesting thing to bring into and think about in a park. All three of the sculptures have trees, which we're bringing down from Dutchess County [in New York's Hudson Valley].

*How much of the work have you plotted out in advance?*

It's very laid out. It's a big project so it requires a lot of people working on it. But at the same time, there are elements built into these three works that are going to have to be improvised on site.

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*Are the parameters of what you can do to the site more regulated because you're working with the City of New York?*

When I'm working [on a piece that will be displayed publicly] and thinking about something that potentially can be used or interacted with, I do have to think about safety and what people might do with these objects. That might be a restriction, but to me, that's the exciting kind of restriction or constraint that actually brings the work into existence and forms the work. I'm really enthusiastic about working with that kind of problem.

*Do you foresee a lot of impromptu decisions on the project?*

Yes, particularly with the fountain. I think we've had to premeditate a lot of stuff because of safety and I'm not able to build a lot of it myself because of the scale of it. There is this element that you can't quite control when you're working with something as organic as a tree, which is nice. Even the computer-modelling programme that we're using to make the architectural rendering isn't capable of rendering the tree exactly. So there's that nice gap between what we can premeditate and what's going to have to be improvised on site.

*You've worked with your brother Elias on numerous projects. How is a project different when you're the sole mind behind it?*

We've actually just opened a show in Paris ["We're Just in It for the Money" at Galerie Balice Hertling until 4 August]. Working with Eli is pretty unique because we don't have to talk about it that much. As brothers, we've been working together for a long time. It almost comes out of improvisation. I think you let yourself do things that you wouldn't normally do in your own work when you collaborate because there's always this moment of projection where you are projecting with the other person, just thinking, or you have an image of the other person somehow. I think it takes us each outside of our own work in a nice way.

*Many writers describe your work as "attacking" the space it inhabits. Do you agree with that description?*

I think it is accurate in a lot of my work. Maybe that comes back to the question of site-specificity. Within a museum or gallery, the connotations of what those spaces are changes from a small gallery to a larger gallery to an institutional space to a museum. And I guess there's nothing to attack in a park. I feel like one of the things that a work can do within an exhibition space is engage with or challenge the context [of the space]. While not to say it's a neutral environment, the range of possibilities of what you can do in a park is so much more open than what is possible in an exhibition space. So, I felt that the best thing I could do was to make something enjoyable and fun.

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VOGUE  
FRANCE

## Rencontre avec Oscar Tuazon à la Biennale de Venise

Sculpteur d'origine américaine et vivant en France, Oscar Tuazon fait évoluer son art aux frontières de l'architecture, de l'habitat précaire ou de la ruine. Il a été choisi avec d'autres artistes pour créer l'un des quatre pavillons à Venise.



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**Comment as-tu conçu *The Trees*, ce mini-pavillon en béton, un peu cassé, désarticulé ?**

Ça n'était pas vraiment en référence aux autres pavillons. *The Trees* n'est pas un discours sur le site, uniquement au sens culturel du terme. J'ai aussi beaucoup prêté attention à la notion de "Giardini" et à la végétation qui allait entourer mon œuvre.

**Quand t'as-t-on sollicité pour cette pièce ?**

Environ dix mois avant la Biennale. J'avais commencé par visiter le site et fait une première proposition. Ce parapavillon est conçu entre autres pour accueillir le travail de l'artiste Asier Mendizabal. Nous avons beaucoup discuté ensemble et j'ai évolué par rapport à ma première mouture.

**Ton projet était-il lié à la thématique générale de la Biennale, ILLUMInations ?**

Oui, dans le sens où c'était vraiment une idée intéressante d'accueillir et de concevoir un espace pour d'autres. Ma pièce est quelque peu inidentifiée. Ca n'est pas une sculpture, c'est presque de l'architecture, qui va être modifiée par les autres plasticiens. Il y aura aussi des performances, dont une pièce sonore, ou la peinture d'Ida Ekblad, qui va recouvrir le béton, voire même peut-être du graffiti.

**Que penses-tu de cette Biennale ?**

J'aime surtout qu'il n'y ait pas de côté spectaculaire. C'est à échelle humaine. Sur le fond des expositions, il est difficile pour moi d'en parler ou de comparer aux autres sessions car c'est la première fois que je viens ici. Même s'il est toujours malaisé de généraliser, je constate que c'est une Biennale pour les artistes. La curatrice Bice Curiger a laissé une grande liberté et a été très respectueuse du travail de chacun. Un dialogue très humain s'est noué entre elle et nous.

**Quels sont tes pavillons préférés ?**

J'aime le pavillon allemand qui présente l'œuvre posthume de Christoph Schlingensiefel (Il vient d'être décoré du Lion d'or du meilleur pavillon) et l'anglais, de Mike Nelson.

**Quels sont les enjeux pour un artiste de 35 ans à participer à la Biennale ?**

C'est très important, car c'est une grande expérience et une fenêtre sur le monde. Ton travail est vu par un public très important. Quand tu es artiste et que tu produis une nouvelle pièce, tu ne sais jamais si cela va marcher et comment l'œuvre va être reçue. Parfois, ça n'est pas ce que tu avais prévu, mais ici, à Venise, ça a fonctionné exactement comme je l'avais imaginé.

**Cette œuvre va-t-elle rester là ou a-t-on prévu de la détruire ?**

Mon contrat stipule qu'elle va être détruite, mais j'espère qu'elle va perdurer. Il y a juste à côté une inscription en pierre, reste d'une œuvre qui date des années 1940. L'artiste n'est jamais revenu la chercher, donc elle est toujours là. Ca serait mon rêve !

# Structural Tension

Julian Rose on the art of Oscar Tuazon



This and opposite page:  
Oscar Tuazon, *untitled*,  
2010, mixed media.  
Installation views,  
Kunsthalle Bern,  
Switzerland. Photos:  
Dominique Uldry.

IT'S EASY ENOUGH to see the work of Oscar Tuazon as a vehement attack on architecture. The Paris-based artist's two most recent shows, for example—an untitled project at the Kunsthalle Bern and *My Mistake* at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts this past spring and summer, respectively—each staged a dramatic encounter between installation and white cube. Both were large-scale frame constructions, assembled from eight-by-eight- or twelve-by-twelve-inch beams of unfinished wood, roughly cut to size with a chain saw and bolted together. In both shows, the frames filled an entire floor, weaving in and out of multiple rooms. Not only is their raw materiality a striking contrast to the high finish of the galleries, but the structures appear to flout the buildings' existing spatial organization with a defiantly independent logic. Where Tuazon's beams encounter the gallery walls, they simply punch through, carrying over into the next gallery, even as the massive armature blocks doors, fills rooms, and profoundly disrupts the buildings' normal patterns of occupation and use. Reviews, following the exhibitions' own literature, have overwhelmingly responded with a rhetoric of violence and destruction. The Bern work "attacks the building," while the ICA structure "annihilates" and enters into "combat" with the existing space. One can't seem to escape repeated references to "aggression," "contamination," and "penetration." This public-relations battle between art and architecture, though, is something of a red herring.

Many contemporary artists, curators, and critics share the assumption that the physical alteration of an exhibition space amounts to an inherently devastating assault on architecture, whether understood as a specific critique of the institution displaying the work or as a more generalized criticism of architecture's position in the culture at large. But these attacks seem at best rhetorical and at worst fleeting, futile, and easily absorbed by the institutions they target. What accounts for the persistence of this myth of conquering artists, vanquishers of architecture, given the glaring disjunction between our collective faith in their triumph and the actual effectiveness of their critiques? Perhaps, like any good myth, this one offers a convenient certainty with which to cover up an uncomfortable gap in understanding. In the face of an increasingly complex and murky relationship between art and architecture, staging an easy binary between the two disciplines offers a deceptively clear model for operating between them. In fact, this liminal field remains permissively vague, even escapist—a space where few difficult questions are asked.

Yet to look into Tuazon's work and find only a reinforcement of existing trends would be to miss an opportunity to move beyond the very binaries





This page: Oscar Tuazon, *My Mistake*, 2010, mixed media. Installation view, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. Photo: Steve White. Opposite page: Oscar Tuazon, *Bend It Till It Breaks*, 2009, wood, metal, concrete. Installation view, Centre International d'Art et du Paysage de l'Île de Vassivière, France.

his work seems at first to reinforce. There is an undeniable aggression in Tuazon's work, as well as a distrust of architectural orthodoxy. He often speaks of his lifelong interest in alternative or "outsider" architectural movements, ranging from the ad hoc constructions of hippie communes to the portable and do-it-yourself shelters of hard-core survivalists. But whatever his interest in these precedents, Tuazon does not follow them completely outside the cultural establishment. His work still operates in, around, and between art and architecture. And while his work remains critical, it is tempered by a deep insight into the way these fields operate. Tuazon does not leverage abstractions such as "art" or "sculpture" in a blunt attack on an equally abstract notion of "architecture." Rather, he tunes his work to selectively relate certain trends, practices, and histories in each discipline to the other. Thus he is able to move away from literal, staged encounters between art and architecture—so prevalent in recent practice—toward an investigation of specific themes that resonate richly in both.

In order to grasp Tuazon's relation to architecture, one must first recognize the depth of his shared concerns with the discipline. Viewed independently of their interpenetration with the galleries they occupied, the ICA and Bern pieces are simple assemblies of timbers: horizontal spanning members held up off the ground by vertical supports. In other words, they are crude post-and-beam structures. The post-and-beam frame holds a near-mythical status in architectural discourse because it is traditionally understood as *the* prototypical structure. In the guise of Enlightenment historian Marc-Antoine Laugier's "primitive hut," the post-and-beam frame was even famously posited as the origin of architecture. Tuazon's pieces thus address one of the most fundamental problems of architecture: the organization of posts and beams into a structural frame.

Amid the current craze for gravity-defying architecture, there is an uncanny power in Tuazon's visceral acknowledgment of gravity's force, a tectonic return of the repressed.

The post-and-beam frame is fabled not only as the first structure, however, but as the origin of the fundamental relationship between structure and representation. Simply put, much of the frame structure's appeal stems from the fact that it doesn't just stand up, it *looks like* it should stand up. The straightforward conjunction of horizontal and vertical elements projects an air of stability, providing the basic diagram shaping our expectations for a well-built building. And it was Gottfried Semper, one of the grandfathers of modern architectural history, who is best known for theorizing this slippage between structural and representational concerns through the notion of tectonics. The term, derived from the Greek *tektōn*, meaning "carpenter or builder," was used in the nineteenth century by Semper specifically to refer to theories of structural expression. In his tract *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts*, he argued that since architecture's most fundamental task is to resist gravity, its primary aesthetic goal should be to represent symbolically the drama of this internal struggle. For Semper, architecture possesses a visual language of structure that is purely symbolic and entirely "independent of material conditions." The appearance of structural





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soundness is thus ultimately just as important as structural performance itself. For example, he criticizes vertical decorations on a horizontal beam because “visually they destroy this member’s tensile strength.”

The famous modernist emphasis on “structural transparency” notwithstanding, modern architecture generally stayed within Semper’s model of tectonics. New industrial materials and conceptions of space may have changed the structural language of architecture, but it was still a *language*—and so structural expression in modernism remained largely rhetorical. This may seem counter-intuitive, yet it can be easily confirmed by a glance at any number of iconic modern buildings. In Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson’s Seagram Building, for example, the austere grid of I beams on the building’s facade appears to be its internal steel structure. But as is well known, the steel actually holding up the building lies hidden inside the curtain wall. So how could modernist structural expression be confronted other than rhetorically? When deconstruction and anti-architecture arrived in the ’80s, buildings were designed to look fragmented, unstable, incomplete—“cuts” were carefully engineered into walls, gaps introduced into floors, and columns twisted to produce an image of structure on the verge of collapse. Yet as the shock of the new wears off (it has now been more than twenty years since the epochal “Deconstructivist Architecture” show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York), it is all too easy to recognize the only destruction here as Semper’s “visual” one.

Today, many architects seem less interested in buildings that appear alarmingly close to succumbing to gravity than in those that defy it entirely—whether in the form of spectacular gestures like the cantilever of Rem Koolhaas’s CCTV tower in Beijing or in the fad for structures that just look so complicated or chaotic that one loses all sense of how they perform the job of keeping themselves upright. But this trend is still essentially a visual game. If deconstruction was an attack on structural function and much contemporary architecture is based on the suppression of structure, both continue to operate within a symbolic language of structural expression, in the shadow of Semper’s tectonics.

The single most powerful dimension of Tuazon’s work is that it finally offers a genuine alternative to these models of tectonics. But while the Bern and ICA pieces are a convenient entry point into this problem, it is three slightly earlier works that articulate the break with tectonics most clearly. *Another Nameless Venture Gone Wrong*, 2009 (Haugar Vestfold Kunstmuseum, Tønsberg, Norway), *Bend It Till It Breaks*, 2009 (Centre International d’Art et du Paysage de l’Île de Vassivière, France), and *Tonopah*, 2008 (Maccarone Inc., New York) are—like the Bern and ICA projects—all essentially primitive frame structures. But their frames are constructed of a much more heterogeneous assortment of building materials. There are raw wooden posts but also massive concrete beams, metal studs, and patches of Sheetrock. The elegant simplicity of the frame unit is here obscured by the seemingly schizophrenic logic with which the materials have been assembled. Although the more recent installations are developed to a roughly consistent level of bare-bones completion, these previous works have an odd patchwork quality. At moments, a near-complete piece of wall (the full sandwich of beams, studs, and Sheetrock) is perched absurdly atop a single post; elsewhere, posts, beams, and studs of different sizes and materials intertwine so densely that one almost loses the identity of the structural frame. These structures are not so much fragmented—for there is none of the romance of the fragment, no suggestion of an originary order or a lost whole—as simply incomplete, undone.

But what one really notices about these structures is that they are literally collapsing. In each of these pieces, Tuazon builds a structural framework around one or more large concrete members, which he casts in place during the installation process. These are purposefully left insufficiently supported, so that as soon as Tuazon removes their formwork they begin to buckle under their own weight. The concrete slabs’ failure reverberates throughout the works; they



Opposite page: Oscar Tuazon, *Another Nameless Venture Gone Wrong*, 2009, mixed media. Installation view, Haugar Vestfold Kunstmuseum, Tønsberg, Norway. Photo: Vegard Kleven. This page, above: Oscar Tuazon, *Tonopah*, 2008, wood, steel, winches, cement. Installation view, Maccarone Inc., New York. Below: Oscar Tuazon, *Bend It Till It Breaks*, 2009, wood, metal, concrete. Installation view, Centre International d'Art et du Paysage, de l'Île de Vassivière, France.



are saved from complete self-destruction only by Tuazon's deployment of a secondary support system as a kind of structural safety fuse—usually a chain hoist fixed to the gallery ceiling—to catch the work before it collapses entirely. The forces involved are immense, with tons of material precariously suspended (*Another Nameless Venture Gone Wrong*, for example, required the support of a ten-ton motorized hoist). Concrete shatters and metal studs buckle and twist, tearing through Sheetrock like tissue paper. Wooden beams bow and posts lean crazily, dragged out of alignment by the inexorable lateral force exerted by the failing concrete. Rubble accumulates on the gallery floor.

Amid the current craze for gravity-defying architecture, there is an uncanny power in Tuazon's visceral acknowledgment of gravity's force, a tectonic return of the repressed. But his use of gravity ultimately cuts much deeper. Not only does he refuse to idealize his works' resistance to gravity, as Semper would demand, but he avoids the purely visual fragmentation and precarity of deconstruction. The relation of his structures to gravity is completely nonmetaphoric. As Tuazon says, "For me the problematic is never one of representation. I mean, I want to push materials to the point where they actually fail. So what some-

**A productive potential in the gap between plan and realization arises—one that neither architects nor sculptors before Tuazon seem to have noticed.**

thing looks like is almost beside the point, or at least beyond my control." Tuazon's most fundamental achievement, all the more profound for being so basic, is to build a structure that does not *look like* but simply *is*.

The relevance of this achievement is not limited to architecture, since notions of structural legibility have held a persistent importance for sculpture as well. Constructivist concerns with transparency and articulation of structure were necessarily reengaged by postwar neo-avant-gardes, particularly Minimalism; even if in the context of sculpture, *structure* referred as much to the logics of manufacture and assembly as to the tectonic expression of a contest with gravity. Donald Judd's famous mantra of "one thing after another," for example, can be interpreted as a kind of imperative for Minimalist work to reveal its logic of assembly; it is almost impossible for a viewer to fail to understand how a work constructed according to this principle has been made. The Minimalist module, then, was essentially a means of ensuring legibility. The ubiquitous grid of Minimalism is simply the most readable organization of a cubic module.

Given the shared strategies and concerns of Minimalism and modern architecture, it is not surprising that many post-Minimalist artists critiqued Minimalism by explicitly engaging architecture. Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970, for example, staged a dramatic encounter between the rational structure of architecture and the overwhelming force of raw matter—dumping (literally) tons of dirt onto a post-and-beam timber shed until its center beam cracked. Gordon Matta-Clark famously dissected the architectural objects of everyday modernism, interrupting the humdrum modularity of houses, offices, and industrial buildings with intricate cutting operations. And Richard Serra has replaced the gridded legibility common to both modern architecture and Minimalism with vertiginous, disorienting spaces derived from complex curvatures. For this generation of artists, the proper response to the module was either to attack it or to abandon it.

Tuazon, however, is willing to look into architecture from a different vantage point, and so his response to Minimalism need not be so overtly anti-architectural.

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While the destructive impulse of Smithson or Matta-Clark might appear superficially similar to Tuazon's, the teleology of their work can be understood as pure negation: moving inexorably toward the zero degree of entropy in Smithson's case or the eventual (and precisely rendered) demolition of the building in Matta-Clark's, distancing their work from Tuazon's investment in a more dynamic and unpredictable precarity.

Tuazon leverages his interests in alternative architecture to overcome the limits of the Minimalist module without leaving it behind. Some critics have seen echoes of Sol LeWitt's three-dimensional grids in the ICA and Bern pieces, and indeed all of Tuazon's works discussed thus far could be described as modular, insofar as a structural frame is a kind of module. Tuazon himself frankly admits to using a module in constructing these pieces, reinforcing (perhaps unintentionally) the association with Minimalism. But the artist's emphasis is on adaptability, flexibility, and the provisional—modularity in the sense that modular housing, say, is designed to be effectively deployed under a wide range of local conditions. For the projects in London and Bern, for example, Tuazon used his knowledge of the basic size and structural capabilities of the module to get an overall sense of how he wanted the work to occupy the gallery space and how it could be structurally viable. Once working on-site, however, he took advantage of the module's flexibility to adapt each piece to various spatial and material constraints as they arose, such as discoveries about the structural capabilities of the gallery building (which walls he could and could not pierce, for instance) and limitations on available tools, labor, and time. Elsewhere, he has gone so far as to construct quasi-habitable structures that respond to their siting outdoors. Although he stops well short of the utopian idealism that often accompanies modular architecture, there remains a strong architectural sensibility in this dimension of Tuazon's work—more Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 than LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes*. Those who see only echoes of Minimalism risk missing the opposite inflection—toward contingency rather than seriality—that lies behind Tuazon's modules.

All this raises the question of the plan, not only in terms of the architectural convention of drawing plans but in relation to the vehemence with which some artists have attacked this convention in their work. Historically, the plan drawing provided the architect's greatest moment of control—the God's-eye view in which the entire organization of a building could be dictated in a single moment. Though recent techniques have made plans much more complex (the layering operations favored by Peter Eisenman, among others), the essential organizational role of the plan has not dramatically changed. On the other hand, certain artists—particularly as their work has approached an architectural scale—have displayed an almost Oedipal need to destroy the primacy of the plan. Serra proudly claims that it is nearly impossible to deduce the plan of one of his sculptures merely by walking through it, or to predict the experience by looking at a plan drawing of the piece. Indeed, many have cited this elimination of the plan's traditional utility as one of the major achievements of Serra's work.

Critics have likewise touted the claim that Tuazon does not work from plans, as if the refusal of this basic architectural convention is in itself another devastating blow struck against the discipline. But as Tuazon's frame structures suggest, working with an architectural convention and criticizing architecture are not mutually exclusive. To deny that Tuazon works from plans would be both untrue (he often does) and unfair. His use of the plan reveals not complicity with



Elias Hansen and Oscar Tuazon, *Use It for What It's Used For*, 2009, concrete, wood, steel, cinder blocks, silicone, solar panel, charge controller, service disconnect, twelve-volt battery, wiring, light, timer. Installation view, LerrtSpace, New York.

architecture but a gift for destabilizing its conventions both critically and productively. As the ad hoc quality of his constructions implies, Tuazon does make many of his construction decisions on-site. His plans are schematic, not rigid. But they are plans nonetheless. For a time, he even drew them in AutoCAD before deciding that sketching by hand was easier and faster. What matters is not that Tuazon uses plans, but that he uses them in a way fundamentally different from architects.

Tuazon does not see the plan as something that needs to be attacked or destroyed or even necessarily challenged, but he does exploit the gap between plan and actual experience. Because of their sheer scale and mass, his works must be relatively consistent and rational in conception. Tuazon has realized, however, that the design need not impose itself on the viewer's experience. At the ICA or Bern, for example, different areas of his structure can generate radically different experiences despite being very similar in plan, largely due to the way Tuazon exploits the contingency of their relationship to the existing architecture. Heights and angles change dramatically depending on location. A given cubic volume might frame a doorway and so be experienced as a passageway or portal, while elsewhere a comparable volume is embedded in a wall, even penetrating the wall's surface with its horizontal members, so that it appears more like a solid mass. Tuazon himself speaks of the "surprise and excitement" he felt walking through the ICA space as he recognized that even after weeks of effort to resolve his structure in plan, the sensation of moving through the piece varied radically from room to room. A productive potential in the difference between drawing and realization arises—one that neither architects nor sculptors before Tuazon seem to have noticed. He reinterprets disciplinary conventions with no sign of pretension, exploiting these norms as productive opportunities rather than simply destroying them.

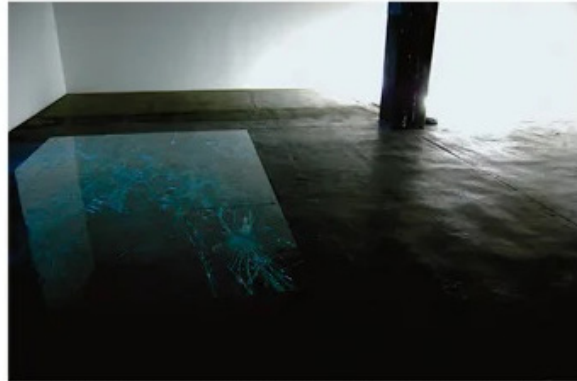
Tuazon's materials, too, pull away from both Minimalism and post-Minimalism even as they complicate architectural orthodoxy. The rough stuff employed in his work is in obvious contrast to the fastidious (even fetishized) surfaces favored by Minimalists such as Judd. But his materials are not simply architectural, either. Most of the building materials Tuazon uses are scrap or salvage he scavenges himself, the raw guts of buildings. In actual building applications, the cheap metal studs and rough-cut timbers Tuazon favors are typically covered with more finished materials such as plaster and drywall or paneling. When we see them bare in his work, they emanate a peculiar mix of familiarity and



strangeness. We know they are architectural, yet we do not associate them with our everyday experience of architecture.

Such a tendency toward the abject might easily succumb to reverse romanticism. The latter is a sentiment that underlies the self-evidently dismantled materials in much process art and “unmonumental” work today. Yet Tuazon’s materiality is not purely transgressive: The most startling thing about many of his works is that materials retain their functional properties or even take on surprising new ones. In *Beer Bottle Test Column*, 2008, a collaboration with Tuazon’s brother, Elias Hansen, a massive construction of wood and concrete is held up in part by a stack of beer bottles reinforced with wire mesh and glue. Here Tuazon adds another level of sophistication to his critique of tectonics. He proves that, ultimately, *anything* can be used to hold up a building. Not only does a column not really need to *look like* it is holding up the building, it does not even need to *be* a column at all—a pile of trash will work just as well, provided that a few simple structural principles are observed. This radical insight trumps centuries of architectural tradition.

Underlying Tuazon’s new understanding of structure, modularity, and materiality is a new sense of subjectivity. Tuazon is clearly influenced by the Minimalist and post-Minimalist understanding of experience as embodied, mobile, and temporal, most explicitly in the ICA and Bern works. To see the whole



Left: Elias Hansen and Oscar Tuazon, *Beer Bottle Test Column*, 2008, mixed media. Installation view, The Station, Miami. Above: Oscar Tuazon, *I Went Out There and Spent a Night Out There. The Light Died Out While I Waited and So I Stopped*, 2010. Installation view, Maccarone Inc., New York. Photo: Andrew Russett.

thing in either venue, one must walk not only around the entire floor but also into and through the structures themselves. At first glance, *I Went Out There and Spent a Night Out There. The Light Died Out While I Waited and So I Stopped*, 2010, also seems to refer directly to the Minimalist precedent of Carl Andre’s gridded metal floor pieces: Tuazon’s work is made up in part of two sheets of reinforced glass placed end to end, also on the gallery floor. Viewers are invited to walk onto both. But when you step onto an Andre piece, nothing much happens. The metal plates, of course, are rock hard and supported firmly on the floor—they don’t budge or even squeak. After he laid them down, Tuazon shattered the glass plates in *I Went . . .*, kicking them until they broke, and left them. When you stride onto that piece, fragments of glass shift and crunch disturbingly underfoot. You feel as if you are breaking Tuazon’s work as you walk across it; you are not only moving in relation to the piece, but the weight and movement of your body are implicated in its destruction. Remarkably, Tuazon is able to engage the body without slipping into an abstract model of subjectivity. The Minimalist subject, after all, remained idealist in many ways, wholly undivided and so always fully present to the world. And while the complex and increasingly illegible spaces created by Matta-Clark and Serra may have disoriented this subject, they did not alter its fundamental abstraction.

This may be why we feel such powerful emotional impact amid Tuazon’s collapsing structures. Perhaps we relate to his works not only through an abstract phenomenology or the disorienting effects of illegible space, but through the bodily and the psychological at the same time. Tuazon has said, “I’ve always tried to think about architecture from the standpoint of occupation, inhabitation. . . . So to me that’s an idea of architecture that starts with the body, with a specific body, it’s architecture in the first person I guess you could say.” Crucially, this is not the idealized analogy between body and building that has haunted architecture at least since the classical invention of the Vitruvian Man. In looking at Tuazon’s structures we experience not only an intellectual reflex of reading or decoding but the immediate shock of (bodily) recognition: a kind of first-person identification or projection. Tuazon’s work thus clears a space between art and architecture—eroding the persistent metaphors and comfortable binaries that usually languish there. □

JULIAN ROSE IS A CRITIC AND DESIGNER BASED IN NEW HAVEN. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)