

THE MAKE-SHIFT LABORATORIES AND MACHINES OF JESUS PALOMINO.
A text by Charles Citron.

You have a beautiful car but no gasoline!

In writing this essay, I asked myself what can be distilled from the makeshift laboratories and machines of, cardboard, colored plastic, recycled packaging and the handmade shantytown architecture of Jesús Palomino.

What energy flows through these installations camouflaged and assembled by tape and tubings and hoses and tinfoil ? And why do you always feel the presence of the hand of the artist ? What is his method and how do we mis-understand it ?

Intuitively his installations mirror the alchemy of feeling and layers of perception. Through on-site interventions, he juxtaposes the tactile and imaginary with social and environmental issues, creating a new context for intercultural communication.

It's interesting how he mirrors contemporary language through organic processes and how image seems to be imprinted on or sealed in transparent skins.

But I do remember how while walking through Sevilla with Jesús, we looked into a department store window and he said he had no interest in shopping but how he would really enjoy rearranging all of the products on the shelves to create new combinations. Of course, we ain't just talking window-shopping here!

How does the artist feel when he sees a green hose?

Who does he think about when covering a structure with tinfoil?

What is boiling in those cauldrons?

What poisons are extracted from those plastic bottles?

His installations read as some kind of ontological experiment. But they are more than that too. They are self-conscious about our humanness and what we are doing to ourselves in a world dominated by media and technology and machines. Is the artist telling us something about our bodies and minds? Are we to be consumed by what we consume, in a process that we don't understand?

Over the past years I have been watching the works of Jesús Palomino. Often this experience has taken place via photocopies, odd catalogues, emails to Ulaan Baatar, Sevilla and Madrid, visits to his studio in Amsterdam and eating delightful little clams in Tapas Bars in Sevilla. What strikes me always about Jesús is his mild mannered sophistication and his sense of hospitality and conservative dignity.

He is a real cosmopolitan and he is honest to the point of departure. And depart he must, because he is always busy with a project which involves a travel somewhere.

And there is something Mediterranean about the work too, almost aquatic. His world reads as if seen from the point of view of the jellyfish enjoying and recording images of Jacques Cousteau in his underwater submarine laboratory.

His art is sensual, painterly and sculpturally constructivist. It is very orderly and yet free. It is both anthropologically and politically aware, as well as scientific about the processed plasticity, which borders on the cartoon, and yet, he is thoroughly Africanized as an artist. He is a modernist who understands collage and material as expression, interfacing with postmodern concepts, and ideas.

The means of production of his work, rather than high tech, points to the low tech, craft productivity of marginal communities around the world. He is aware of intercultural difference and fascinated with the diversity of local cultures, their approaches to form making and architecture that care for their daily needs.

He has departed from the high speed-media train, the art conveyer belt. And like really good artists understand that new art must be an extension of the process of older movements and must resist the urge to academicize, to remain poetic, and original. It's a process of learning through intercultural appropriation and historical referencing. Through direct optical experience. Through living places and feeling materials.

So he walks, he breathes, he plans, he maps. He finds plastic bags and wood and rubbish and as if he lived in a town in Latin America or Africa or Mongolia all of his life, rummaging through the waste dumps in his mind for solutions to problems he invents. He recycles and transforms and twists and turns and hammers and bends to create a reversal of the pristine world of art technology and western media culture. But Jesús is deliberate, in this sense he plans his works conceptually and accented by theme.

His concern for the poor or local is counterbalanced by the sensation that the architecture while knocked together in an improvised fashion refers to precise first world aesthetic experience. The filmy transparency and loose handmade rapping humanizes the hard edge concepts and atmosphere by carrying emotional geometric structures. And have no doubt it is a critic of what is missing in first world culture. The human touch in globalization. It points to the artist's ethic as a prerequisite for his communication.

There is also something peculiar about his sensibility, like a tupperware salesman who through some wild trip to the Amazon has a revelation and realizes that this container or this bit of plastic sheet can be used as the foundation for a new civilization.

Yes. it's even borderline Utopian in a banana republic sort of way. It's like you enter into a camp of revolutionaries who having lost their way in the rainforest just gave up and settle-down, experimenting with creation of another world rather than a new one. Realizing the other world was always just around the corner.

The work suggests the immediacy of contemporary culture, ephemeral and make-shift, the sense that this hyper real language can simply disappear, not out of violence or destruction but out of reverse forces inherent in its own use and manufacture, its own invention, its own memory time.

The question of time seems to be a preoccupation throughout all the work. Understated it raps itself through each installation and suspends itself in moments of luminosity.

Jesús takes the view that all things fade away and are part of the temporary. Culture is the change we create and the things we consume and conserve. What time are we, how fast are we moving or shall I say consuming ?

Our world is fluctuating between sign and metaphysical experiences but what of empathy ? The works are not heavy-handed. They are dramatic in a theatrical way and they are always somewhere. They create a location, a site, and a place with inferred history, landscape or concept.

They exist not as artifice but as anti-artifice.

The body politic is simple and carefully established.

He has a delicate sense of language.

The hand in this case is slower than the eye, so the viewer has to wait, to be patient, to allow the work to settle in and become part of their life and experience.

In the work BODY COUNT & ENDLESS FOOD MACHINE, real political events are catalogued and displayed in a statistical manner as part of an artificial processing machine, its juxtaposed to endless consumption and packaging.

In CONTRA LA DESGANA (AGAINST APATHY), the idea of metabolic media laboratory is simulated. All functions are relegated to intuitive structuring and framing. Cellophane Time functions like a gelatin preserving archeological and media fragments.

The language of making over rides contextual and social meanings but the messages of resistance and the critique of contemporary economic and political structures are clearly stated.

Post artificiality and simulacra is transformed into organic and intellectual processes.

Plastic is used to signal emotional suspension and the preserving of anthropological specimens for research. It distills the processes of information gathering into poetic, sculptural constructs. Does the work appear functional only to emphasize its emotional dis-functionality ?

ANTICONGELANTE & 8 EMISIONES DE RADIO (ANTIFREEZING & 8 RADIO BROADCASTINGS) was a project in Vejer de la Frontera, Cádiz, not far from Morocco. According to the artist, "the issue was the frozen and poisoned history shared by European Andalusia culture of southern Spain and northern Moroccan culture with Andalusian roots."

The word HISTORIA (History in Spanish) and Sadaka (meaning friendship in Arabic) is cast in ice molds and then displayed in a freezer. Conflict is refrigerated, frozen and suspended in time. An ice case is transformed into a stage set, the dry grassy landscape of

Cadiz juxtaposed to the cool Mediterranean blue shelter filled with clean hermetically sealed ice oriented toward Morocco.

" 8 radio broadcasts were planned in the local radio station in the town of Vejer concerning shared history and common roots, differences, in social struggle, Islam, illegal immigration and intercultural dialogue in the hope of a better understanding through the use of media. Every week during the radio broadcast the words Historia and Sadaka were taken out of the case to melt in the sun."

The artist uses art as a liaison between two cultural communities to establish dialogue and activate a thaw in relations. The metaphorical transformation of language and material activates social discourse. After all art is not politics but it may express political views.

Yet the preservation of historical culture, the defense of culture is shown as a diminishing organic reality. Tradition can refrigerate conflict and language creating static prejudices. Why use ice to achieve this meaning, which seems to be in dialectical opposition to the landscape ? It is precisely this confrontation in form, which evokes poetic meaning and opens the work as environmental art.

Without knowing the subtext (very important in Art today) or the artists' intentions, the work may also refer to global warming as the words are laid to melt in a bed of dry grasses. Technology supports the language but yields to natural and social forces. They become pieces of perforated and deformed glacial language, something anthropologically frozen in the ice age, given over to the reality of environmental and organic change.

Is Jesús telling us here that all language is part of the world of nature and is subservient to its forces despite technological innovation ? Are we to understand from the form that mans cultural prejudices and identifications are inconsequent in geological time except to mankind ?

All the more reason to work with ideals and try to bridge the cultural and historical gaps.

In MEDIA FILTER & BIG COMPASS, Marfa, TEXAS, a circumference is drawn on the floor; a mineral water bottle is positioned off center. Electric cables intersect the space and at magnetic north a sheet of green plastic supports a fluorescent light. The word North is boldly printed. As in other installations current events and world affairs are prominently displayed, hermetically sealed in travel plastic. A chair is covered in luminous green plastic, cardboard boxes support the structure as if as electrical conduits. A large rug made of acrylic is on the floor. One can't avoid the direct critique of American politics.

"The first Poison Collector was made in Serbia & Montenegro to filter out the high rate of pollution in the river Tamis and Danube caused by the NATO military campaign against Milosevic's ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

Three different Posion Collectors were presented in Seville, Madrid and Burgos, three very important places in the History of Franco's regime. The issue was to filter out the political negativity in the History of my country connected to Franco's regime and European fascism. The books and documents displayed included historical material about:

- The Spanish Civil War;
- war in the Balkans;
- books about the Shoah;
- Hannah Arendt's essay "EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM";
- documents about Franco's postwar repression and violence in Spanish jails and concentration camps;
- a personal train ticket from Krakow to Auschwitz;
- documents about contemporary racism and social intolerance.

As my grandfather was persecuted during Franco regime rules and never returned to Spain this piece had also something to do with my personal and family memory. It was these memories that I was trying to collect to clean the poison from our lives around Spain."

Large rapped cotton balls, filter imaginary poisons, extracted via clear plastic tubes from plastic soda and mineral water bottles. The diffusion of artificial elements creates a surreal symbiosis. The vividly displayed texts and tape barriers, as well as the large free standing fluorescent lamps, create and alarming warning of the transformation necessary in healing and in collecting. This theme is reiterated in the TRANSFORMER series where energy is transformed inside a cardboard takeaway system of interconnecting illuminated boxes and dysfunctional circuits. Is it the light that is transformed in this studio laboratory or is it another more mysterious element ? Texts on banners are prominently displayed delivering these messages: "LA VIDA ES EL BIEN MAS PRECIADO." ("LIFE AS THE HIGHEST GOOD."

Which is the title of one chapter in Hannan Arendt's essay: "The Human Condition".)
 "LA HISTORIA NI DIGA FALSEDAD NI CALLE VERDAD." ("HISTORY DON'T SPEAK FALSELY, FALSEHOOD DOES NOT SILENCE THE TRUTH.")

"These two sentences were used on banners in an exhibition in Caracas as part of a machine device to produce Civil Rights."

In Patio Herreriano in Valladolid entitled "BIG FAVELA & 8 RADIO BROADCASTINGS", cauldrons, boxes, newspapers and framing exercise the analogue structure. Fluorescent light in green auras and 3 layers of billboard screens all conspire to radiate meaning or diffuse a message.

" The project was similar to ANTIFREEZING. One installation was inside the Museum and others were group media experiences in he local Radio Station. The broadcast were connected to issues such as art management and social responsibilities, mental health institutuions, immigartion in Spain, education in artistic institutions, etc. with two months of broadcastings by young students of journalism. The big Favela was a heap of shelters, improvised housing resembling poor Brazilian neighborhoods like shantytowns in cities around the world."

In all these installations media, history and current events are metabolized, sweating in upon themselves, rapped in throwaway material and forms, which create hybrid synthetic morphologies and architectures that transform and effuse essences. The sculptures while setting the stage for social and political discourse and for aesthetic interventions, (social

sculpture) also conceal inside its handmade found object membrane the poetic evocation and artistic necessity of the artist.

Today art is not divorced from ethics but often is fused in an uneasy tension with the empathetic and ideological views of the artist. The art of misunderstanding is collected in the symbolic makeshift persona of the artist. The multiple layers of constructed selves, the ambiguous seeing and communication. The interconnectivity evoked in the work as a multiplicity of conflict and ideals, of moral positions and obsessive rapping and camouflaging. What is the connection between the subject of the subject and the object of the subject ?

Jesús Palomino's work tries not to forget to remember, in order to remember not to forget, what forces usher in cultural displacement and human tragedy.

Perhaps this is what is so telling about these installations.

The artist's effort to transform and change himself in order to shift the emotional compass and media processes which are broadcast globally. And even more importantly, to resist, comment upon, and activate, how we receive and consume this information daily as humans beings.

In this sense Jesus is our engineer and inventor. Constructing what he sees and imagines. After all seeing is expression and it is both a mirror and transformer as art. The objective world, the human world around us, is therefore invented by all of us. These works cannot be translated literally or only politically but function as complex poetic laboratories whose casualty evokes often irrational feelings and interpretations which are the stuff of art.

As in some hybrid Star Trek episode, the artist seeks out new lives and old civilizations, to boldly go where everyman has gone before. The organic handmade machine becomes an extension of the mind and the body in image world.

Jesús Palomino is engaged against the emotional and physical apathy of our time. He compels us to think about ourselves, about our habitats and personal laboratories, about our compulsive consumerism, politics and media obsessions and the most importantly, HUMAN CONDITION.

Charles Citron.

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