

Tania Pérez Córdova

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Art

Tania Pérez Córdova, la lutte des glaces

A travers des œuvres qui fondent ou qu'elle fige sous verre, l'artiste mexicaine, qui expose en ce moment à Paris, fait taire le bruit du monde.



«Todas nuestras explicaciones» (2022). (Courtesy Art : Concept, Paris)

par [Judicaël Lavrador](#)

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C'est une sculpture froide et glissante qui tombe régulièrement de la boîte où elle est encastrée avec un bruit sourd. L'assistante de la galerie Art : Concept où se tient l'exposition de Tania Pérez Córdova la remet à sa place sans ménagement, en attendant, le soir venu, de la remettre au congélateur. L'objet fait de glace – son écrin est en béton – a la forme d'un visage moulé de profil. Sculpture qui perd la tête, l'œuvre qui se meut, s'ébranle, se performe et se reforme seule (ou presque) figure peut-être une sorte de supplice à la Sisyphe, ou du moins la vanité de toutes choses et notamment des longs discours, ainsi que semble le suggérer son titre, *Todas nuestras explicaciones* («toutes nos explications»).

Une autre pièce de l'artiste mexicaine (née en 1979) met la parole en forme et en mouvement en ciblant celle des hommes politiques de son pays. Leur salive (en réalité une salive artificielle) se déverse au compte-gouttes d'un seau moulé en aluminium à un autre placé au-dessous. Et le soir venu, il faut reverser le liquide translucide d'un seau à l'autre. Intitulée *Politicians Are Saying*, la pièce se désole de la logorrhée politique, plus qu'elle ne la raille. Et puis, dans son silencieux goutte-à-goutte, la fait taire.

Cette manière d'assourdir le bruit du monde, Tania Pérez Córdova l'applique aussi à la marchandise et à la consommation dans ses panneaux aux vitres fumées derrière lesquelles elle a glissé, collé, saupoudré des choses et d'autres glanées au cours de ses errances nocturnes. Des fragments de sac plastique, de masques, de tickets de caisse, de téléphone portable, des emballages de chocolat, des abeilles forment, sous cet écran noir qui éteint leur éclat, un inventaire parcellaire de «*toutes ces choses que nous avons achetées et dont nous n'avons pas besoin*», indiquent les cartels. Eloge de la dispersion et de la sobriété, ces tableaux sont composés avec un doigté faussement négligent, formant de mélancoliques miscellanées sous verre des rebuts du monde d'avant que l'artiste enterre sous nos yeux.

«All Our Explanations» de Tania Pérez Córdova, à la galerie Art : Concept (75003) jusqu'au 2 avril. Rens. : www.galerieartconcept.com

PUZZLES AND PROMISES

By Glenn Adamson  April 12, 2021 11:00am

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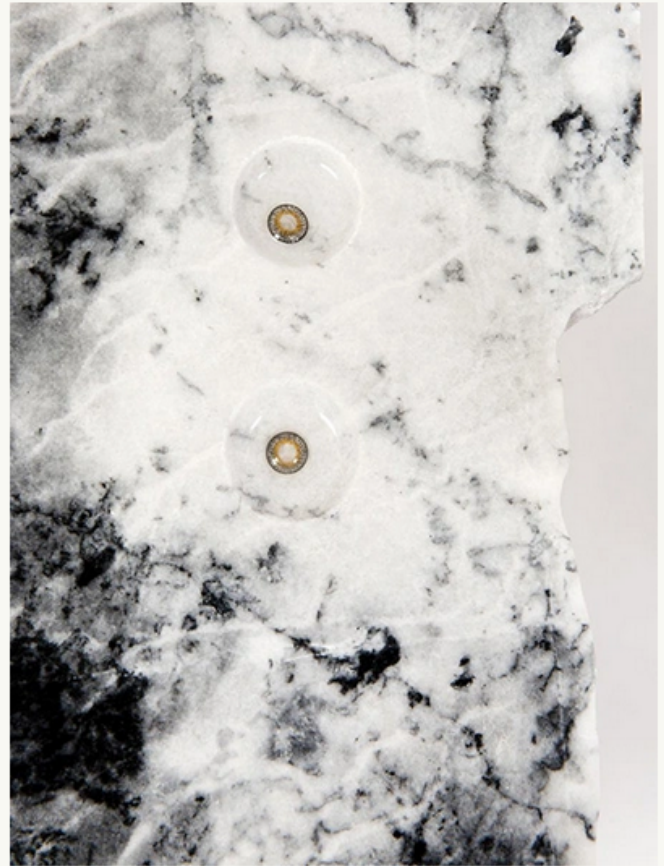
Tania Pérez Córdova: *We focus on a woman facing sideways*, 2013–16, bronze, Swarovski crystal drop earring, and a woman wearing the other earring.

The materials list for Tania Pérez Córdova's *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways* (2013/17) reads as follows: "Bronze, Swarovski Crystal drop earring, and a woman wearing the other earring." The work is a simple bent rod, charting a transit in space. A single earring bereft of its mate, hangs from the rod like a lure. It's meant, perhaps, to catch a thought, and hold it for a while, before throwing it back into the ocean of possibility.

There are a few things to notice here. First, observe how Córdova activates the conventional framing language of the work. The title and materials list do not describe the piece in the usual sense, but rather help to constitute it—an old Conceptual art trick, here applied to novel poetic effect. Córdova conscripts us, her viewers, into a wholly imagined, yet psychologically charged, act of looking. (Idea for an art history seminar: try pairing the work with Barbara Kruger's *Untitled [Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face]*, 1981, in which that phrase is emblazoned over a photo reproduction of a Classical female head, another instance of pronouns arrestingly deployed.) *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways*, which was part of her breakthrough exhibition, "Smoke, Nearby," at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2017, has a particularly personal association for the artist, having been inspired by her grandmother's comment that the loss of one earring rendered its match virtually worthless. But Córdova has used the same legerdemain in other works as well.

Even (2016) is a piece of beautifully figured marble, with a pair of tinted contact lenses resting on its upper surface. The initial impression is cartoonish—a sculpture with googly eyes. But the materials list, which includes “a person wearing color contact lenses in a different color than his/her natural eyes,” transforms the minimally anthropomorphized slab into someone’s alter ego. A more recent iteration of the theme, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By* (2019), consists of a shapely vase decorated with falling ginkgo leaves; the same pattern recurs in a printed dress worn by a woman who occasionally visits the exhibition. (Her image appears on the gallery’s checklist, another occupation of the exhibition’s textual apparatus.)

The “absent subject” is only one of Córdova’s oblique strategies. Over the past few years, she has created works incorporating “the glass of a window facing south”; cigarette ashes from a man who wants to quit smoking; and a friend’s SIM card, embedded in a porcelain block—a tombstone for incoming phone calls. Then there is her photograph showing an innocuous-looking lump of sandcast bronze, which is captioned: “A sculpture hidden within another sculpture.”



Tania Pérez Córdova: *Even*, 2016, marble, personalized color contact lenses, and a person wearing color contact lenses from a different color than their natural eyes.

COURTESY THE ARTIST

It’s a pity that Guy Debord already claimed the term “Situationist” back in the late 1950s, for that is the perfect way to describe Córdova’s methodology. Each of her works conjures a scenario, playfully dubious in its ontology, but rich in narrative implication. The effect is perfectly calibrated to our phantasmagoric era, when images (of art and everything else) skip away from us, so many stones across the water.

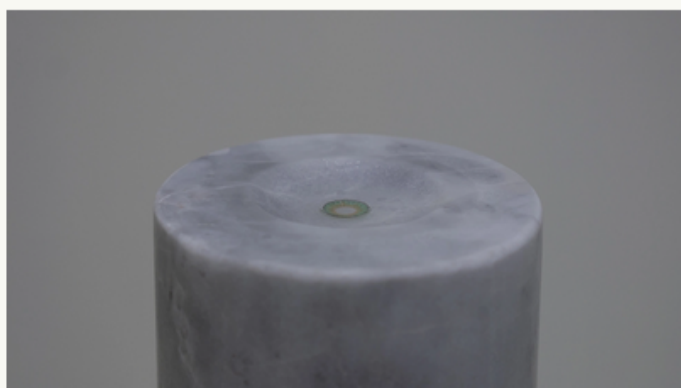
Yet, crucially, Córdova’s situations are firmly anchored in the real. When I interviewed her for this article, I explained that I was interested mainly in her approach to process and materials. She replied, “I wouldn’t know what else to talk about.” Córdova was born in Mexico City in 1979, and remains based there, though she studied at Goldsmiths at the University of London from 2002 to 2005. She also spends time in Italy, through family connections. This positions her within two unusually intact artisanal cultures. Despite the head-spinning philosophical conundrums she constructs, her collaboration with fabricators is the core of her practice.



Tania Pérez Córdova: *They say it's like a rock*, 2015, glass from a window facing south and Nag Champa incense.
COURTESY JOSÉ GARCÍA, MEXICO CITY

Navigating that world of craftsmen has often been a challenge for her, partly because of the gender dynamics involved—she’s sometimes the only woman present in the workshop, and also the one giving the orders—and partly because she typically begins without a clear intention: “I would not want to be the kind of artist who knows exactly she wants.” Córdova aims to put herself in the way of happenstance. She explains this through an anecdote about John Ashbery, who said that his poems often originated in a stray phrase overheard in public. Without knowing the context of the words, he’d write them down and later use them to trigger his own compositional process. Córdova enters the space of a craft or trade in just this spirit, opening herself to its creative possibilities, then waiting to be set off in some direction or other.

The ceramic object in *Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By* is one example. A particular casting mold caught her eye—a curvy vase in negative, like the well-known optical illusion involving two faces. “If I’d had to design the shape myself,” she says frankly, “I would have had a lot of difficulty. I rely on randomness.” When I spoke with Córdova in March, she was just beginning a project at an Italian glass atelier. She did not yet know where the collaboration might lead, but ideas were forming about breath, which gives life to blown glass as well as to human beings, but has taken on such terrible connotations in this past year of pandemic. It might take days or weeks for an artwork to coalesce around this initial notion.



Tania Pérez Córdova: *To wink, to cry*, 2020.
COURTESY [TINA KIM GALLERY](#), NEW YORK

This purposefully provisional approach is very different from the way most artists handle outsourced fabrication—which is to say, as a delivery system for plans already well in place. Córdova instead enters into the life and logic of the manufactory, riffing on its capabilities like a jazz musician stretching out a standard tune. Exemplary, in this regard, is her exploration of the casting process, which she loves for its accidental features—the spillover and flashing that are usually pared away from the finished product—and for its oscillation of positive and negative states of matter.

These dynamics were at the heart of her exhibition “Daylength of a room,” held at the Kunsthalle Basel in 2018. The project’s centerpiece was *Stuttering*, a group of everyday objects—an aluminum saucepan, a tin can, a length of copper pipe, a glass pitcher, silver cutlery—which Córdova had melted and recast into their original form. A helpful explanation was provided: “Imagine an ice cube, melted down, then poured back into the ice tray and refrozen. It finds itself a tiny bit smaller, containing a little less of itself, when remade into its own shape. Now imagine this process applied to other objects in the world.” The slight shrinkage and tormented surfaces of the items gave them a somewhat forlorn air, like wool clothing accidentally put through a tumble dryer. Yet together, they read as an elegy: Córdova had invented a way to visualize the act of forgetting, to materialize loss.

For an exhibition this past September, “Short Sight Box” at Tina Kim Gallery in New York, Córdova used casting to create a series that she calls “Contours,” made by pouring liquid bronze into rectilinear furrows in a bed of sand. When the metal cools, it is lifted out, revealing a gleaming outline, edged all over with solidified splatter. The rectilinear shapes inevitably recall the perimeters of paintings (a gentle joke about Jackson Pollock, maybe?), but also of windows and doors—more apertures into some alternate reality. At peak pandemic, the works took on an additional layer of meaning: visual echoes of all the looking-out we have all been doing lately, wary and watchful, sequestered in our homes.

Of course, the metal portals of the “Contours” do not actually go anywhere—except in imagination. If Córdova has just one abiding theme, this is it: the psychic overlay that we bring to the objects and spaces around us, rendering them the props and sets of our own private dramas. She catches that process of narrative scripting in the act; holds the evidence up to the light, considers it, moves on. During our conversation, Córdova described one of her habitual activities. She likes to trawl the informal street markets in Mexico City, looking at all the things for sale: jewelry, electronics, sneakers, whatever. Most of it is ersatz in one way or another. But for Córdova, the fakeness of what’s on offer—the counterfeit branded merchandise, all the materials imitating other, more expensive materials—is what makes the experience so interesting. In this shifty commercial terrain, value itself seems up for grabs. It’s a point of perpetual negotiation, resettled with each deal, no more, no less. Is that a little like the art she makes? Could be. “It’s almost like a promise,” she says. “OK, Let’s see.”



Tania Pérez Córdova: *Contour #2*, 2020, bronze poured into sand, 83 by 25 1/2 by 79 inches.

COURTESY TINA KIM GALLERY, NEW YORK



Tania Pérez Córdova, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By*, 2019, glazed ceramic, occasionally a woman wearing a dress, 35 3/8 x 19 3/4 x 19 3/4".

Tania Pérez Córdoba

TINA KIM GALLERY

“Woman’s head wearing jewellery, preserved as excavated . . .” So begins the description of item No. 122294—a grouping of skull fragments and precious objects, including a comb made of silver and a coronet with gold leaves, taken from the Royal Cemetery at Ur in southern Iraq and dated 2600 BCE—which sits in the permanent collection of London’s British Museum. Tania Pérez Córdoba, who referenced that object in a 2017 interview, makes sculpture that could be described with a similar rhetorical touch. In exhibitions she has had in Mexico City, Chicago, and Vienna, among other places, the artist has presented a body of work that imbues the mundane with subtle intimations of the marvelous.

In “Short Sight Box,” the artist’s first solo show in New York, Pérez Córdoba’s expansive sense of time manifested itself across a range of sculptures. In the first of two rooms were a pair of sand-cast architectural bronzes, *Contour #1* and *Contour #4*, both 2020, which played at being a door and a window, respectively, while a slab of dirt, *Sunning*, 2017, clung to another wall like a freshly painted canvas. Discarded reminders of daily life—cigarette ash, makeup—commingled with the mottled earth of *Sunning*. Yet this work of compacted soil, hardened under a hot sun and reoriented as a vertical panel, also evokes the mysteries surrounding the kinds of things humans have sealed—ostensibly, for eternity—inside earthen tombs like those at Ur. Large swaths of peach and teal eye shadow, loosely brushed on the surface of the piece—which called to mind midcentury abstraction—distill the tension between the immediate affairs of the cosmetic and the eternal concerns of the ancient.

Of all the pieces here, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By*, 2019, resonated most strongly with the forensic poetry of the British Museum object. The work is a three-foot-tall ceramic vessel bearing a delicate pattern of cascading light-orange blossoms against a dark ground. However, the image of the sculpture printed on the checklist also shows a woman—a visitor to the gallery—walking past it, wearing a dress with a floral design nearly identical to the sculpture’s. The moment of staged serendipity adds an eerie layer to *Portrait*, situating the ceramic’s staid silhouette against the blur of a human presence.

In the second room, *Panorama*, 2020, an earth-toned canvas painted with a spray-tanning gun, resonated with the arid body of *Sunning* and offered a subtle comment on the close connections between mark-making and subjectivity in the more conventional histories of abstraction. Three more *Contour* bronzes lined the walls, but an assembly of seven concave plaster casts sprawled across the floor at the center of the room: the exhibition’s namesake, *Short Sight Box*, 2020. Each cast was taken from a hole in the ground, and dirt still clung to the outsides of the works. Inside each hollow are found materials the artist relocated to the gallery: volcanic ash, rainwater in a plastic sandwich bag, a long chain of single peso coins, and a pair of pearls, one real, one fake.

Pérez Córdova calls the performative gestures that accompany the making of her artworks “events.” Take *To wink, to cry*, 2020, another sculpture in the front room, which featured a single colored contact lens suspended in a solution called “artificial tears” at the top of a short, slender pillar made of marble. The corresponding contact lens, one was told, was worn by someone who occasionally visited the gallery. The contact’s hue did not match the natural color of the wearer’s other eye, so spotting it should have been easy for anyone willing to pay close attention. Subtleties of this nature are typically made apparent in what artist and writer Joseph Grigely calls an exhibition’s “prosthetics”: the checklists, installation images, and other items that accompany the art objects on display. Pérez Córdova borrows and expands on the approaches of many Conceptual artists before her, but by orchestrating moments such as those evoked by *To wink, to cry* or *Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By*, she insists on the lyrical, anecdotal magic that can occur when possibility infuses the world around us.

—Brian T. Leahy

Tania Pérez Córdova: Sculptures as Events

In Conversation with Lauren Cornell, New York, 13 January 2021



Tania Pérez Córdova. Photo: Mauricio Guillén.

'I often redo works because I think I need to explore more possibilities of the material,' says Tania Pérez Córdova. The production process is central to her practice, with the materiality of each sculptural piece revealing infinite narrative possibilities.

Take We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways (2013–2017), most recently recreated for the artist's solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (Smoke, nearby, 15 April–20 August 2017). Bridging a corner in the exhibition space, a slender strip of bronze held a Swarovski crystal earring.

Nearby, a text read: 'A woman is missing her left earring. It is suspended on a brass ribbon in the gallery. Until it is reunited with its mate the sculpture exists in both places simultaneously.'



Tania Pérez Córdova, *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways* (2013–2017) (detail). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Ramiro Chaves.

By expanding the material presence of objects—signalling their simultaneous existence elsewhere, as in the case of this work—Pérez Córdova reflects on the mutability of time.

In the series 'Things in Pause' (2013) presented at the New Museum Triennial in 2015, the artist embedded the SIM card of a friend into a slab of porcelain. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, his calls were diverted to a temporary number. In later iterations, Pérez Córdova discovered that she was addressing other temporal dimensions as the work naturally entered the 'electronic ageing timeline', with the assigned space for the SIM card becoming too large.

Notions of absence and disappearance are as important to Pérez Córdova as materiality. Shown for her solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel in 2018 (Daylength of a room, 26 October 2018–6 January 2019), 'Objects cast into themselves' (2018), Pérez Córdova casts and re-casts objects so that they become frail versions of their former selves. The series began with a trumpet that she bought from a busker who passed by her house, which she then moulded and melted, bringing it further away from its original function.



Tania Pérez Córdova, from the series 'Things in Pause' (2013). Courtesy the artist.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (26 October 2018–6 January 2019). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

In her most recent exhibition at Tina Kim Gallery, *Short Sight Box* (12 September–14 November 2020), further transformations were visible in a series of contours created from windows and door frames that the artist had registered by memory. Volcanic ash, artificial tears, petrified earth, and contact lenses constituted other elements of the exhibition, which came together as a poetic 'mood board' inscribed in the past, present, and future.

Tania Pérez Córdova speaks about her latest exhibition in this conversation with Lauren Cornell, director of the graduate programme and chief curator at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and a former curator at the *New Museum*. Cornell included Pérez Córdova in the 2015 New Museum Triennial that she co-curated with artist Ryan Trecartin.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LCTania, you've described this show as a state of mind, and it feels like that: personal, psychological, a reflective step away from our time. I wrote down some of the different materials included: contact lenses, petrified earth, artificial tears, volcanic ash—such distinct elements cohered into a consistent mood. Could you speak about the state of mind that you created here?

TPCThere is a little anecdote I'd like to tell, just to keep in the back of your mind. I read one time that somebody asked John Ashbery how he writes poetry. He said that he didn't really have any specific methodology, but he gave this example of being in a public place and overhearing a conversation between some strangers, and then really liking a phrase, and taking that exact phrase and using it as the start of his poem.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (26 October 2018–6 January 2019). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

I like to think that he never knew what that conversation was about, and those strangers never knew that a phrase of theirs was used in a poem. I like to keep this little anecdote as a backdrop.

For some time, I've thought of sculptures as events. I continuously ask whether an object can have a situation inscribed not just in the past, but also in the present and future.

I started describing my work as a kind of mood, because my practice is not really research-based and doesn't really have a concrete story. What I'm interested in is creating an image through objects, through language, and through descriptions of objects. But there is nothing so specific.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (26 October 2018–6 January 2019). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

If I were to find a kind of narrative form, I would say it's more like poetry than a novel, because it's not about anything other than a mood or a state of mind. This is obviously completely intuitive and not a conscious process. My work is not biographical. I usually collect phrases that I read in the newspaper. If a phrase calls my mind, I just write it down. It's like a mood board. It's an attempt to grasp a general state of mind, but obviously it often ends up being about me. But I guess that's the nature of art, no?

We are all looping between the general and the personal. In trying to talk about the general, one may accidentally talk about the personal. And talking about the personal might be about the general.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *Sunning* (2017). Petrified earth dried in the sun, cigarette ash, make up. 99.1 x 69.9 x 2.9 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC This body of work seems, to me, to touch on climate change—does that ring true to you? There seem to be strong aspects of loss and mourning, as reflected not only by the artificial tears and ash but, more subtly, in the hushed, evacuated nature of all the sculptures on view.

TPC For some time, I've asked myself whether it's possible to address issues that matter to me in my works, especially when the work is so abstract by nature.

Some time ago, while watching an interview with Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė, and Lina Lapelytė, the artists of the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale, I realised that what fascinated me most about their brilliant piece was how they managed to talk about very concrete, scientific, and extremely urgent issues by constructing an abstract image.

One of them was talking about how scientists are recovering a dying coral reef with 3D printers. Even fascinating research like this was used to build a mood. To me, this felt like opening the possibility of addressing this urgent subject from a purely domestic point of view.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

I titled *Iron Rain* (2020) after reading an article on the history of the climate throughout different ages of the earth and weather phenomena in other planets. In these hypothetical scenarios, there was a description of rainfall in the form of liquified metal—an image for an unreachable and uninhabitable imagined future.

I would not say that the show is about climate change specifically—I guess it's just a mood that reflects this situation and how it is echoed in surrounding information; in anxiety.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *Iron Rain* (2020). Graphite crucible, zinc. 28 x 28 x 27 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC In previous works, you've made new objects out of existing materials, such as coins, sometimes regenerating them until they disappear. But there's a different process in this body of work—could you speak about it?

TPC The first time I made these works was for a group exhibition in New York at Galerie Martin Janda, curated by Magalí Arriola (*A Mouse Drowned in a Honey Pot*, 10 March–11 August 2014).

The show was based around a non-existent house that had a personal relation to Magalí. I remember I was given some images of this house, and these images were very personal. The photos were of a children's party and you could see bits of the house in background.



Tania Pérez Córdova, 'Objects cast into themselves' (2018). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

I decided to recreate some of these contours in approximation to what these places could have been. Then I did this work a few more times. When I was planning the show for Tina Kim Gallery, I wanted to do a larger series, staging an image of domesticity that was in between being inside and outside.

The first one I did was this door, which was the memory of the entrance door of my personal home. Then a whole other series unfolded. When the confinement hit, these works had just been finished, then I thought of something else.



Tania Pérez Córdova, Contour #3 (2020). Bronze poured into sand. 178 x 130 x 2 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

I don't know if you had the same experience, but in the most extreme part of the confinement, my window view became a still image.

I remember I was once doing a residency in Scotland, and I got really claustrophobic from seeing this one mountain through the window. It was very beautiful, but I felt I couldn't escape from it.

I thought of these contours, which became the outline of an image from which you're unable to escape. This is just a thought I had when I was looking at a contour of my window view at home, not being able to go out, just looking at this place from a distance.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery.

LCContours, yes. Here, it feels like we see contours of spaces—designations of inside and outside—within what feels like an open plane. Within a year of lockdowns, the show feels boundless to me.

I want to ask you about technique. In your previous works, there was a tendency to copy things, to renew them, or to follow their half-lives into disappearance.

Here, it feels more like you're focused on techniques of mirroring, and doubling. Is that correct?

TPCI thought a lot about the idea of doubling. The first thing that came to my mind was this idea that when a writer is stuck, they should just write something again and it will never happen in the same way.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery.

I've been working with this translator called Kate Briggs—she wrote this amazing book called *This Little Art*, which considers translation as a methodology. If you translate something, it will never be the same as the original expression. Often in my work, there's also the idea of the fake and the real, which is another translation, in a way—from the original to the synthetic, for example. I'm interested in doubling, what it means culturally, and the value that we assign to these things culturally.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *Panorama* (2020). Professional airbrush sunless spray tan on canvas. 210 x 116 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LCCan I ask about your ongoing attachment to the contact lens?

TPCYes. The first time I used a contact lens, I was thinking of this idea of sculpture as being half of an event—a wearable object that could exist in two different locations.

I think that there's something interesting about the idea of the contact lens as a synthetic object that refers to the idea of seeing. I often reuse materials and rethink them in different situations.

I love to think that the work is not just about the object, but about thinking of someone or being forced to see someone, which is such a strange moment. When you lock eyes with a stranger, it's so uncomfortable and so unusual. The work almost creates that interaction with the people coming into this space.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *To wink, to cry* (2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LCWhen we worked together on the New Museum Triennial in 2015, we borrowed a contact lens, a SIM card, and an earring for the three different sculptures. It was quite challenging to secure them, to actually borrow them for a short time.

You mentioned that you think about your sculptures as events that pause some action happening outside of the gallery. I was struck by the semblance of a deeper pause in this show. You seem to be looking at a more tectonic shift, even though you have some short-term borrowed objects in the show. Could you speak about time as a material or a subject in this body of work?

TPCI think what I was trying to show is that although an object might look uneventful, you can still try to think of it within the passage of time. I guess that's what happens in everyday life. You can look at any object, and you can think about what is going to happen to it in ten years, almost through the way it exists—through its past and future.



Tania Pérez Córdova, 'Objects cast into themselves' (2018). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

This body of work is more a way of understanding a still image as an object within a timeline. I started casting holes while I was doing a series of high reliefs in earth, a series I called 'Handhold' (2016). I was digging holes to gather the earth I needed and I felt the need to address the leftover as well.

I wanted to create this idea of a landscape of situations. That's why I described elements inside the holes as situations. Each of these holes could be thought of as propositions for something.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *Sincere / Non-sincere* (2018). Fake gold necklace, obsidian, water. 26 × 44 × 13 cm. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

LCSomething that really strikes me about your work is that the final sculptures are often described as delicate, even kind of slight. And, I know they're quite fragile, having installed them, yet there's a monumental effort that goes into making and procuring materials for them. How long did it take you to make some of these? What was the process?

TPCI feel the amateur part of the process of making the works is important. Most of the works have some accidental shape or development. It's very difficult for me to have something made without me being there, because it's so much about the incidental nature of arriving to things.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

The contours were actually quite a long process. First we traced the casting and made a drawing, as you would do in the sand if you were at the beach, then we poured liquid metal, which travelled across the line. The most time-consuming bit was the pressing of the earth and preparing it for the drawing.

I often work with specialised workshops and part of the process for me has to do with renegotiating the terms of production. I prefer to make agreements in terms of time rather than results because often, what would usually be considered a mistake ends up being the object that works best for me.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *To wink, to cry* (2020). Marble, copper cast, artificial tears, cosmetic contact lens, a person wearing one contact lens of a colour different to her/his eyes occasionally. 81.3 x 12.4 x 12.4 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LCThe audience is inquiring about value. How do you think about value in relation to your materials?

TPCSome time ago, I bought a one-peso Mexican coin at a flea market. I paid one euro for it. It's a small gesture, but it's fascinating to me that over time,

the symbolic value of the coin had overtaken its economic value. One euro is usually about 22 to 24 pesos.

This as a process that interests me. In that specific anecdote, it's also interesting to think that the exchange rate of the story is impossible: one euro for one peso.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

I think that the coins and the pearls and this idea of value are interesting, because it reflects how we assign meaning to things in culture. They are objects that interest me because they change and shift with time. Fake objects interest me, exactly because of how we assign value.

I had the idea that the chain in *Short Sight Box – Hole A* (2020) would resemble the movement of a falling coin. It was thinking of both the image of a coin dropped for luck, or the visual idea of a falling economy.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *Portrait of a Woman Passing By* (2019). Glazed ceramic, woman wearing a dress. 90 x 50 cm. Exhibition view: Short Sight Box, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

I started working with coins while I was working with a foundry that produces little statues for a well-known Mexican film award. When I saw them casting the pieces, I realised they were adding a lot of beer cans to the mixture to economise the bronze usage. These little things—learning how something works—are fascinating to me.

Obviously, the culture we live in is a counterfeit culture. I buy volcanic ash and I buy a necklace, they tell me it's real, but in Mexico you never know—it could be fake. In a way, I don't really care if they cheated me or not. I just wanted to get in situations where there is this tension, and I bring this uncertainty to the work.

When I started producing objects, I found that the objects were not sufficient as objects. I could not decide on making something just because it had a certain aesthetic. I needed more from it to be exciting to me.



Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

In a way it's the narrative that excites me. The narrative that I could either inscribe or uncover. That's why I think of things as embedded in a timeline, as it allows for them to be expanded further.

Maybe it's a way to think of the present as moving or attempt to put it in motion. Making objects feels a lot like fighting the idea that what you're making needs to be preserved, like a moment frozen in time.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *To wink, to cry* (2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LCCould you talk about the conservation of these objects? In a way, the process of maintaining them involves marking time, too—for example, in having to replace the contact lens liquid when it evaporates.

TPCYes, it's also something that happens without me planning it. One day, Katherine [Lauricella] called me to say the pot in *To wink, to cry* (2020) was rusting and I got so excited. I didn't think these artificial tears would make it change so fast, and it felt to me that this transformation was necessarily part of the work.

It's also a way to make the works more active—to have things happening rather than things just being.

Tania Pérez Córdova: Girl with the Other Earring

"I never felt the need for my works to look Mexican." Born in 1979, Tania Pérez Córdova belongs to a new generation of artists in Mexico who see themselves as distinct from the celebrated 1990s group of conceptualists whose art had a more overt sociopolitical dimension. Words by Elizabeth Fullerton



Chasing, Pausing, Waiting, 2014. Blusher, bird droppings, cigarette ash (from a smoker wanting to quit), black marble

I have trouble reaching Mexican sculptor Tania Pérez Córdova as her phone isn't updating with new emails. It's ironic because this glitch could almost have been (but wasn't) a function of a sculpture from her *Things in Pause* series, which interrupt the flow of people's existence. Her 2013 work *Call Forwarding*, for instance, comprised a porcelain slab embedded with a SIM card; while the piece was exhibited, the owner of the card had to arrange for calls to be forwarded to a new card. Pérez Córdova layers different technologies, time periods and materials—gunpowder, cigarette ash, makeup, foam, bronze poured into sand, jewellery—to present poetic snapshots of a narrative that has already happened or might yet take place. Her elegant sculptures are questions hanging in the air, a feeling unarticulated.

In her intimate creations, vestiges of human presence can be discerned as objects are given new purposes; a medallion of melted beer cans trapped between reused window glass, a

Elizabeth Fullerton: Tania Pérez Córdova: Girl with the Other Earring

<https://elephant.art/tania-perez-cordova-girl-earring/> (07.02.2019)

bronze cast of someone's pocket, a coloured contact lens on marble. She often activates her sculptures through a playfully performative element such as having a person in the gallery wear the partner contact lens or earring to one in a sculpture. Driven by a fascination with materiality, her recent body of work for her solo show at Kunsthalle Basel last October explored the slippage between original and copy, juxtaposing everyday items like a chain-link fence and a copper saucepan with their hand-cast replicas.



We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways, 2013–17. brass, borrowed earring, woman wearing a single earring

Pérez Córdova studied at the Mexican art school Esmeralda and then at Goldsmiths in London. Since then her star has steadily risen. She took part in the 2015 New Museum Triennial in New York, had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in 2017 and will take part in the Aichi Triennale, Japan, this year. We finally caught up in a cafe in the leafy Condesa district and discussed her practice, the Basel show and gender equality in notoriously macho Mexico.

Time seems to be an intrinsic element of your work.

I like to think of sculptures as events, as a thing that happens either by the way something is made or by the way it exists when displayed. So this always has a relationship with a

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temporality, a beginning and an end, a narrative. For my Things in Pause series I thought I would make sculptures that by existing would make a pause elsewhere. The most obvious example was the SIM card. I would borrow someone's telephone, the phone would be suspended for the show and the SIM card would later be returned. I had the idea that by seeing these sculptures you would almost imagine a cinematic image of another situation that has stopped for this one to exist. But then technology changed so fast and the first sculptures had these big SIM cards, so that sculpture feels like it aged really quickly and was implying other things, like that the person who lent this card could not afford the latest phone.



Handhold 3, 2016, earth, grass, varnish, bronze cast in someone's pocket

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Your sculptures feel like artefacts of our age, offering fragmentary clues to future civilizations about our lives and rituals, such as smoking or wearing contact lenses.

As you say this I'm thinking it's almost as if the objects in that series were left over from a human action, like the remains of a human presence.

It's funny because some time ago I found out there's this process called "accelerated ageing" and companies test different materials to see how they will age in the future. They have machines that really are like time machines that recreate weather conditions. I aged this black fabric for my piece *How to Use Reversed Psychology with Pictures* (2012/13) and it's like a fast-forwarded object. We are in this present time but this object is now effectively in the future.

You seem to personify objects or give them some agency.

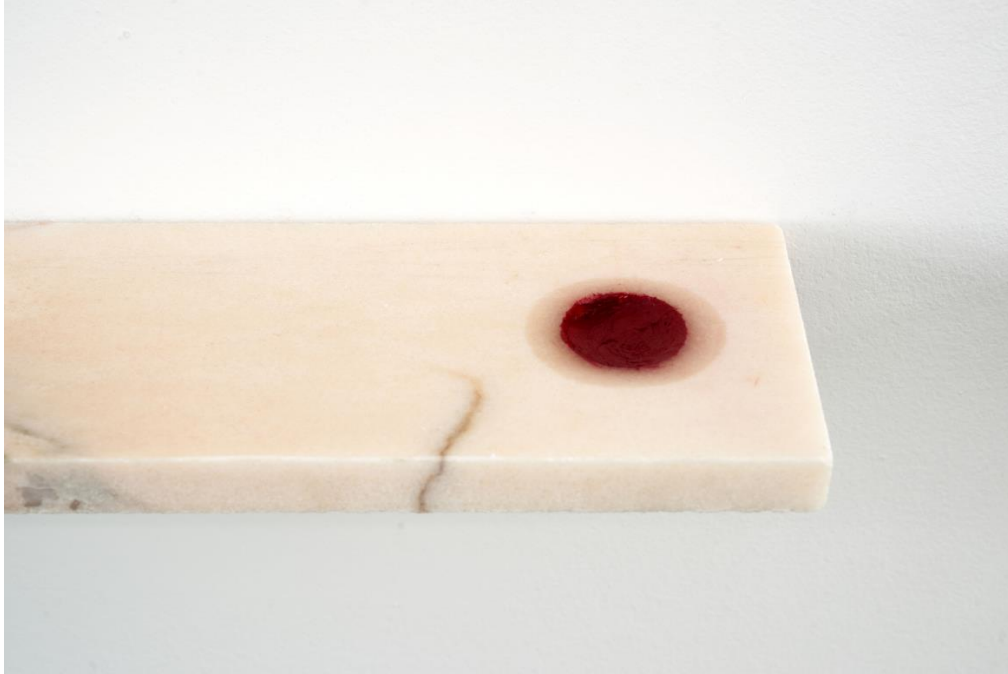
I always liked to think that objects were more than objects, they also included a person or an action or a movement. They're there like an active object to set up an event or they're the memory of one. Maybe it's a nostalgia for it to be something else than a sculpture, and at the same time I consider myself very much a sculptor.

How important is language in your work? In contrast with the minimal aesthetic of the sculptures, your captions include enormous detail such as "glass from a window facing south", while titles sometimes feel like clauses.

I think a lot about the way things are described. For instance, with my caption "bronze, Swarovski crystal drop earring, and a woman wearing the other earring", it's as if the description of the materials goes beyond materiality to the condition of something. With the title of that work *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways*, I was reading a film script and that was a note describing things the camera would focus on. I liked the idea that while seeing the sculpture you'd think of the woman wearing the other earring rather than just seeing the sculpture.

Elizabeth Fullerton: Tania Pérez Córdova: Girl with the Other Earring

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Something Separated by Commas, 2014. Marble, green contact lens, red lipstick

Do your works start with the idea?

I feel like there's two things happening at the same time. First, I'm truly just interested in the material or the way something is made. I'm physically involved in the making of all my works and that's important to me. And secondly, I usually have this completely abstract idea of what I would like, almost like a feeling, an echo of a situation. I never sketch because I never have an idea formally of how I would like it to look and then fight for it. The final shape of things is always quite accidental on purpose. It's as if I need to find a point of view to describe something and then I can call it a work.

Your sculptures have an intimacy that is perhaps absent from the work of the previous generation.

I would not like my work to be seen as biographical but I think it's to do with a more personal process. I was trying to honestly think what feels more like my personal reality in terms of materials or references. I never felt the need for my works to look Mexican because the artists I'm interested in aren't representations of cultures or movements, it's their individuality that interests me.

Elizabeth Fullerton: Tania Pérez Córdova: Girl with the Other Earring

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Daylength of a room, installation view, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel

How is it being a female artist here?

In some way you could say it's a privilege because we're not that many. But culturally Mexico is very behind in terms of gender equality. Really, really behind. There's not a lot of politics of gender equality in jobs or even the way people are educated. The art world here is completely run by men. There's a handful of women in power and I'm not sure how committed to the cause they are, or if they're enablers of dynamics of male power. It's always uncomfortable to bring it into the conversation, with men and women.

Your Kunsthalle Basel show *Daylength of a Room* returned to the theme of time, featuring an installation of a plant with a degenerative disease and sculptures made of lava and of baked bread. Why did you choose that title and what exactly is a "daylength"?

It's a word used in biology to talk about Circadian rhythms of plants and animals. The idea is that a single day has different lengths for different living beings and I wanted to give each individual sculpture a unique presence in time. For example, a work in the show called *Woman Next to a Still-Life* was inspired by encountering a note in the Egyptian Museum of Turin describing how sculptures and sphinx were reused by subsequent dynasties, who

Elizabeth Fullerton: Tania Pérez Córdova: *Girl with the Other Earring*

<https://elephant.art/tania-perez-cordova-girl-earring/> (07.02.2019)

slightly altered the facial expressions of the carvings when they ruled.

I love the idea of a stone as transformative and also to think that it points toward its own future rather than its past. The form is rather unstable like other pieces in the show, as if it's about their potential change, not their present form.

Elizabeth Fullerton: Tania Pérez Córdova: Girl with the Other Earring

<https://elephant.art/tania-perez-cordova-girl-earring/> (07.02.2019)

Tania Pérez Córdova at Kunsthalle Basel

January 2, 2019



Artist: Tania Pérez Córdova

Exhibition title: Daylength of a room

Venue: Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland

Date: October 26, 2018 – January 6, 2019

Photography: all images copyright and courtesy of the artist and ©Kunsthalle Basel

Imagine an ice cube, melted down, then poured back into the ice tray and refrozen. It finds itself a tiny bit smaller, containing a little less of itself, when remade into its own shape. Now imagine this process applied to other objects in the world, as Tania Pérez Córdova does. She makes a mold of a thing, melts it down, and then casts it as a copy made from the molten material of the thing itself. This curious procedure is central to the Mexi-can artist's first institutional solo exhibition in Europe.

In preparation for the show, Córdova collected an array of prosaic things—including a copper sauce-pan, a glass pitcher, a metal chain-link fence, silver cutlery—some her own, some found, and subjected them to her copy-of-the-thing-made-from-the-thing-itself process. Hung on a wall or over a door or placed on carpet in the center of a room, her un-deniably ungainly results are rough, pock-marked, and somehow incomplete even though the visitor's eye can easily identify their initial forms. They are built up from accretions of their original matter, with occasional material gaps, made obvious by the stains of lipstick or herbal protein powder—carefully chosen stuff that has seemingly seeped out of her various once-functioning receptacles.

In another work, *Paisaje* (landscape), a bar of soap or a bottle cap is now wedged in a replica fence's new gaps, making these even more obvious, pointed. For all her objects' insistent materiality, what we are truly seeing, you might say, is the lacuna between original and copy, between first generation and second, between mass-produced readymade and handmade replica. Córdova has literally made loss and put it on display.

The artist relishes this process of making—or perhaps better put, unmaking. “In theory,” she suggests, “if I would continue the cycle indefinitely, at some point it will result in the things' disappearance.” For instance, that ice cube would completely dissipate in the process of trying to (re) become itself. In the exhibition, the artist doesn't go so far as to make her objects disappear, but in a material as much as a metaphorical sense, they arguably negotiate loss and regeneration, authenticity and imitation.

The mutation or deceptiveness of a thing—how its material integrity shifts, how it can cosmetically enhance something (or someone), or simply pretend to be something it's not—manifests in various guises in Córdova's elegantly gnomic show. A piece of obsidian (molten volcanic sludge cooled to become glasslike) with a polished depression holds a cheap, imitation-gold chain (*Sincere / Non-sincere*). The luxurious-looking natural stone surface jars with the cheapness of a chain that is masquerading as something it isn't. Nearby, more than nine meters of the same sort of necklaces purchased by the artist at a Mexico City market are strung together and suspended from a high metal bar (People keeping their belongings, others throwing theirs away).

All but one were bought at the price of costume jewelry; a single chain among them was promised to be real gold, and sold to the artist as such, although it looks exactly like the others. Visitors will be unable to distinguish them, but neither can the artist, who supposes she'll have to place her faith in the seller's version of the truth.

A shelf-like artwork (OOOOO) made of variegated thin slabs of broken marble and plaster lines the wall (notice, again, how fine materials meet their economically inferior stand-ins). Circular recesses carved into them hold colored contact lenses, products par excellence of aspirational cosmetic transformation. Exhibition visitors will encounter enlisted staff members who have temporarily transformed the color of one eye with the other half of the contact lens pair, activating the work and extending it beyond the exhibition space proper. Sculpture, Córdova insists, can be at once material and performative and a negotiation.

"Above all," a critic of her work once wrote, "Córdova is concerned with time." This exhibition exemplifies that concern, with its title's use of "daylength" suggesting as much. The English term is borrowed from science, proposing that the notion of a single "day" (24 hours for humans, perhaps only 6 hours for a certain plant) might be measured according to different rules, depending on who—or what—you are talking about. For her exhibition, the artist creates works that negotiate different temporalities. They remind us that although the artwork is typically thought of as something forever-fixed once completed, hers might just operate according to another rhythm.

While conceiving the show, Córdova was struck by a story she heard: that in the Ramesside period in ancient Egypt, existing Sphinx statues were recycled by newly arrived pharaohs, who would slightly alter their facial features to conform to new tastes and changing political ideology. Inspired by this, she created a new sculpture in relief of a mouth (Woman next to a still-life), carved from pumice and hung high on a wall, like a clock in a train station. Its existence in its current form will last as long as the Kunsthalle Basel exhibition is on view. Upon each subsequent showing, she will alter the shape of the mouth, adding teeth or a grin in its next incarnations. Continuously evolving, it defies being fixed as it marks passing time.

Along another wall are three sets of pumice sculptures (3 figures thinking; two standing, one seated), each forming the two halves of a vaguely shaped head (think Constantin Brâncuși's 1910 Sleeping Muse). Each one sandwiches specially made flat loaves of bread, baked so thoroughly that they are hardened, petrified. Yet another loaf, presented in a back room, has cigarettes baked into it so that the heat of the oven literally "smoked" the cigarettes while encrusting them into the loaf (Strike). These add to the wildly eclectic material universe that populates the artist's exhibition.

In the piece poetically called Architect holding a building, Córdova's use of volcanic ash (mixed with gunpowder and cosmetics) to paint walls reminds us that there are active volcanos not far from her hometown, acting as an ever-ready threat, a ticking time bomb. Time is manifest in yet another register in her placement of a plant with so-called shot hole disease at the entrance to her exhibition. Plants with this fungal disease, as the name suggests, have what look like bullet holes in their leaves, and without treatment will slowly, entirely disintegrate. Like the objects in the exhibition that hint at their own dissolution, time here acts as a sculptural agent.

In a moment when no one seems to have time for anything, Tania Pérez Córdova won't let us forget the time things take: for lava to turn to glassy stone, for a cigarette to burn, for a loaf to bake, for hair to grow impossibly long, for cheap metal to reveal itself as imitation gold thanks to humidity and oxidation. These different temporalities enrich the daylength of this room.



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, Daylength of a room, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo : Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, Daylength of a room, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo : Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, Daylength of a room, view on, Woman next to a still-life, 2018, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, Daylength of a room, view on, 3 figures thinking; two standing, one seated, 2018, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, Daylength of a room, view on, Sincere / Non-sincere, 2018, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, *Daylength of a room*, view on, *Figure standing next to a fountain*, 2018, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, *Daylength of a room*, view on Stuttering, 2018 (detail), Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, Daylength of a room, view on, Strike, 2018, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel



Tania Pérez Córdova, installation view, Daylength of a room, Kunsthalle Basel, 2018. Photo: Philipp Hänger / Kunsthalle Basel

■ Exhibitions

◆ Basel, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland, Tania Pérez Córdova

◀ Hak Vogrin at SHRINE and Sargent's Daughters

▶ Tracy Molis at Kai Matsumiya

Murakami and Perez Cordova form an unexpected symmetry at the MCA



"Tania Perez Cordova: Smoke, nearby," a exhibition of the Mexican sculptor's work, is at the Museum of Contemporary Art through Aug. 20. (Nathan Keay photo)

Taken together, two solo exhibitions currently on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art demand this odd question. The shows are "The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg," a blockbuster retrospective by the Japanese superstar Takashi Murakami, and "Smoke, nearby," the first major presentation by Tania Perez Cordova, a Mexican sculptor little known in the United States. I doubt that these two artists have ever been exhibited in the same building, and my guess is that they will not be again. Their work has nothing in common, save providing the perfect and necessary antidote for one another.

Begin with Murakami, whose exhibition demands immense fortitude of viewers. It's no small feat to withstand thousands of hallucinogenic fungi, psychotic mice, smiling daisies, vomiting giants, rainbow skulls, nightmarish deities, technicolor tsunamis, and a hip-hop bear, all of it slickly fabricated at mammoth scale. We're talking a 59-foot-long painting of a frothing dragon, a 14-foot-high sculpture of a violent blue demon, three-dimensional candy-colored mushrooms dotted with green eyes, and mural-size canvases crowded with dozens of hideously distorted spiritual figures, each draped in layers of clashing fabrics. Everything is so loud and so bold as to be unmissable, except by dint of being overwhelmed by everything else.

Leave time for Perez Cordova, because of the quiet relief provided by her witty sculptures. Modest combinations of clay and bank cards, makeup and marble, glass and cheap foam, they require intimate completion by attentive visitors, and sometimes by unnamed people

Lori Waxman: Murakami and Perez Cordova form an unexpected symmetry at the MCA

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-0720-mca-murakami-review-20170720-column.html> (07.12.2018)

elsewhere in Chicago. A single crystal drop earring dangles from a brass rod; somewhere a woman wears its matching other. A bent and stained piece of glass rests on the floor; above it gapes a hole in the ceiling fixture. Atop a waist-high marble column rests a watery divot; in it floats a single colored contact lens, barely visible, its pair who knows where. Everything is so subtle as to be easy to miss, but that just encourages harder looking.

For three decades, Murakami has acted like a giant computer into which choice aspects of Japanese and Western culture and history have been fed, amalgamated, and churned back out. He has incorporated the 18th-century painting style of ukiyo-e and the traditional technique of Nihonga, legendary figures from Buddhism and folk tales, the cartoony characters of anime and manga, the disasters of Hiroshima and Fukushima. He's designed luxury handbags for Louis Vuitton, sneakers for Vans, and an album cover for Kanye West. The conscience of Anselm Kiefer, the vanguard showmanship of Yves Klein, the commercial brazenness of Andy Warhol all figure as prominent artistic influences from early on. To complete, reinsert bits and pieces of Murakami's own past work and run it all through Kaikai Kiki Ltd., the company he founded in the 1990s on the outskirts of Tokyo and which today employs some 100 young artisans to produce his artwork, in addition to running galleries and a biannual art fair, and managing the careers of young artists.

Murakami cannily summarizes the overarching effect of his oeuvre in a video that plays near the entrance to his exhibition. "What is the greatest art piece?" he asks. His answer, "emptiness," betrays a discomfiting knowingness about the excess and superficiality of contemporary life, and a willingness to deliver it with maximum force.

Perez Cordova's exhibition, meanwhile, actually looks empty, or at least as if the gallery was being deinstalled. Wood partitions with unpainted backing stand askew or lean against a wall; a dozen damaged panes of glass fill a corner; rough objects rest atop protective mats. Colors range from dull to neutral, except for a rectangle of cracked pink foam and a glass of fluorescent yellow water that could have been accidentally left behind by a preparator who needed somewhere to put an uncapped highlighter pen.

To experience any of this as art requires attentiveness to situations that do not ask for it, the cleverness to look for clues in sometimes-hidden captions, and the willingness to see beyond what's strictly visible in the gallery. It's useful to believe what the artist claims of her materials and then some: that a man's flexed bicep really did leave that impression in the pink foam; that those silvery concave shapes are really the result of pouring molten aluminum into a hole in a hill; that the debit card pressed into the center of that clay bowl really links to a unique Banamex account; that somewhere in Chicago there really are people wearing garments and contact lenses that match those here. Time is vital, too, more than the average of 15 to 30 seconds that most people spend looking at an artwork, according to museum researchers. Perez Cordova offers direct assistance on this one: a ceiling fan hung from a bracket of 2-by-4s spins at a rate of 111 seconds per rotation, the minimum amount of time the artist believes a patron needs for each view. Move too fast, and

Lori Waxman: Murakami and Perez Cordova form an unexpected symmetry at the MCA

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-0720-mca-murakami-review-20170720-column.html> (07.12.2018)

"Metronome" itself remains imperceptible.

If Murakami's studio functions like a movie production company, with his exhibition displaying its highly finished creations, Perez Cordova's show is a film set, where almost everything has already taken place. The former, like all blockbusters, can't keep from giving us the entertainment we think we want. The latter helps us transcend it.

"Tania Perez Cordova: Smoke, nearby" and "Takashi Murakami: The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg" run through Aug. 20 and Sept. 24 respectively at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 220 E. Chicago Ave., 312-280-2660, www.mcachicago.org.

Lori Waxman: Murakami and Perez Cordova form an unexpected symmetry at the MCA
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-0720-mca-murakami-review-20170720-column.html> (07.12.2018)

February 24, 2017 – Tania Pérez Córdova is a visual artist based in Mexico City. Her sculptures are "devices to create pause," as their contemplation reveals past and present possible events. Her upcoming solo show "Smoke, Nearby" at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art opens April 2017.



As told to Laurel Schwulst, 1579 words.

Tags: Art, Process, Education.

Interview: Tania Pérez Córdova

On titles, obstructions, in-betweens, layers, voids, chance, and not knowing

In one of your work's captions, you specified the glass material was specifically from "a window facing south." How important is that kind of detail?

The glass pieces were all from the same place, an old studio of mine. When I named them, I thought it was important to mention whether they were the north windows or the south windows. It was a suggestion of how they really existed when they were windows.

When I showed the glass pieces, many people asked me, "So what's happening to your studio now that it doesn't have windows? Is rain coming in?" The mention of orientation helped form this image of another place and another time.

In titling my work, I decided that whenever there's something happening, like an event or an activity, I include it as part of the materials. It was important for me to be able to insert it in the formalities of how work is described, which is with these captions. Captions are just how artworks are traditionally described. I prefer using captions to creating a new explanation outside that. I usually just list abstract situations as part of the materials. So for example, the earrings piece is made with bronze just as much as with a woman wearing an earring.



They say it's like a rock, 2015. Glass from a window facing south and Nag Champa incense. 21 × 29 × 24 cm.

I read about your piece in which you asked a musician if you could borrow two of her piano keys for your piece. Is it difficult to negotiate the borrowing for your work?

Usually it is quite easy. My work usually has a link to some kind of real narrative, so it's not an artifice. It is important for me that it's real. It truly is a borrowed piano key, even if it would be very simple to just stage it.

I made a series of sculptures at that time I thought of as "devices to create pause". Looking at them would not only be looking at them as sculptures, but thinking of the other situations they imply. In the case of the piano, I remember asking the owner of the piano, "Just keep playing your repertoire without those two keys." I like the narrative that there would be a series of songs altered because of the missing keys.

I also had a work that included one earring and a SIM card. This obstruction would only happen during the show. Once the show was over, everything would go back to normal: the woman would wear both earrings again and the phone would work again.

You have a upcoming show at Chicago's MCA. How has preparing for that show been unique to other shows?

I was invited to show a series of my works, and I proposed that I'd make "in-betweens". So the idea is to remake old works so that the new works would be transitions between the old works.

Now that I'm talking to you, I suppose I never thought this before, but I realized this has a lot to do with my partner, Francesco. Francesco was translating this Italian poet who had never been translated. While he was translating, he thought, "I'm just going to write in between the lines because this poem is so beautiful." So he's just been adding lines to a translation. It's strange because it's not fully his own poem, but it's not fully like the original. So it really is like an in-between, and that's what's good about it.

This reminds me of my friend's story. Her dad has an oil company in the United States. He said that one of their tactics is future speculation. So, they'll imagine a terrible oil spill. Then, they'll make a series of in-between plans, given where they are at the present moment, to make sure that oil spill won't happen.

Ah, so like reverse thinking. Amazing. Yeah, I am working in a way similar to the oil company. It's almost as if you've set a beginning and an end point, and then you just need to figure out what the logic in-between is. It's a new way for me to work and to be excited, since at the beginning I was not that keen on showing old work. It's a good way to enjoy thinking about them again.

How important is it to you that people who buy your work understand it?

I hope they do, but I always have this doubt. I'm sure some work has been sold to people who really understand. But I decided that you don't need to know things immediately. Maybe that comes with time.

I'm also completely fine if people look at the works just like objects. I've accepted that they have two dimensions and two lives, and it depends how people want to engage. Different people engage differently.

Some people can't be bothered to know more than what they see. That's fair enough. It's up to you how much you'd like to dig.

It's also very important for me to not become cryptic on purpose. I don't want the work to be about decoding a hidden knowledge. I'm more interested in creating a fragment. The void is as important as the work. I think about how the part that's there and the part that's not there interact.

Do you write a lot for your practice?

No. I mean, I write titles. But no, I don't really write, write, write, write. I find it extremely painful. I would love to, but I just find it so painful. I collect more. I collect language or phrases that I like, or words, even if I'm not really sure why.

There's a really beautiful anecdote I like to think about from this John Ashbery interview in *The Paris Review*, and somebody asks him, "What gets you started when writing a poem?" Then he tells this story of being in a public place and overhearing a phrase by someone nearby, out of context. He likes the phrase and uses it as the finishing line for his poem—it was exactly what he was looking for. I like that he didn't even know what their conversation was about, and that they will never know their phrase was used for a famous poem.

You went to school in London, right?

I went to Goldsmiths, but I hated it. It took me a very long time to recover. I mean, I went there wanting to do work, but I came out being completely blocked. I remember thinking you go there to make more work, not to make less work, so give me back my money.

I don't know if it works like this for everybody, but making work is not necessarily like hammering, and not really even switching off your brain. Part needs to happen somehow intuitively. You cannot have complete control.

I think that Goldsmiths program is very good, but it's very bloated. It's very "fake intellectual," very close to the critical studies department. It's almost like they are commissioning meaning or something.

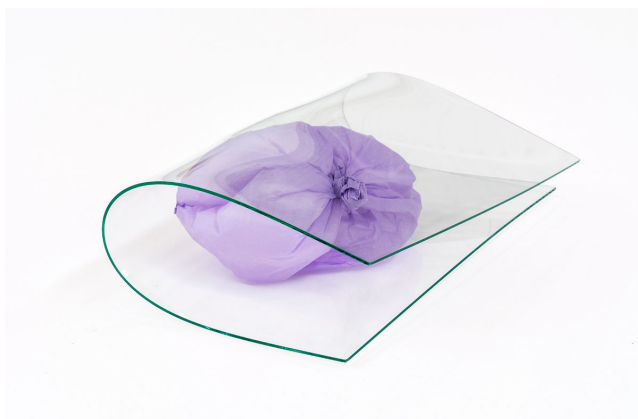
When I work, I tell myself, "Don't have specific plans." I'm always really careful when I talk about my work to not say what it means because one should not know what it means. This became fundamental for me. I should never ever know what it means or what it does. I should just know where it comes from. This is what took me a long time to understand, but it's what I needed to make work.

I remember this quote by the filmmaker Ingmar Bergman that said something like, "Intuition is like throwing a spear into the darkness, and intellect is about going to find it afterwards."

That's a good process.

I've been asked a few times to teach, but I always say no. I'm not sure I do something that can be taught. Maybe that sounds really romantic, but I feel like for me education was such a counterproductive experience. Maybe in a few years it'll be more clear, but I don't know. What can I say? Something like, "I just collect random phrases and I'm not really sure why, I don't even remember who wrote them." I try to celebrate not knowing.

They say it makes miracles, 2015. Glass from a window facing north, plastic bag. 13 × 45 × 25.5 cm.



Name

Tania Pérez Córdova

Vocation

Visual artist

Fact

Tania Pérez Córdova is a visual artist based in Mexico City. Her sculptures are "devices to create pause," as their contemplation reveals past and present possible events. Her upcoming solo show "Smoke, Nearby" at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art opens April 2017.



Tania Pérez Córdova recommends:

To read: The Performance of Becoming Human, by Daniel Borzutzky published by Brooklyn Art Press

To read: A man in a Room Spray-Painting a Fly... (or at least trying to...) by Francesco Pedraglio published by Bookworks.

To visit: British Museum's object number 122294 which is in the Mesopotamia Section and its description reads like:

“Woman's head wearing jewelry, preserved as excavated; head of body 53 in the great death pit; the jewelry includes a gold ribbon in the hair, a silver comb, a diadem of gold leaves, gold ear-rings and a silver comb with gold and lapis lazuli head.”

To visit: the Coatlicue Aztec stone at the Mexico City Anthropology Museum. The colossal stone was buried and unearthed episodically in a fascinating story over hundreds of years.

To watch when you have insomnia at night: a live stream of the Popocatepetl volcano online.

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ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2017

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

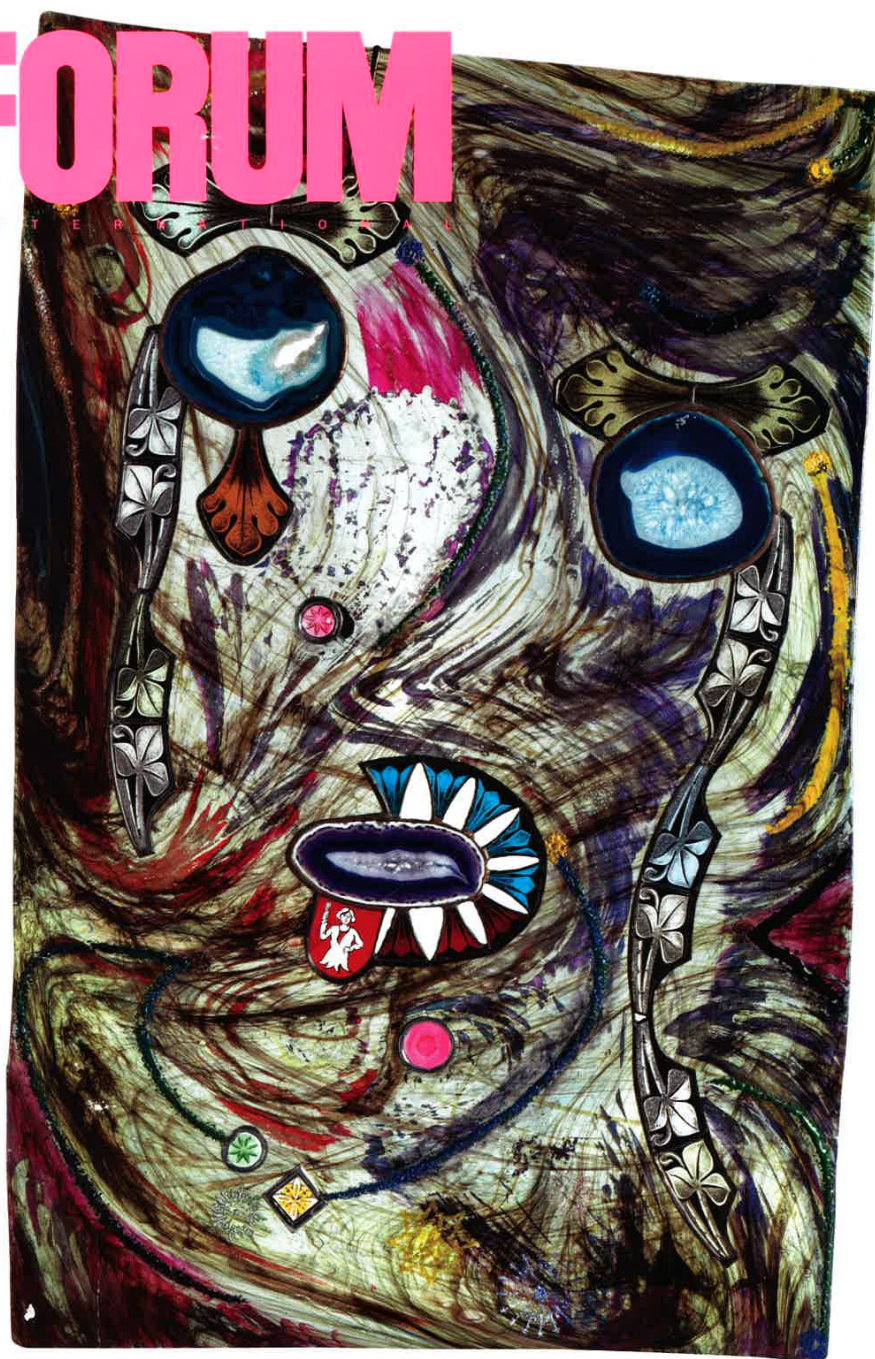
FALL PREVIEW

THE GRAND TOUR:
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HUEY COPELAND AND
FRANK WILDERSON
ON MUSEUMS AND RACE

DIAMOND STINGILY

KERSTIN BRÄTSCH



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POUSSIN M'INSTRUIT: Poussin teaches me. Maybe, but what Poussin teaches and what Graham learned are not congruent. Truer to what we see is Graham's intriguingly postmodern observation from 1931: "We use painters of the past as we use paint, so much per tube, so much per magazine reproduction." Like every modern neoclassicism of any value—and there haven't been many, but they're always more modern and less classical than they claim—Graham's became a tool of the most outrageous eccentricity, allowing the artist to express his erotic obsessions with just the flimsiest protective veil of formal rectitude. Self-contradiction, perhaps even self-deception, lends these late paintings an unfathomable sense of mystery that makes them impossible to forget.

—Barry Schwabsky

CHICAGO

Tania Pérez Córdova

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

For "Smoke, Nearby," Mexican artist Tania Pérez Córdova's first US retrospective, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago made the unusual decision of leaving one of its downstairs galleries clear of any dividing walls. The open expanse was bathed in a uniform white light, which lent a still, clinical appearance to the sculptures hanging from, leaning against, or tucked within a series of irregular wooden display structures. These constructions functioned as stations at which the viewer could pause, gradually building conceptual connections between the different sculptures as she navigated the space. Only one work, *Detour*, 2017—a photograph of smoke curling into the air—hung on the perimeter wall. The photograph staged a missing element of a nearby sculpture, *They say it's like a rock*, 2015, an elegantly warped glass plane from which a stick of incense was suspended (the museum's fire code meant that it could not be lit). Distributed throughout the room were kindred works made from found panes of glass (one taken from the museum's ceiling above) coupled with other objects, one per work: a jade bracelet, plywood, soap-free cleansing gel, a plastic bag, nail polish, a guitar string, and a cigarette butt. Pithy wall descriptions

Who these people were, and whether they knew each other, was unclear. Upon initial viewing, these mannered riffs on Fluxus and institutional critique felt overly broad, but on closer inspection, subtle clues unveiled pointed, site-specific narratives. (As it turns out, the man and woman who inspired these paintings are local Chicagoans with whom Pérez Córdova made a "small agreement . . . [they] would pop by [the exhibition] from time to time wearing the shirt [and the dress].")

The show, curated by José Esparza Chong Cuy, presented Pérez Córdova's practice as a pointed departure from those of other contemporary Mexican sculptors, such as Abraham Cruzvillegas. As scholar Robin Greeley argues, Cruzvillegas's references to slums (*colonias para-caidistas*) in his work have created a recognizable set of signifiers for Mexico City as a specific metropolis, albeit one harshly conditioned by the global economy; by contrast, Pérez Córdova seems to return to the melancholic, placeless poetics of Gabriel Orozco. In *Yielding Stone*, 1992, Orozco rolled a ball of plasticine in the street as it picked up detritus, consequently immortalizing indexical traces of the external world in its gnarled surface. Pérez Córdova's *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways*, 2013/2017, similarly refers to a time and a place that we cannot see or experience: The work comprises a Swarovski diamond earring dangling from a brass display, as well as "a woman wearing the other earring" somewhere beyond the institutional space. What social class does this individual occupy; what sort of mobility does she have?

The practice of incorporating inaccessible elements or events in an artwork has its roots in the postwar avant-garde, from Yves Klein's "immaterial transfers" to Robert Smithson's nonsites. Pérez Córdova locates a darker possibility in this tradition with *A person possessed by curiosity*, 2015, a ceramic bowl with the fossil-like imprint of a Banamex debit card on its surface. The debit card was linked to a real bank account into which the artist deposited money throughout the exhibition's run. *A person possessed* likely makes reference to a major money-laundering bust that occurred in 2013, when the Federal Reserve connected Banamex USA, a subsidiary of Citigroup, to Mexican drug cartel activity. If Pérez Córdova imbricates this work in vast flows of politics, finance, and crime, she engages the scale of the individual body in *First-Person Narrator*, 2013/2017, a marble slab with a shallow depression in which honey, green hazel, and blue cosmetic contact lenses float. Another example of the sinister elegance of Pérez Córdova's practice, *First-Person's* disembodied gaze prompts us to wonder if someone once wore the contacts in an attempt to lighten the color of their eyes. Here the pathos of identity in the Trump era is rendered ghostly and yet acutely physical.

—Daniel Quiles

PORTLAND, OREGON

Ryan McLaughlin

ADAMS AND OLLMAN

Recently returned to the US after a multiyear sojourn in Berlin, American painter Ryan McLaughlin has come home to a changed nation. His country's public life, always grotesque, has become an outright horror show, riven by daily violence and the breakdown of any common public language. How might a painter like McLaughlin, of such searching intelligence and melancholy sensibility, get along in this stridently polarized era?

At Adams and Ollman, McLaughlin continued his long-standing practice of graphic appropriation, showing a suite of seven paintings from 2017 that feature hieroglyphic shapes set afloat in fields of gentle taupes, tans, and frank browns. *Demeter*, one of the larger works on



Tania Pérez Córdova, *First-Person Narrator* (detail), 2013/2017, marble and prescription cosmetic contact lenses, 4 3/4 x 74 3/4 x 1".

produced interplays between obdurate materials—bronze, marble, clay, aluminum, earth—and absent things, people, or events: For instance, the captions for *Portrait of a Man Unknown* and *Portrait of a Woman Unknown*, both 2013/2017, paintings that replicate the patterns of a man's shirt and a woman's dress, informed visitors that the works' mediums also included the man and woman wearing those clothes.

Zigzag Incisions

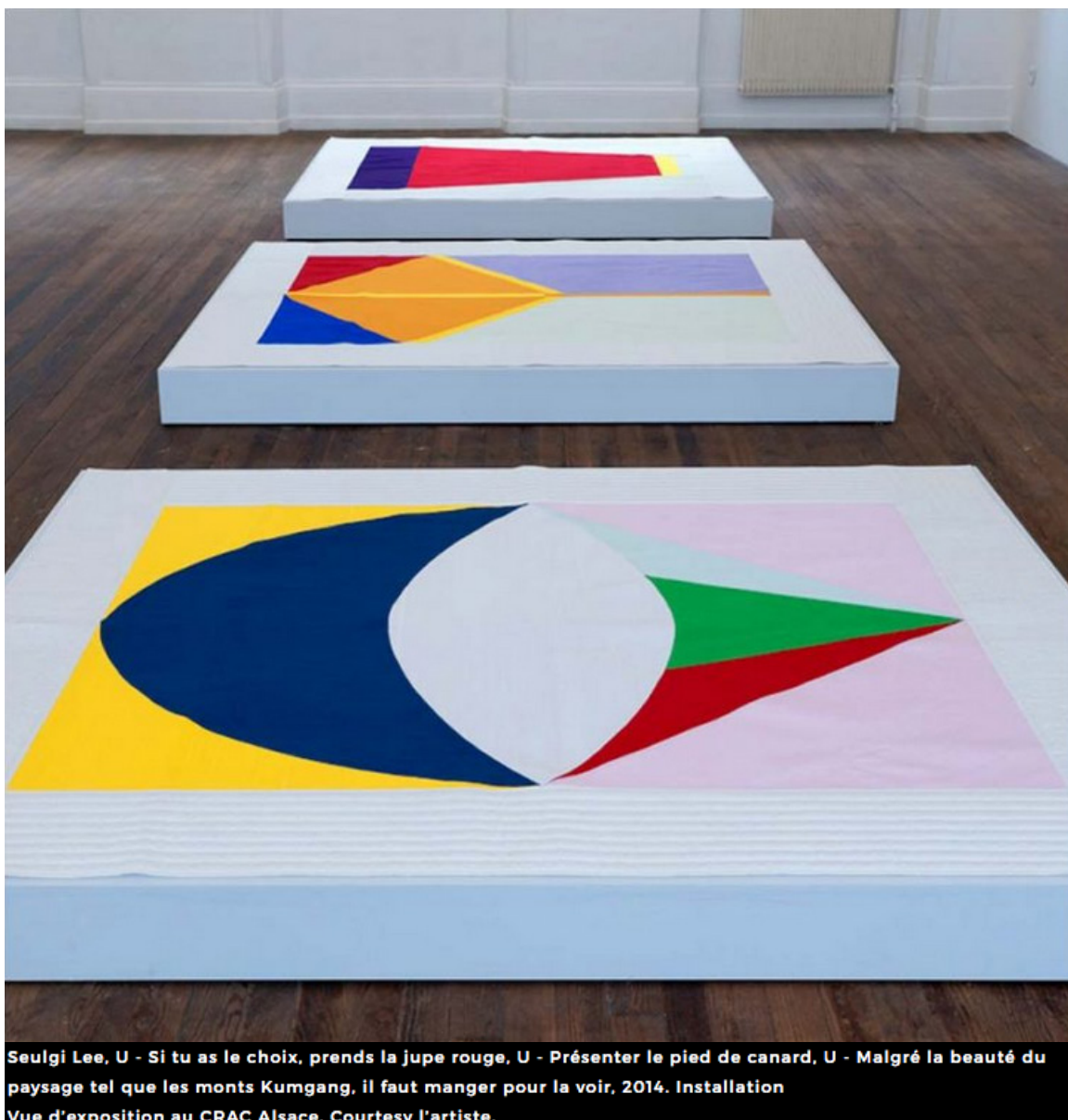
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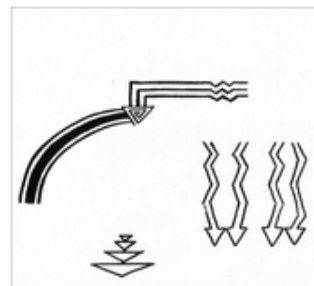
📍 CRAC ALSACE

👤 ARMANDO ANDRADE TUDELA | RAVEN CHACON | TANIA PEREZ CORDOVA
| FRANCESCO PEDRAGLIO | ROBERTO EVANGELISTA
| XIMENA GARRIDO-LECCA | SEULGI LEE | PIERRE LEGUILLON
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| JULIA ROMETTI | JORGE SATORRE

L'exposition « Zigzag Incisions » au CRAC Alsace propose une exploration des lignes obliques, des croisements et des zigzags à travers les œuvres de quatorze artistes contemporains. Des installations, sculptures, films et peintures qui se nourrissent de confrontation, d'hybridation et de géométrie.



Seulgi Lee, U - Si tu as le choix, prends la jupe rouge, U - Présenter le pied de canard, U - Malgré la beauté du paysage tel que les monts Kumgang, il faut manger pour la voir, 2014. Installation
Vue d'exposition au CRAC Alsace. Courtesy l'artiste.



L'exposition « **Zigzag Incisions** » au Centre Rhénan d'Art Contemporain Alsace réunit les installations, sculptures, films et peintures de quatorze artistes contemporains. Elle instaure entre ces créations un dialogue volontairement oblique, mettant en lumière les croisements géographiques, culturels, conceptuels et disciplinaires qui les nourrissent.

Des croisements géographiques

L'installation *Jour transparent I, Jour transparent II, Jour transparent III* d'Armando Andrade Tudela est composée de diverses pièces de tissus ethniques tels que des ponchos suspendus entre de larges plaques de plexiglas. L'artiste s'approprie ainsi un dispositif rappelant les musées ethnographiques pour présenter des objets relevant d'une production faussement artisanale mondialisée qui correspond à la vision stéréotypée qu'ont les pays occidentaux de pays émergents.

C'est aussi à la friction entre la culture sud-américaine et les schémas néocoloniaux que s'intéresse Ximena Garrido-Lecca. A travers ses installations comme *Smoke Architecture*, réalisé en 2015, l'artiste péruvienne étudie comment l'architecture reflète l'impact culturel des standards occidentaux et comment les formes traditionnelles rentrent en conflit avec les processus de développement industriels de masse.

Des croisements disciplinaires

Les œuvres de Tania Perez Cordova et Francesco Pedraglio résultent d'une volonté de croiser occasionnellement les pratiques de chacun. Si l'un comme l'autre revendique une démarche autonome, résultant sur des créations individuelles qui reflètent leur perspective propre, c'est de la confrontation de leurs particularités, des interventions conceptuelles et formelles différentes, que naît une ligne en zigzag, une sorte de nouvelle œuvre.

Le zigzag est présent dans l'œuvre *Mater Dolorosa - In Memoriam II (Of the Creation and Survival of Forms)*, un essai de Roberto Evangelista, sous la forme d'une exploration poétique de la naissance et de la pérennité des motifs. Roberto Evangelista tente de cerner l'origine géométrique de l'univers en filmant, dans les années 1970, la région du lac Arara en Amazonie.

MUSEUMS ENTERTAINMENT

Murakami and Perez Cordova form an unexpected symmetry at the MCA

By LORI WAXMAN

JUL 19, 2017 AT 12:11 PM



Takashi Murakami exhibit, "The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg"

Octopus tentacles decorate a front window of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago ahead of the opening of the Takashi Murakami exhibit, "The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg." (Erin Hooley / Chicago Tribune)

1 / 13

Taken together, two solo exhibitions currently on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art demand this odd question. The shows are "The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg," a blockbuster retrospective by the Japanese superstar Takashi Murakami, and "Smoke, nearby," the first major presentation by Tania Perez Cordova, a Mexican sculptor little known in the United States. I doubt that these two artists have ever been exhibited in the same building, and my guess is that they will not be again. Their work has nothing in common, save providing the perfect and necessary antidote for one another.

Begin with Murakami, whose exhibition demands immense fortitude of viewers. It's no small feat to withstand thousands of hallucinogenic fungi, psychotic mice, smiling daisies, vomiting giants, rainbow skulls, nightmarish deities, technicolor tsunamis, and a hip-hop bear, all of it slickly fabricated at mammoth scale. We're talking a 59-foot-long painting of a frothing dragon, a 14-foot-high sculpture of a violent blue demon, three-dimensional candy-colored mushrooms dotted with green eyes, and mural-size canvases crowded with dozens of hideously distorted spiritual figures, each draped in layers of clashing fabrics. Everything is so loud and so bold as to be unmissable, except by dint of being overwhelmed by everything else.

Leave time for Perez Cordova, because of the quiet relief provided by her witty sculptures. Modest combinations of clay and bank cards, makeup and marble, glass and cheap foam, they require intimate completion by attentive visitors, and sometimes by unnamed people elsewhere in Chicago. A single crystal drop earring dangles from a brass rod; somewhere a woman wears its matching other. A bent and stained piece of glass rests on the floor; above it gapes a hole in the ceiling fixture. Atop a waist-high marble column rests a watery divot; in it floats a single colored contact lens, barely visible, its pair who knows where. Everything is so subtle as to be easy to miss, but that just encourages harder looking.



"Tania Perez Cordova: Smoke, nearby," a exhibition of the Mexican sculptor's work, is at the Museum of Contemporary Art through Aug. 20. (Nathan Keay photo)

For three decades, Murakami has acted like a giant computer into which choice aspects of Japanese and Western culture and history have been fed, amalgamated, and churned back out. He has incorporated the 18th-century painting style of ukiyo-e and the traditional technique of Nihonga, legendary figures from Buddhism and folk tales, the cartoony characters of anime and manga, the disasters of Hiroshima and Fukushima. He's designed luxury handbags for Louis Vuitton, sneakers for Vans, and an album cover for Kanye West. The conscience of Anselm Kiefer, the vanguard showmanship of Yves Klein, the commercial brazenness of Andy Warhol all figure as prominent artistic influences from early on. To complete, reinsert bits and pieces of Murakami's own past work and run it all through Kaikai Kiki Ltd., the company he founded in the 1990s on the outskirts of Tokyo and which today employs some 100 young artisans to produce his artwork, in addition to running galleries and a biannual art fair, and managing the careers of young artists.

Murakami cannily summarizes the overarching effect of his oeuvre in a video that plays near the entrance to his exhibition. "What is the greatest art piece?" he asks. His answer, "emptiness," betrays a discomfiting knowingness about the excess and superficiality of contemporary life, and a willingness to deliver it with maximum force.

Perez Cordova's exhibition, meanwhile, actually looks empty, or at least as if the gallery was being deinstalled. Wood partitions with unpainted backing stand askew or lean against a wall; a dozen damaged panes of glass fill a corner; rough objects rest atop protective mats. Colors range from dull to neutral, except for a rectangle of cracked pink foam and a glass of fluorescent yellow water that could have been accidentally left behind by a preparator who needed somewhere to put an uncapped highlighter pen.



Murakami merchandise

T-shirts and plush figures on sale in the MCA store from the Takashi Murakami exhibit. The store at the Museum of Contemporary Art can barely keep the popular merchandise on the shelves from their Takashi Murakami show "The Octopus Eats it's Own Leg". (Nancy Stone / Chicago Tribune)

1 / 13

To experience any of this as art requires attentiveness to situations that do not ask for it, the cleverness to look for clues in sometimes-hidden captions, and the willingness to see beyond what's strictly visible in the gallery. It's useful to believe what the artist claims of her materials and then some: that a man's flexed bicep really did leave that impression in the pink foam; that those silvery concave shapes are really the result of pouring molten aluminum into a hole in a hill; that the debit card pressed into the center of that clay bowl really links to a unique Banamex account; that somewhere in Chicago there really are people wearing garments and contact lenses that match those here. Time is vital, too, more that the average of 15 to 30 seconds that most people spend looking at an artwork, according to museum researchers. Perez Cordova offers direct assistance on this one: a ceiling fan hung from a bracket of 2-by-4s spins at a rate of 111 seconds per rotation, the minimum amount of time the artist believes a patron needs for each view. Move too fast, and "Metronome" itself remains imperceptible.

If Murakami's studio functions like a movie production company, with his exhibition displaying its highly finished creations, Perez Cordova's show is a film set, where almost everything has already taken place. The former, like all blockbusters, can't keep from giving us the entertainment we think we want. The latter helps us transcend it.

"Tania Perez Cordova: Smoke, nearby" and "Takashi Murakami: The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg" run through Aug. 20 and Sept. 24 respectively at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 220 E. Chicago Ave., 312-280-2660, www.mcachicago.org.

Lori Waxman is a freelance critic.

In Focus: Tania Pérez Córdova

The memory and lifespan of objects



Chasing, pausing, waiting, 2014, blusher, bird droppings, cigarette ash (from a smoker wanting to quit), black marble, 14 × 28 × 13 cm. All images courtesy: the artist, Meessen De Clercq, Brussels, and Proyectos Monclova, Mexico City

Can an object be an event? If the answer is 'yes', then what kind of event might it be? Has it happened already, or will it occur in the future? Has it occurred here, or elsewhere? Such imponderables lie at the core of Tania Pérez Córdova's sculptural practice. For the Mexican artist, matter always points off-stage, towards instances and interactions beyond the present time and place. Her work insists that materials garner meaning through social interactions, often (but not necessarily) outside of the gallery, within networks of exchange that are silted in the mind, in promises to be kept or broken, in desires and fears of imagined futures.

One of my favourite examples of Córdova's complex understanding of this material distillation of human relations is *Call forwarding* (2013). To make the piece, Córdova borrowed the sim card from a friend's mobile phone and implanted it into a thin sheet of white porcelain that was subsequently mounted on the gallery wall. *Call forwarding* involved a degree of negotiation, since Córdova had to persuade a friend to part with his phone number and to set up a call-forwarding service to a new sim. The work is as perverse as it is playful: an interruption in the flow of communications, an absurd and elegant re-purposing of a seemingly essential piece of modern hardware. Preserved in ceramic, the work sets up a series of polarities: contemporary and prehistoric technologies, verbal and tactile experiences, useful and redundant matter.

Colin Perry: In Focus: Tania Pérez Córdova

In: Frieze Magazine, 16.03.2015

<https://frieze.com/article/focus-tania-perez-cordova> (22.04.2016)

A number of Córdova's works include borrowed items, which are either returned to the owner after the exhibition closes, or are kept on permanent loan. *Things in pause* (2014) consists of two black piano keys mounted onto four panels of orange-coloured foam and hung on the gallery wall. The keys were borrowed from a pianist the artist met while installing her exhibition as part of the Bienal do Mercosul in 2013. *Things in pause* suggests an imagined scenario, in which the musician must modify her playing, changing much-loved tunes to compensate for the missing notes. Another tactic for invoking invisible social relations is evident in *We focus on a woman facing sideways, Evening* (2014), which utilizes just one of a pair of objects: a single gold earring, given to the artist by her grandmother, hangs off a triangular bronze armature slotted into the corner of the gallery. Here, the exhibited object insistently invokes its phantom other.



We focus on a woman facing sideways, Evening (detail), 2014, bronze, borrowed

Language is central to Córdova's practice. This is evident in the relationships she establishes between a work's title and the cultural meanings of the materials she uses. *Something separated by commas*

Colin Perry: In Focus: Tania Pérez Córdova

In: Frieze Magazine, 16.03.2015

<https://frieze.com/article/focus-tania-perez-cordova> (22.04.2016)

(2014) consists of thin, shelf-like pieces of marble with circular depressions containing traces of cigarette ash, a pool of red lipstick and a single green contact lens. These diminutive reliquaries suggest the shelf has been used by someone preparing for a social engagement, perhaps lounging against the gallery wall, lighting a cigarette, applying make-up, then heading out. (Córdova explains to me that, because few Mexicans have green eyes, this lens also hints at flawed aspirations to European standards of beauty). In *Chasing, pausing, waiting* (2014) the list of materials in the caption adds vital details not visibly evident in the display: 'makeup (blush), bird droppings, cigarette ash (from a smoker wanting to quit), black marble'. Here, we have the traces of flirtation or disguise (blushes), accidents (bird shit), anxiety (the smoker who wants to quit) and luxury (marble). These pieces wittily adumbrate scenes from any number of melodramas without the use of a script.

Above all, Córdova is concerned with time. *If used like stones* (2012) comprises an Epson printer (model sx130) mounted on the gallery wall: a gesture that simply asks for the years to pass, to transfigure this humdrum piece of office technology into a valuable historical artefact. Contrasting psychological conceptions of human and geological duration, *Untitled* (2014) is a photograph of Popocatepetl, an active volcano that looms at the margins of Mexico City like a time bomb (the image is taken from an official surveillance camera that keeps an eye on it day and night). *How to use reversed psychology with pictures* (2012/13) consists of a sheet of pale, worn-out linen that was originally dyed completely black. Córdova purchased the dark fabric, subjecting it to a series of tests that are used by manufacturers to measure their products' life expectancies. The result is an item that has seemingly time-travelled to arrive prematurely at its future state of decay.

Córdova's work draws attention to different time-scales: the duration of an exhibition, the lifespan of an object, the imagined actions of a smoker burning her way through a cigarette. In doing so, her works create lacunae for viewers to envisage alternative places, relations and intervals; they urge us to treat the gallery as a time machine.

Tania Pérez Córdova is an artist living and working in Mexico City, Mexico. Her work is included in 'Surround Audience', the 2015 New Museum Triennial, New York, USA, from 24 February to 24 May.

Colin Perry: In Focus: Tania Pérez Córdova

In: Frieze Magazine, 16.03.2015

<https://frieze.com/article/focus-tania-pérez-córdova> (22.04.2016)

Going back to basics – getting back to art (and earrings)

There it hangs: a golden earring in the shape of a piece of miniature drooping armour, placed in a tiny hole in a slender triangular metal structure coming out of a corner of the room. The 'lock' is attached to the back of the pin; the whole thing hangs just as it would from an earlobe. The earring is alone, separated from its twin. In fact, the separation is temporary; the other earring remains with its owner, who will not use it until the two are reunited.

The earring and its structure are installed in an official-looking building, one of the four main venues of the ninth Bienal do Mercosul, titled *Weather Permitting* and beautifully curated by Sofia Hernandez Chong Cuy and her team in Porto Alegre. It is one of four works in the Bienal by the Mexico City-based artist Tania Pérez Córdova.

WITH FUNDING BEING THE MOST PROMINENT TOPIC AMONG COLLEAGUES TODAY, IT IS CRUCIAL TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH ART ITSELF

All of them contain a borrowed object, which has temporarily left a significant part of itself, or its context, behind. They share the title *Things in Pause*. In addition to the earring, there is a sim card embedded in porcelain, a shirtsleeve severed from the shirt itself and inserted into pine wood, and a piano key on a journey of its own. After the exhibition the objects will be returned from whence they came. In case of a sale, the buyer is requested to find an equivalent object to incorporate into the framework devised by the artist.

Pérez Córdova puts objects on hold, placing them outside of their quotidian existence as (temporary) art objects. In a way they are being put to the test, both as plain objects and as art. So what happened to the earring, a delicate and intimate object (belonging to the artist's grandmother, I learn while reading up on the work), in this otherwise large-scale biennial exhibition?

In addition to modestly electrifying the corner where it was installed, next to work by, among others, Cao Fei and Mario Garcia Torres, *Lost Gold Earring* said something about how art can operate today: that objects and actions can commute between contexts, and that the transitions from homebase to artwork and back to homebase can allow for imaginative yet concrete associations.

It is tempting to introduce the idea of the quasi-object into this query. The quasi-object is less psychologically charged than a transitional object, but nevertheless one that mediates between people. The quasi-object is not even an object, but neither is it a subject. And yet it participates in the constitution of the subject. When passed around, the quasi-object creates the collective – when it stops, the subjective 'I' appears.

A ball, for example a football, is the quintessential quasi-object, according to the philosopher Michel Serres. It is made for circulation, 'weaving the collective' while in motion. It remains 'lifeless', or not yet animated, as long as it is still. It has the potential of being both 'being' and 'relation', depending on its status.

On closer inspection, the objects in Pérez Córdova's work are to some extent quasi-objects. They simultaneously connect and decentre; they form the basis of distinct works in and of themselves and they partake in the mediation between a number of other external entities. In the bigger picture, it is very likely that art itself is a quasi-object.

Maria Lind: Going back to basics – getting back to art (and earrings)

In: Artreview, December 2013

http://artreview.com/opinion/december_2013_opinion_maria_lind_on_going_back_to_basics_art_itself_and_earrings/ (26.07.2014)

Having recently been invited to address some of the urgencies of the present in the sphere of curating at a symposium at the School of Visual Art in New York, art comes first on my list. Art as a quasi-object – a form of understanding that is more necessary than ever, as a horizon of the possible beyond the given.

I have a distinct feeling that we need to return to art itself, to focus on artworks and art projects in the wake of art institutions becoming more and more obsessed with themselves, curating programmes being preoccupied with curating, and curating students becoming stuck in curatorial pirouettes or symbiotic collaborations. Not that art has disappeared completely, but it has been pushed into the background.

This is problematic and yet understandable: in a place like Europe a paradigm shift has happened in terms of the conditions of production for both art and curating. The single most palpable feature of this is how funding structures have been transformed, largely without public debate. At the same time as the commercial art market is blossoming, public funding is decreasing, and at the same time the public funding that remains is increasingly instrumentalised.

With funding being the most prominent topic among colleagues today, it is crucial to spend more time with art itself, inquiring what an artwork does. Not what it can do, but what it actually does: how it sits in a specific situation in society, and how it operates from there. Pérez Córdova's golden earring and its commuting character, its relying on future events, has stayed with me. I even started to wear earrings again, after a 15-year pause.

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TANIA PÉREZ CÓRDOVA
(MEXICO CITY, b. 1979)



Script for a Perfect Phone Call, 2014

The sculptural compositions of Mexico City-based artist Tania Pérez Córdova suggest the passing of time. Inscribed in her work are traces that connect her still life objects to a complex contemporary world: a borrowed gold earring hangs from a bronze cast structure, a set of used contact lenses sit in a marble molding, an active credit card is embedded in a clay platter, a stranger's SIM card is encrusted in a porcelain mold.

These objects, while seemingly uneventful, create situations where the artist's negotiations with those third parties are made visible to the viewer. Her delicate work might wrongfully be read as conceptual, but when analyzed carefully, her sculptures gain a completely different dimension: they are also the women left without one gold earring; those people whose viewing prescriptions lie in the gallery; they are also the credit card user, the bank and the whole credit system; they are also all of us, and our relationship to digital communication.

Tania's interest in quotidian events somehow underlines how unremarkable situations can be compelling acts that are associated with a complex infrastructure of social or economic relationships. She sometimes describes her sculptures as stage props of a script about everyday life. They are performative works that do not move—"contemporary relics," as she calls them. Although perhaps,

José Esparza Chong Cuy: Tania Pérez Córdova

"contemporary fossils" is more adequate—they are objects that witness life happening around them and slowly, almost as if suggesting sedimentation, give traces of human life.

Perhaps less visible but also very much present in Tania's work is her interest in materiality. She often tests the physical limits of materials by transforming them into something they're not: melting a bronze coin with beer cans to the point where the coin is still a coin, reshaping an old car's windshield into an ornament, or pressing a piece of foam to suggest an action.

There seems to be a relationship between the unscripted events her sculptures evoke and the experimentation with materiality she pursues, that would be interesting in exploring at a large scale, and which would surely surface many meaningful acts of contemporary life that might seem ordinary to an untrained eye.

— José Esparza Chong Cuy