

Jorge Pedro Núñez and Jesús Fuenmayor
Q&A for CIFO

JF: In a statement about your intentions, you say that you use “strategies of infiltration, recycling, superposition, displacement and association” in your work. Following this, in reference to your project for CIFO, you indicate that “it is an installation of sculptures made from vinyl record sleeve covers, interspersed with shapes inspired by concrete art, based on a collection of personal images that belong to a collective unconscious.” It is curious that in neither statement do you establish the flow with which these strategies function. In other words, we are left to wonder: What becomes infiltrated? What undergoes a recycling process? In the case of superposition, is there a winner? From where to where does the displacement happen? And, do the associations result from alliances or are they forced? In short, it seems that you talk about your work from a point of view that is completely defined by cultural processes, and not only the bias of the artistic environment. If this is the case, the question is whether you are substituting the idea of an institutional critique (from the administration of art), with a cultural critique. What are the characteristics of this cultural critique? What commentary can the artist make about cultural change that is both productive and that adds something to the work done by different disciplines of cultural studies?

JPN: I work with the awareness that in art everything has been done. Based on this, I get to work. The mixtures and infiltrations that I put into my work are first analyzed in terms of modern art in general, and then put into the current specific context of presentation in the context of art.

I use recognizable icons from certain periods of art history. After manipulating them, I attempt to strip them of their hierarchical character established by history, and of the same dogmas established by art. For instance, I may use minimalism as a starting point and contaminate it with my practice of superposition, to induce relationships based on the individual histories of the elements used (this can be read as a perversion of what we understand as minimalism in art).

I do not explicitly seek to make an institutional or cultural critique, as my work can be read as a post-colonial process that strips cultural identities off their hierarchies.

JF: You state that your work places you in a post-historical era. I assume that you are referring to the history of art. Please would you clarify what “post-historical” means to you?

JPN: In my work, I propose a different reading of history. I mix North with South and high culture with popular culture. My intention is to use recycling to put historical shapes back into circulation, to induce irony, humor and a critical distance, to produce new readings based on memory.

JF: In the piece that you have just finished for the Paris MAM, there is a clear allusion to a work by Malevich. Not long ago, you created a piece that is a geometrically folded bicycle wheel (a cross between Duchamp and Rodchenko). What process do you use to decide on one artistic reference and not another?

JPN: This is a form of contextualization. For me, the piece that I am presenting at the MAM evokes the history of modern art, starting with what I consider a very popular art figure, like Malevich. The work is entitled “TODO LO QUE MAM ME DIO” (EVERYTHING MAM GAVE ME). It is made up of two pieces, one of which is subtitled “The Guardian of Malevich,” which is a remake of a sculpture by Malevich made from fluorescent tubes... This, in turn, is looked after by a museum caretaker, who has to wear dark glasses. I created this piece after the robberies from the MAM in May (Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Modigliani, Leger), just before the opening of the exhibition containing my piece. “The Guardian of Malevich” also works as an internal joke, or a commentary on the way the museum is run. I work with my formal memory of art history, but I always end up moving away from the most obvious to an internal joke. However, the title of my project for CIFO, “Nature Morte With Monuments” is made up of the name of two New York galleries from the 80s that, at the time, played an important role for the post-conceptualists and the neo-geos.

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JF: In most, if not all of your work, there is a feeling that the pieces belong to the world of rejected items, although they seem very clean and very well created. Maybe because you draw an atlas by sealing the cracks in the floor of a gallery, or because you convert the limits of space into a flexible, amorphous medium when you reproduce dimensions using rubber elastic, or because you recycle advertisements from art magazines and reconfigure them into modernist icons, you always put art close to disposable items, in a critical sense. What is the intention behind establishing this ambiguous distance between the excessive value of art and its precarious existence?

JPN: Most of the materials that I use are the waste or residues from other activities. I work in a space that negotiates between elements that are in and out of control. I work with the resulting piece and its possible relationships with the presentation context.

The value of art is related to its poetic, conceptual, formal, and material value. What we call the aura is, in turn, linked to the history, the idea of the original work, etc. My pieces are directly linked to these values and they are in direct resonance with the material world. I like working with the enunciation of a certain aura of art, which exists as a material value. This can create relationships between the object and the reader, in terms of the history or physical nature of the work.

JF: Somewhere you've said that you place yourself between abstraction and conceptualism, which are precisely the roots of the most recent avant-garde movements. It is like placing yourself at a dead point. What possibilities for innovation do you see for art?

JPN: The title of my project for CIFO, "Nature Morte With Monument," evokes death and, at the same time, the static weight of art. Perhaps this belongs to an aesthetic from the depression in the 80s which, on the contrary, was a fairly productive period.

JF: Your move to Paris ten years ago happened at the same time as a process that saw your work develop into research with its own characteristics. Given that very few Venezuelan and Latin American artists emigrate to Paris now when compared with how they used to, what can you tell me about your experience there and how has it influenced your work?

JPN: I studied here in Paris, but I have paradoxically always been interested in American minimal and conceptual art, as well as the Latin American avant-garde movements linked to a precarious social context of art production and presentation. Perhaps my development here in Paris has given me a point of view that is distanced from these practices, and a knowledge of conceptual rhetoric that is linked to Philosophy and Literature, particularly in the French context.