

SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

Abraham Cruzvillegas

Reconstruction I: The Five Enemies and Reconstruction II: The Five Enemies, 2018 on Cockatoo Island

21st Biennale

of Sydney



Hanging/pending, contradictory, unstable and gentrified self-portrait, smelling like malt, stuck in the traffic jam, needing to take a shit since a while ago, listening to Martha Debayle, the next day having read 'Campo de guerra' by Sergio González Rodríguez; attempting to escape from the mystics of efficiency and competitiveness, with no signal on my cellphone, and dreaming about devouring a juicy papaya following the beat of 'Demolición' by Los Saicos, 2014
wooden beams, iron elements, rebar, used bricks and stones, tin sheets, organic elements

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; kurimanzutto, Mexico City; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Regen Projects, Los Angeles; and Thomas Dane, London. Collection of Museo Jumex
Photograph: Abigail Enzaldo

... autoconstrucción is about scarcity, solutions and ingenuity ... and how you can conceive a philosophy of life that you can make something out of nothing. That is also a metaphor for identity ... we are constantly transforming ourselves.

Cruzvillegas' art practice relies on the use of found and repurposed materials to create large-scale sculptural and installation works that are conceptual in intent, and influenced by the neighbourhood and culture of where he grew up in Ajusco, Mexico City. Best known for a body of works described as *autoconstrucción* (or 'self-constructions'), these works use this title to refer to methods of building slowly over time, methods that arise out of poverty and necessity, and rely on creativity, adaptation and working with others.

This new work for the Biennale is made of materials sourced from Cockatoo Island itself, reflecting on the heritage and industrial context of the island to make abstracted forms that inhabit the industrial-scale space.

Questions for Discussion

1. What materials can we use to make art? Is there a limit? Look at the practices of arte povera; found objects and readymades; and assemblage and bricolage. What do artists do with these materials that turns them into art?
2. How might you adapt Cruzvillegas' conceptual approach to your local context? Look around your neighbourhood for what has been discarded. Think about where your rubbish and recycling goes; where new buildings are being constructed or old buildings are being destroyed; find out when your local council collects furniture, white goods and e-waste.
3. Does this use of materials imply a critique of capitalist production and consumption? Or does the aesthetic of the sculpture make you think of something else? Write down what it suggests to you.

Reference Points

Cruzvillegas' sculptures sit in dialogue with a range of art practices that use existing materials and forms to create work. At the same time, his practice is informed by his social and cultural context, which is a significant consideration when looking at his methodology and considering the ideas and meanings implied by his reworking of found materials.

To contextualise his practice we might look at the diverse work of past Biennale of Sydney participants, listed here alongside the years of their participation: Jannis Kounellis (1998, 2008), Anselm Kiefer (1984, 1988, 1992), Mario and Marisa Merz (1979, 1984, 2008), Michelangelo Pistoletto (2008), Rosalie Gascoigne (1979, 1988, 1990, 2000), Renata Lucas (2008), Virginia Ward (1998), Mark di Suvero (1976), El Anatsui (2012) and Michael Rakowitz (2008).

We might also find connections with work like that of Kader Attia (2010), Annette Messager (1979, 1984, 1990) and Cornelia Parker (2008).

Practices and Processes

Cruzvillegas' work is produced by taking the qualities and associations of found materials, and building on their aesthetic through repetition, scale, contrast and contextualisation. It is important to recognise the associations of the materials and of Cruzvillegas' methods, and how that works in a specific context – in this case, the heritage and industrial environment of Cockatoo Island. To make a body of work in response to this kind of practice, we need to collect and consider materials.

Make a sculpture out of junk

Collect materials from your local area that have been discarded – cardboard boxes are a great place to start. This might include old and broken toys or sports equipment, discarded furniture, or anything that you can safely collect. Does the material need to be taken apart and divided into smaller elements before you can use it? Does the material become abstract in this process? Let the qualities of the materials guide you in your making – use colour, or texture or scale to make aesthetic decisions as you assemble your work.

Conceptual sculpture

Now, consider how you might use this method to comment on a local issue. For instance, what is taking place in your immediate environment? Could you draw attention to a recycling or environmental issue? Is there a need in your community for something you could build in this way? Perhaps a group of you could get together to build a conceptual sculpture.

Drawing

To reflect on your work, make a detailed drawing of your joint project.

Subjective frame:
responses to the world

Cultural frame:
cultural context, political
and social conditions