

Juan Carlos Robles

Crossing Lines Under Construction

November 24, 2017 – January 20, 2018

The artist simultaneously poses the idea of ruin and of a project under construction to talk about the current moment of culture in the expanded context of globalization.

He takes as allegorical motif a work found in his wandering through the streets of Tangier, the project under construction of the Museum of Moroccan Arts in Tangier. With this,

he aims to make us think about the limits, both metaphorical and real, to articulate a cultural meeting space in which we can recognize ourselves on both sides of the Mediterranean. He inquires into that possibility of being, while at the same time noting the fragility of the fulfilment of such desire, in a moment of violence, convulsion and plagued by uncertainties that affect the processes of individual and collective identification.

Part of the work of Juan Carlos Robles since the nineties is mainly concerned with making visible the conditioning factors of the formation of desire, the identity crises in a subjective sense and the visualization of the psychological landscape as a way of elaborating strategies to approach the other, in the current moment of massmediatic globalization of culture. Through photography, video, sculpture and intervention in public space, he opens a sociological, psychological, philosophical and political reflection on the antagonistic tension he perceives between the desire to belong and the fleetingness that imposes living in a contemporary crowd.

Interval between construction and ruins

amparo lozano

In both Arabic and french, *Détroit* (strait) combines the narrowness (*étroitesse*, *dayq*) with squalor (*détresse*, *mutadayeq*)

Yto Barrada

In an interview between Imre Szeman and Ursula Biemann about the artist's projects *Black Sea Files* and *Contained Movility*, Szeman begins by posing a dilemma about the concept of globalization. As a first option, as opposed to the second, it exposes whether by such concept we can understand "a distributed nervous system, with concentrations of geographically dispersed nodes (Silicon Valley, Silicon Alley, London, New York, Tokyo, Shanghai, Bangalore), but without any central brain that authorizes the movement of electrical impulses, which are deployed in an increasingly diverse series of locations and spaces" or else if globalization is to be understood as a nervous system made up of real, physical lines... To what he adds: "Mobility, for the fortunate few who enjoy it, is achieved at the price of the immobility imposed on many other, who are forced to cross borders illegally because of economic and political circumstances or who are held with a firm hand by military regimes or legal systems in their places of origin to serve as cheap labour or as suppliers of organs, drugs and sexual services"ⁱⁱ.

In this regard, he categorically states that this second globalization is the real one and adds that bringing it to the field of representation requires a concrete type of artistic energy.

In my opinion, "the representation" of this project, first set up in Galería Isabel Hurley (Málaga), with the proposal *Crossing Lines Under Construction*, and that Juan Carlos Robles restates for his presentation in ALCULTURA (Algeciras), under the title *El Espejo de Hércules. Espacios para un deseo de encuentro*, starts indeed from "a specific type of artistic energy", in the consideration that it manages to visually enlarge and enrich the narratives we use to give meaning to the complexity of contemporary life. Its approach is a way of transcending traditional criticisms against what might be called "the capitalist volley and its tentacles" as well as of the models set out on the idea of tourism. Robles reframes both matters, reconsidering the official parameters in which they are inscribed, clearly intending to offer new visual and conceptual considerations. At the same time, he maintains its desire that a real meeting point from both parts divided by the Mediterranean Sea can be built (an idea that can be extrapolated to any situation of the current unjust and harmful concept of the *border* idea, in all cases defined by "the powers").

Languages, like identities, which we would like to be hybrid and intercultural, are destined to constant change. These also have their borders and margins, a line that becomes an object of desire for transgression.

The movement, the journey -forced, dear, real or metaphorical- undertakes people to cross those boundary lines, although sometimes it is they who are crossed by them. Perhaps the construction of the Museum of Moroccan Arts in Tangier is an image of the journey as a paradigm of our time. In my opinion, one of the areas of interest of Robles' project lies, as I mentioned, in how he articulates the representations generated by all this series of changing situations, a reflection of the perception (and desire) of what's different, at an individual level as well as at cultural, economic or religious levels. It is also very interesting the analysis point of the above under the murmur of tourism as a false symbol of moving forward taking the right approach towards the future.

In some way, this art project makes me think about how little we know about the world in our present. When I saw it, I thought of others from different artists, of which I quote only two. The first one: *On Translation: Miedo/Jauf* (Antoni Muntadas). As can be read in the UFO fileⁱⁱ: "It is a project about the experience and the interpretation of fear and its complexities on both sides of the Strait (...) Two diverse realities and divided not only by the sea but by border fences and boundaries on both sides." Without dwelling upon a more detailed analysis, I do believe it is appropriate to convey the opinion of Byung-Chul Hanⁱⁱⁱ: "Fear has very different aetiologies. First, it is aroused by the strange, the sinister and inhospitable, the unknown. It assumes the negativity of what's completely different."

The second one: *Solid Sea - case 04: (M)RE-Tourism*, by the collective Multiplicity. In this piece of work, one of the territorial changes resulting from the MRE (*Marocains Résidents à l'Étranger*) phenomenon affecting the coastal zone of Morocco is analysed, in which, in recent years, models of land use related to mass tourism, real estate investment and real estate development have been applied.

From the idea that the MRE are not entirely European in Europe, nor completely Moroccan in Morocco, they write: ^{iv}"The columns of cars recognisable on the Spanish roads by the bulky luggage on the roof rack are the most obvious and folkloric image of a much more complex phenomenon that covers the transmutation of social, economic and cultural models. A current that, by crossing the Mediterranean in a different order than the migratory (outgoing) flow, is activating important transformations in the social and spatial condition of a part of Morocco and introducing new models in the financial and investment systems, in the types of construction and in the urbanization processes". Even though *El Espejo de Hércules. Escenarios para un deseo de encuentro / Crossing Lines. Under Construction*, as an artistic representation, can be considered as a symbolic production, it presents a work of art that shows a contemporary human condition (Adam), in addition to focusing on the phenomenon, also contemporary, of "tourism".

I also consider the opinion of the artist Yto Barrada, born in Tangier, is very important: "Although it has collapsed, the colonial dream has left us with an iniquitous regime of management and perception of mobility between the north and south of the Mediterranean. In this bottleneck called the Strait of Gibraltar, *the right of access* is now unilateral (...) This interval territory has the amazing peculiarity of being marked by the coincidence between a physical space, a symbolic space and, finally, an intimate space^v."

He also points out that Moroccan cities are modelled by urban migrations, but also *by and for* tourism, two mass movements that are directly linked to globalization.

In this line of thought, Juan Carlos Robles' project focuses on the current construction of the Museum of Moroccan Arts in Tangier as an infrastructure for the future and questions which part of the city's history is forgotten or erased. A city that, like many others, is immersed in the process of being considered as the product of a complex relationship between its physical forms and the set of forces that pass through its interior life. Like all cities to date (let us hear Adam's very interesting testimony about his city, Melilla, and his participation in various armed conflicts in the last two decades in several cities), cannot fail to be a clear reflection of historical, political, economic, geostrategic and cultural processes in which, from the point of view of integration or marginality, from symbols and imaginaries, must fight against the problem of difference, against the allocation of the "I" and "the other". Although Byung-Chul considers that the times when the other existed have passed and that the proliferation of the same is what, posing as growth, constitutes today these pathological alterations of the social body. In the end, perhaps the shape of a city is above all a mental landscape that we need to have *in mente*.

This is one of the possible stories that this project tells.

Juan Carlos Robles. Resume

(Seville, 1962)

He's a doctor of Fine Arts, he lives between Berlin and Malaga where he teaches at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Malaga. Since 2000 he has been working with Galería Oliva Arauna in Madrid and currently is represented by Galería Isabel Hurley.

He has exhibited among other places at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (MNCARS) in Madrid; Sala Montcada Fundacio La Caixa, Arts Sta Mònica, Pabellon Mies van Der Rohe and MACBA in Barcelona, CAAC in Seville, CAAM in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Haus der kulturen der Welt and Sala del Senado KunstBank in Berlin, Royal College of Art in London, Art in General in Nueva York, as well as at the Johannesburg Biennale in South Africa, III Bienal BIACS de Sevilla, XXVII Bienal de Pontevedra, I Bienal de Canarias, VIDEOZONE V-International Video Art Biennial in Tel Aviv (Israel), Instituto Cervantes in Rome, Beijing and Tokyo; Laboratorio Arte Alameda and Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil in City of Mexico, Buenos Aires Museum of Modern Art and Casa de España in Lima. His work has been seen at several fairs: Paris Photo, MadridFoto, Arco Madrid, Artissima Turin, The Armory Show in New York, Pinta London. His work has recently been seen in Maracaibo at VII Velada de Santa Lucía, at Centro Cultural de España in Miami, Mexico City, Guatemala and Montevideo, at Galeria Oliva Arauna in Madrid, at CAS in Seville, at Pratt Manhattan Gallery in New York, at Noche en Blanco in Malaga, CAC in Malaga, as well as at the Summa International Fair in Madrid and at the Swab Barcelona Art Fair.

Whis work is in collections such as Banco de España; Fundacion Pilar Citoler; MACBA; CAAC; Inicarte-Junta de Andalucía; Patio Herreriano, Valladolid; Fundacion Marcelino Botin and Museo de Bellas Artes in Santander, Caja San Fernando/Cajasol, Seville; Museum of Contemporary Art in Madrid; Ayuntamiento de Almagro, Ciudad Real; CAC in Malaga; as well as in query files: Mediateca CaixaForum, Barcelona; Centro de documentacion Priamo Lozada, Mexico; Centro Experimental de las Artes, I+CAS, Seville; CAAM, Las Palmas de

Gran Canaria and Media library of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Castilla-La Mancha.

i Ursula Biemann, and Imre Szeman: "Tránsito forzoso: un diálogo sobre *Black Sea Files* (Archivos del Mar Negro) y *Contained Mobility* (Movilidad contenida), in various artists, *Zona B. En los márgenes de Europa*, exhibition catalogue, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 2007: 13-14.

ii Available in www.desorg.org (20/11/2017)

iii Byung-Chul Han: *La expulsión de lo distinto. Percepción y comunicación en la sociedad actual*, Herder Editorial, Barcelona, 2017: 47.

iv Multiplicity: "Case 04: (M)RE-TOURISM. Turistas de identidad", in various artists, *Tour-ismes. La derrota de la disseni. Itiniraris crítics*, exhibition catalogue, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 2004: 430..

v Yto Barrada "El Estrecho o una vida llena de agujeros" (1998-2004), in various artists, *Tour-ismes. La derrota de la disseni. Itiniraris crítics, op. cit.:* 238.