

Now we have to quote Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak if we want to be modern, if we want to be “politically modern.” And not colonial. “To give voice,” is what English speakers call it, though the voice is always taken, never given. We must quote the last thing that the discourse of power has quoted in order to make it clear that we are knowledgeable, that we are a part of it. But quoting the source imposed by the center of power is more and more a colonial act.... Well then, I know about it but I don’t quote it. I decide to not incorporate it into my discourse. We don’t incorporate it. To counter Spivak, Clark. To counter this pseudo French theory, the *vulnerabilizado* or injured Portuguese discourse—though the problem is not Spivak but rather the army of people quoting her who think that Marx is a legendary activist and writer.

The fundamental question is, who manufactures narrative and from where? How do we truly write these particular stories in such a way that they bring us back to the same place every time? Why did Pollock as frozen by Namuth pass into history, while Fontana de Mulas did not, when, all things considered, the Argentine artist’s gesture of cutting the canvas was infinitely more radical? Could history be any different if Fontana had been presented as one of the key figures in the foundational narrative of modernity because cutting a canvas, even fifteen years later, is more radical than walking on one?

Thus, we could conclude with two short stories by Borges that act as metaphors of the hegemonic gaze—which observes the world from a fixed point and draws the world from that perspective, and which is now behind all the canon revisions, including the canons of art. The first is *Museo* (*Museum*, 1960) which talks about a vast and useless map, “de rigueur in science,” and an empire where, “The art of Geography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied an entire City.” The second pertains to his book *Atlas* (1984), in which Borges, now blind, travels the world—the atlas—without being able to see it or seeing it with different eyes from those of retinal vision.

While the first story speaks of the insane desire to control the world, to maintain the position of power that the West has in the world, and the failure to do so, in *Atlas* Borges talks about how enriching it is to find vulnerability in fragmentation, about the map that forces one to see in a new way, to break into pieces. “My physical body can be in Lucerne, Colorado or Cairo, but when I wake up each morning, as I once again take up the habit of being Borges, I invariably emerge from a dream that takes place in Buenos Aires.” Nevertheless, the question remains whether the Buenos Aires where one awakens in Lucerne, Colorado or Iceland is still the same Buenos Aires.

Conversation

Liliana Porter and José Luis Blondet

José Luis Blondet It seems right that this conversation take place on the stage of a theatre, since we’re talking to Liliana Porter, who’s persistently explored notions related to representation’s reach and limitations. Liliana once noted that seeing her work was like going to the cinema and watching a movie with the lights on. That is, everything around the film is as important as the film itself. Or that it’s like putting a little mystery—irrelevant yet colossal—in the center of a stage. The special effects and all the mechanisms surrounding it, that make the performance possible, are as important as the drama itself. We see both rehearsals and the final performance in the same act.

Talking to Liliana in a theatre—in a theatre in Mexico City—makes even more sense. Liliana began her career right here in Mexico City; she studied here several years, and she had her first show here, in 1957. This first exhibition of her prints and paintings (which to date was her only show in Mexico) was briefly reviewed by Juan José Arreola in an article entitled “Liliana Porter Gives Form to Fable” (*Liliana Porter da forma a la fábula*). Liliana swears that exhibition’s works have very little in common with her recent work, whose literary character is much more evident, featuring actors, stages, dramatic situations, dialogue and even lucid morals to the stories. But it seems as if the story-telling and fable-like qualities that operate in Liliana’s current work were present from the very beginning of her career, though perhaps only for those with a seasoned eye for fable and confabulations, as was the case with the renowned Arreola.

I promised Liliana that we wouldn’t talk about Jorge Luis Borges in this interview, nor about that world of similarities that unites them, and that once prompted her to say she wanted to paint like Borges wrote. And I’ll keep my promise after having mentioned the connection in her work with literary traditions of the fantastic, with the worlds of Arreola and Borges and several others. Liliana gives form to fable, and now it seems the case that’s she’s been doing it for some time.

One of the stories—the fables—that she managed to pull apart only to refashion it from its component parts—was the one that says printmaking is a medium limited to traditional technique. A printer and engraver by profession, Liliana tested printmaking’s limits from early on, and never let herself be trapped by the dictates of technique, but rather, questioned—modestly—the very ways in which a print creates meaning. These explorations coincided with those of Venezuelan artist José Guillermo Castillo and Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer, who, together with Liliana, founded the New York Graphic Workshop in 1965. They composed manifestos, they provoked outcries, participated in important shows and dramatically expanded the notion of

what a print is. At one point they proposed that any activity could be considered printmaking; even slicing a *chorizo* sausage could be printmaking.

Liliana Porter That was Luis. He began obsessively (and rather amusingly) to define what printmaking was—and came to the conclusion that if you slice a salami, every slice is like a random print, since the little globs of fat are not always in the same place, but at the same time the concept of *slice* repeats. By redefining printmaking we devised the concept of the multiple: a Coke bottle is a print and a car is a print.

JLB And that condition of the work commenting on its own limits has always been present. Maybe that's the story that runs through it all these years. Since the paintings of the 80's, that presented incomprehensible situations, lightly tinted by the absurd, and where encounters both perfectly logical and perfectly impossible took place in relation to the vastness of an impassable canvas. Of course, the question of who is it who paints what I'm painting—the question of which came first, the egg or painting, the chicken or the painter—is still with us.

But it's not until the 90's when those little silent toy or souvenir figurine armies begin to enter onto the scene, populating photographs, prints and films. With them, the *mise-en-scène* is clearer, and questions about the place of the artist in relation to the artwork's limits are subtler, more open to interpretation and also a little more ironic. To talk about this, we've chosen a few images from Liliana's work in the last ten to fifteen years, and these images will more or less structure the course of our conversation. Finally we'll show *Para usted (For You)*, Liliana's first film from 1999, a compilation of some twenty vignettes. And then—if time and patience permit—we'll take questions from the audience.

Well, I was going to say what I just said at the same time we'd have an image on the screen, but it looks like I didn't press the right button. So...

LP Stop: there it is.

JLB Right. It's probably been there for a long time. It's the famous finger piece...

LP Since you began talking so quickly, I didn't have the opportunity to say hello to anyone, or thank them... But I do want to say that I'm very happy to be here. Mexico is very important to me, because as José Luis said, I had my first show here and lived here for three years, from '58 to '61. I came when I was sixteen and studied at Iberoamericana University. Just the other day my brother Luis, who lives in Mexico City, invited me to eat at the San Angel Inn, and it dawned on me, as I spoke to people, that a lot of Mexicans are unaware that before it was a restaurant, it was Iberoamericana University, and it was a wonderful place. It was strange to be there, by the very same fountain, and I said to my brother, "Do you see that? That's the spot where I learned printmaking, where Mathias Goeritz corrected my work." The notion of time passing—so very much one of my themes—made everything doubly striking. But returning to my first thought, I wanted to thank Ivo Mesquita, who invited me to come, SITAC for organizing everything; thank you all for being here, and thank you, José Luis, for all those surprising

things you said. Though we've been talking for a long time, it was never on stage and under the spotlight.

JLB Nor before an audience. When Liliana's asked to talk about her work, she often begins by talking about one of her early pieces, where she drew a line at various moments in time, and where lines and time cut across her finger. A friend who's seen her prepare her remarks a number of times calls it "the finger speech." So let's begin there by sticking our finger right into it, as it were.

LP I do often choose this print, a photographic engraving from 1973, that was put together like this: I drew a line in ink on my hand and the line continues where my hand was before. I took a photo of it, and made a photographic engraving, printed it, and then continued drawing a line on it in pencil. So even though we see a coherent line from start to finish, not only is it constituted at different times, but in different media. This is a concept that interests me: fragmentation, how we reorder reality and the understanding we have of time. I'd like to think that if I made this print or drew this line again, from start to finish there would be an interval of more than thirty years.

JLB I think it's in *La explicación (The Explanation)*, a painting from 1991, where a couple of those little figures first appear, the ones that will assume such a prominent place in your work, and will even end up being movie stars.

In this, their first entrance onto the stage of your work, two diminutive little characters appear as if lost in the middle of this big canvas, since the painting stretches out to something like four meters.

LP It's pretty big. That was the first time I created a dialogue, the confrontation between two unlike characters. Then I developed other dialogues with other characters and in other media. In this case it was a serious man wearing a hat and a baby chick. You're more familiar with the man in the hat, since you're Venezuelan... Can you tell me who he is?

JLB José Gregorio Hernández is a saint—I think he's known here as well—a popular saint born at the beginning of the 20th century in Isnotú, in the Venezuelan Andes. He was a doctor known for his generosity, who was run over and killed by a car as he crossed the street to buy medicine for a very sick woman. He almost immediately began to be venerated by the masses. He's a very interesting personality: a holy scientist. But I should confess a tiny disappointment. One time I asked Liliana how she ended up working with José Gregorio's image. Her answer was a little bit disconcerting to me; she chose it because it looked like a Magritte, not because it had any...

LP True. What happened was that I was in Colombia, right at the time I was working on a series based on Magritte's work. So I was walking by one of those places where they sell religious articles, and I saw a whole row of Virgin Marys and a whole row of this guy with the hat. And I thought, "What is Magritte doing here?" I grew worried. They said he was an underground Venezuelan saint who hadn't been beatified yet...

JLB But what's more powerful is that if he were beatified...

LP But it's within the narrative that maybe he's a saint, or maybe he's an Argentine guy with a hat standing in front of this baby chick. That's what I like. The curious part of this piece is that it recounts its entire storyline as if this had been in place before the painting itself was executed, but in fact when you start composing the piece, you put all these elements into it and you say, "Ok, that's cool," but you don't know why or anything else about it. Then those black surfaces and that long cloth came into it, like some sort of formalist perversion, that sort of echoes the man who's explaining something to the baby chick. Then comes the title, because you finally begin to know what it is you've done, that maybe what you've done is... I like the idea that this man is explaining something to the baby chick, which means that there is an explanation, and the hope that there might be one is tremendous.

JLB But it's an explanation that doesn't leave the painting, but rather stays within it; we're witnesses to the fact that the explanation takes place, but the painting in no way concerns itself with whatever it is that's explained. The painting's whole background, that serves as the stage where these two improbable characters can meet and where the explanation can take place, are monochromatic panels. I wonder if these panels somehow relate to certain traditions in modern painting. Is that something that interests you? Is the idea to comment that *the explanation* could exist within the painting's own explorations, or is that not the case?

LP No.

JLB [laughter] Ok. Next question... I'm sorry, did you want to say something else?

LP Yes, that in reality, formal considerations don't figure into *the way* the work is done. This is very important, obviously. Yes, form has its place, but not as a criterion for imagining the work. In reality the artwork could be literature, in the sense of something that has nothing to do with the formal or the visual.

JLB Yes, plus the piece is called *La explicación*. There's an emphasis in your work on the didactic; in the mechanisms with which teaching is constructed, later to be deconstructed. There's a moral to the story that we always miss. The straightening of a line, or an amendment to a plane, is a theme that frequently appears in drawings, prints and paintings. Various versions of the same problem: doodles that are corrected, as if doodles could be right or wrong.

LP Among the themes that interest me, one that always reemerges is that of corrections. Here you have a drawing in a notebook, what's called a Rivadavia notebook, the ones we used in elementary school in Buenos Aires, and this drawing is one in a series of eighteen that constitute one artwork. It's called *Him and Others*, and within these eighteen drawings many of the themes that interest me are enunciated. One of them is this one. This version of correction amuses me because it's absurd to correct a doodle—a doodle is always fine the way it is. The very concept of the doodle means it's impossible to do one poorly. It's absurd to correct a doodle, but there's

also a sad part, a pretentious part to it: the person who's doing the correcting knows what perfection is. What the drawing says—what it indicates—is the inability to understand.

JLB One of these doodles was at the center of an incident at MOMA.

LP [Silence]

JLB Do you remember that incident? Would you tell us the story? The painting was a still life with a pitcher...

LP No, it was not a pitcher.

JLB It wasn't a pitcher? And then they changed the...

LP The thing is that I told José Luis this story a long time ago... No, when MoMA had its Latin American art exposition, a long time ago, there was a picture—that you're confusing with another picture; it wasn't that one, but they do look alike—that showed Mickey Mouse and a mirror. The idea behind the picture was there was a toy that reflected a toy, that there was a Mickey Mouse, and that there was a shelf with a crayon on it, attached to the canvas. So you went from reality, the crayon, to an image, to an image of an image that was the reflection of an image that was the mirror. The work was in the show and one day the MoMA people called me. "We have a problem. A man came and stood in front of your picture, detached the crayon and drew all over it. It's a mess." The painting's owner was in Buenos Aires, either worried or pleased about the insurance settlement. Then they called me and I went to see it, and it turns out that in truth what the vandal did was better. I'd drawn this bold line, and I liked the idea that I'd left behind the instrument that had created the line, a somewhat obvious idea, but it worked. But when I'd drawn the line I was a little worried because if that line came out wrong, it would ruin the entire piece, so I'd drawn it somewhat timidly. But this vandal came along and drew it as I should have, and he did it right. So I said it was ok and re-signed the piece.

JLB So it was a collaboration! Another theme, another question that you formulate in different ways is the notion of the disguise of the disguise (*disfraz* in Spanish). A character hides behind a disguise that in fact exposes him.

LP I like the idea of *disguise* (in English) better than *disfraz*. It's not exactly a *disfraz*, but I don't know what its Spanish translation would be. The idea is that of a mask, of disguising yourself as something.

JLB There's a story of yours about how the drawings and annotations series in the Rivadavia notebooks came about. It concerns one of the first drawings, *Where Are You?* Will you tell it or shall I? I'm going to hand it off to you; you should tell it.

LP Ok. One of these sets of drawings (that we didn't bring) came about when I was an artist-in-residence in Italy, at the Civitella Ranieri Center in Umbertide, a wonderful place where they give you a private studio and an apartment inside a castle and you work for two months. At that point I was doing photography and when they invited me I said to myself, "Wow, I've never worked outside my own studio; what am I going to do?" So I carried some notebooks and photographs with me and I got these collages out of them.

I was about to fall asleep and I came up with this piece: a rabbit looking for a rabbit on the other side and where neither could see the other. The piece was called *Where Are You? ¿Dónde estás?* I was already in bed and so as not to forget I got up and sketched it quickly and said “I’ll do it right tomorrow,” but when I woke up, I saw that it was right as it was and it wasn’t necessary to do it on drawing paper. That how that series came about, that sort of very basic way of drawing, where I said “that’s it,” because you tend to want to do a “finished” version of things and sometimes that ruins everything.

JLB One tends to do the finished version and discard the draft, but in this case the draft itself is the finished work.

LP We’ve skipped the first piece—we didn’t say anything about it.

JLB It was supposed to be in the background while we spoke. Shall we continue with *El mago (The Wizard)* and the *Magrittes* series, so we don’t break the image sequence we put together?

LP The series consists of very small prints. This print, for instance, is from 1975 and belongs to a series about Magritte. But it’s not about Magritte.

JLB No. *Ceci n’est pas un Magritte*.

LP It began because I had a book by Susi Gablik of Magritte reproductions. You always have recurring themes, and my theme is the questioning of, or fascination with, the limit between the real and the virtual, between image and name. The book was on the table, opened to a page with a reproduction of the man whose face is covered by an apple, and there were some apples right by the book. So then I put a real apple on top of the reproduction of an apple, and this interested me quite a bit; so in my work *El mago*, where there are so many hands attending to the character, I showed up with a fork and gave him something to eat.

JLB And so since you created these dialogues with reproductions of artworks, with Picasso prints, and Magritte pieces, you added yet another instance of dialogue. The dialogues anticipate the situations that would come with the little character figures. I should ask if this photograph means more to you as an object or as an artwork by Magritte.

LP For me Magritte’s work and the book of reproductions are part of reality, objects that we see and incorporate into our experience, so I don’t separate what a work of art is from what any object is. I’m using them, but semi-collective memory is also useful. It’s nice you know it’s a Magritte.

JLB The same thing happens with José Gregorio Hernández’s story. It’s nice to know it’s not a Magritte. Let’s talk about the *Diálogos (Dialogues)* series, and in particular about the dialogue that we’re showing here (and I’m not referring to our dialogue). Let’s talk about the photograph where a stylized sculpture and a sort of not-so-bright-looking toy are in dialogue.

LP My work has incorporated photography from the very beginning. But I am not a photographer. I always used photography so I could then transfer it to a silkscreen, an etching or even a canvas; but photography interested me because I wanted these

objects to take on a certain reality and not be so contaminated by my interpretation, as would be the case if I’d drawn them instead of photographing them. I wanted them to be as objective as possible, if indeed anything can be objective. Nowadays I don’t think photography is seen in that way, but up to about ten minutes ago it was thought to be the most objective medium, the one closest to reality. In any case, the year I began doing photography—designed to end up as photography—was 1995.

JLB It’s curious that these *Diálogos* are so named since they are exchanged glances, encounters between two objects that you place there and make look at each other, for an eternity. They’re very silent works, yet you call them *Diálogos*. So these dialogues change into situations.

LP In the *Diálogos* what interests me is the confrontation of dissimilar situations. For example, a little doll face-to-face with a character on a postcard. In this case, I’m amused by the idea that a little doll converses with or faces a sculpture, or that the sculpture fancies itself as enjoying physical existence, and that in that moment it becomes human and doesn’t die.

JLB Almost all these dialogues are just an exchange of glances and I’m intrigued that one of the first situations, this one, with the girl and the penguin, is precisely the scene where the penguin looks right into the little girl’s eyes, right into her gaze.

LP [*To audience*] He chooses the images and he changes them so they’ll be a surprise. They’re situations...

JLB But this *Situación* began as a diptych.

LP It is a diptych. This image was the same but separate, one photo of the penguin and another of the little girl, but it seemed like they were getting along well...

JLB It seemed like there was going to be a dialogue and that turned into a situation. From this situation we move on to one of the most recent ones we’re showing, *Rojo con águila (Red and Eagle)*, where we see a little Indian souvenir lined up with a gold-headed imperial eagle. And to finish it all off, this intense red background. This one’s from this year, right?

LP Yes. Here you don’t see it that red, but it’s a very intense red, a duraflex. It’s a photograph in which color is very important and very brilliant...

JLB Not to mention the title...

LP Yes, it’s called *Red and Eagle*.

JLB The reason I included this image in the presentation is that I find it interesting how political commentary enters into your work, always very obliquely, very much to the side, in an effect like an image in a poem.

LP In reality, they’re both present at once, and I see that it works. All the rest of it, the interpretations, I leave to them [the audience]. It’s not that I have an interpretation and I give it to them. I’m listening, not talking. That’s the way it works.

JLB When I look at my watch I see we have to pick up the pace. I’ll move through the images more quickly; I’m anxious to hear your comments.

LP This is a triptych, a digital photograph, called *Striptease with Nazi*.

JLB A scene in three acts: the bust of the Nazi in a woman's dress, then the second photo with the dress almost on the ground, and then the last one where we see the nude Nazi (that is, the Nazi dressed as a Nazi).

LP It's a mini-animation.

JB And this Nazi is absolutely a character that shows up in films, and photographs, and who always carries an important sexual signification with him. In the film there's a very moving love story, in which this very same Nazi ends up passionately kissing a ceramic dog.

LP But that's in the film we're not going to show. What's great about this character is his worried face.

JLB He's wearing make-up as well...

LP But that's who he is.

JLB The next image is *Please Don't Move*, where we see quite a few small figures posing in front of your camera lens.

LP *Please Don't Move*. Basically it's my cast of characters.

JLB It takes a while to notice that the piglet has a camera in his hands. The photo can also work in mirror image: them photographing us. The piglet could be the one asking us not to move.

LP What happened was that I arranged them and I took the photo, but since I'm not a photographer, I always have these feelings of guilt, and I say "Oh, this part's out of focus," and I realized that the only part of the photo that was in focus was the photographer, so it was perfect that I said "*Please, don't move.*" In addition to the humor in telling inanimate characters not to move.

JLB This is like a printing plate, a mirror that's taking a photo of this dysfunctional family, as Estrella de Diego said in an essay about your work. We're going to have to hurry up in order to show the film. Let's show some of the *Reconstrucciones (Reconstructions)*. The representation is similar in these works: a broken or ruined figure is shown on one plane, while in another we see it perfectly reconstructed. It seems like one of those before-and-after TV commercials. A lot of people see hope in these works, because they show that it's possible to reconstruct something—this Mickey Mouse that's been hammered to death in the artwork. However, the trick is...

LP What, there's a trick?

JLB ...that there's only one Mickey who's been reconstructed. Go ahead and tell us the story...

LP There's a disruption in time, because it's a photo where we see the shattered-glass Mickey, and there's a shelf with the real, intact Mickey Mouse in front of the photo. It's impossible that the first one be the one on the shelf, in perfect condition, and still be the one in the image, completely smashed; so there's this strange, hopeful situation, because it's possible either to change the past, or reconstruct it so well that you don't note any fissures.

JLB These works mix up destruction and reconstruction, before and after. And you assert these reconstructions with very different sorts of objects: it could be Mickey Mouse or a little ceramic Chinese guy...

LP It's probably because of my tendency to print. It's hard for me to make a single thing; I need to do it over and over. When it's one artwork, I need to do it over and over in different ways.

JLB What makes you want to stop—to stop making versions of one of your themes?

LP When I finally understand. Or when I get over it.

JLB And you've continued working actively as a printer. This work that we're seeing, *Tigre (Tiger)*, is a tiger printed on paper, but at the same time we're looking at it, we also perceive the claw marks the animal has presumably left on the paper. There's an episode with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in which the latter complains that every time Don Quixote takes a blow, Sancho ends up with the bruises, and awakens the next day in all kinds of pain. I think there's a little bit of that going on here.

LP This is a woodcut, a xylograph, and after it's printed, I make the scratches. Deep down it's the same work as the one we showed at the beginning with the line and the finger, because two timeframes, two spaces, are joined: the one that corresponds to the paper where the scratches are, and the one that's the space where the tiger is.

JLB Well I hate to rush, but we should leave time to show the film. I want to show the forced perspective because although you've worked a lot with miniatures and small toys I think this is the first time that you've played with disproportion; not only with physical disproportion, but disproportion in terms of a task.

LP Just so you'll know, the figure is three centimeters high and is on top of a shelf; the whole thing comes together somewhere between amusing and dramatic.

JLB It's a tiny figure who's undertaking a colossal task. Whatever the material is that the figure has to work with—canvas, rocks, ropes—it's disproportionately large for the little laborer. Yet for the viewer it's an accumulation of material that doesn't present major surprises in terms of scale. There are various versions; here we have the stone one. Sometimes I think that if you paid the little figure, it would be one of Santiago Sierra's works... Finally we have the image of the dog.

LP Well, it's a dog disguised as a dog.

JLB You can't be more literal than a dog disguised as a dog. I think this has to do with the idea of fable, and the truncated moral, that can never be completely articulated, but that is present, given that didactic interest of yours. Now let's watch that film from 1999.

LP It's a short film, don't be scared...

JLB It's about fifteen minutes long and it's called *Para usted (For You)*.

JLB Let's open it up for questions. I think we have about 15 minutes.

Participant I want to congratulate Liliana on her use of things so seemingly innocuous as lightheartedness, but I believe she's asking, in my view, a question that's

almost existential or ontological—positing philosophical matters. So my question to Liliana is, apart from considerations of serious ingenuousness, or ingenuous seriousness, is there another philosophical support? I'd like to think so, but I'd like to know if it's in line with Heidegger's propositions in his book *Poetry, Language, Thought* where he discusses the transformation of the subject through the experience of art, or art as an ontological transformation. Heidegger's idea is of aesthetic experience as a transformation of the subject in the battle between "the World" and "the Earth." Here we see earthly materials squaring off in battle with the world in which we humans participate and which art takes hold of to produce that spark and that transformation. I don't know if there's any Heidegger behind Liliana's ideology, so that's my question.

LP Well, you all would have to tell me that, because I'm neither a philosopher nor a theorist, and I simply enunciate the things that concern me. I'm not really even saying anything; I just present situations that allow me to think and come to terms with reality. So that's my answer.

Participant My question is this: Where in your life do those little figures come from? Did you relate to them when you were a girl, or had you never seen them before and that was why they seemed so funny to you? What is your relationship to them?

LP Well, I get them at flea markets, antique stores and places like that. When I think about it—because I'm often asked how I choose them—I'd say I know them when I see them, but I have to look at them closely and think about what they're like. What they have in common are their expressions, like they don't understand that much, that they're perplexed. Most are from the time when I was baby, so I'd never choose a Barbie, because I never played with one and there's no empathy there. Some are toys and others are knickknacks. For me knickknacks are a mystery: that someone would take a glass rabbit, put it on a shelf and think that's normal. Now since I'm so immersed in all this, I note that most of the umbrellas have a duck-head and that the salt-shakers are bears; that there are animals everywhere. It's gotten so that now that my house is in the Hudson Valley, where deer still live—and although I moved there long ago—when a deer shows up in my yard, it's like something out of Walt Disney for me. It's the same as the first deer I saw in the movies when I was a girl, so I have to intellectualize the fact that it's an animal, that it's alive and all that.

Participant I just want to ask if you're married.

LP I'm twice divorced, which is to say *no*. Are you making a proposal?

JLB Careful. This could constitute forced labor...

LP Thank you very much.

JLB Thanks to all.

Translated by Michael Parker Stainback.

Conversation

Leandro Erlich and Ivo Mesquita

Ivo Mesquita Now we're going to move on to a conversation with Leandro Erlich, who arrived this morning after a long flight and some of the airport adventures that are becoming more and more common these days, what with the different companies and visas, etc. I'd like to welcome him here and tell you all that I have been interested in Leandro's work since I first met him in Houston in the mid-1990s. This is something that happens nowadays: a Brazilian and an Argentinean meeting somewhere like Houston, when they're practically neighbors back home. I've been following his career since that meeting. [Someone discreetly turns the name plates on the table around, because they have been placed backwards, but Ivo turns them back.] No, no, it's an amalgam of the artist and the curator, an appropriation. They say that we curators are constantly appropriating artists' intelligence.

Let's begin our conversation with an initial description of Leandro's work over the last ten years, and then, given that these projects are installations where the public plays an important role in terms of how the project is presented—always theatrical in appearance and with audience involvement, seducing the spectator through a play of perception and illusion until the entire work is revealed—we will show some videos which demonstrate how these installations work.

Leandro Erlich Thank you, Ivo, for the invitation, and thanks to everyone here. I think it would be a good idea to look at some images before I start speaking, to give you an idea of the kind of work I've been doing in recent years. To begin with, as a sort of an introduction, let me tell you that my work is connected to architecture. The work acts as a scene where the public is invited to interact and to play a determined role. The script for this scene is suggested, in a sense, by the space, but then it is transformed into an experience based on previous experiences and the referential aspect of the work.

I'll start with *The Elevator*, from 1995, because chronologically speaking, it marked the beginning of the work I would develop later. It is a work where the anecdotal... Well, I'm going to tell you an anecdote that led up to this work, and I'm also going to tell you that I come from a family of architects. My father, my brother and my aunt are all architects, but my only interest in architecture is as a lived experience, because I believe that physical spaces are the stages where our lives and our emotions are played out. What happens is that in most cases, we aren't continuously aware of the space where things happen. Perhaps out of an ambition to be hyperrealistic, all my projects are quite large, because it's important that this elevator—now I will explain the work—be life-size: it's not a representation of an elevator but rather the intention of *making* an