

Volume II - Ana Navas & Marisol Rodríguez

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Over the course of two months, Ana Navas and I developed the following dialogue. Made through a back and forth of emails, our conversation was greatly enriched by visits to her current studio at the *Fondation Fiminco* (2020-2021) in the outskirts of Paris, where I saw her works on different stages of development and in between lockdowns.

Born in Ecuador but immigrated to Venezuela at an early age, Ana Navas is a nomad. Her references are abundant, her works often deceiving as they juggle with the languages of modern art turned kitsch, and of contemporary art turned the lingua franca of global marketing. Hiding beneath mysterious surfaces and provocative forms is a carefully constructed imaginary that resonates beyond geographies one that questions our own stance on this hyper aesthetization we've become so accustomed to, so versed in.

Ana and I enjoyed exploring all these ideas together. Hopefully this format can help you, the reader, discover her

work and thoughts more naturally. Welcome then.

Marisol Rodríguez

MARISOL How odd is it that being in the same city, it is just more convenient to exchange through email than in person. It is so because we are, on February 2021 when I'm writing these words, going through a worldwide pandemic that has us respecting a curfew from 6 pm to 6 am every day in all of France and in Paris, in extreme suburbs of which we both are. Is there a way that the work you are producing now -which is of course the result of many years of work and long-lasting research- can escape this simultaneously simple and mind bending fact?

ANA I would not call it an escape since this has impacted all of us in different ways, but I definitely think my personal working situation has been less affected from this fact than other people's and that my work has been a good company for me lately. As you know, I am doing now an artist residency program at *Fondation Fimenco* in Romainville. We are a group of artists who live and work in the same building, so I can still decide much of my own working schedule and I am enjoying the other participants' company, which is also good in terms of keeping a social routine. We are living odd times, that is unquestionable, but I do feel my current personal conditions are making them less tough.

"The video turned out as an exploration around basic notions on sculpture: mass, containers, emptiness, relation between positive and negative volumes, and the sequence ends when I hide a grapefruit inside of a watermelon."

MARISOL I'll do a self-serving flashback to the first time I consciously encountered your work, it was I believe in 2015 in the gallery *Proyecto Paralelo* in Mexico City. I don't remember what the exhibition was about but I remember seeing your work next to a piece by Melanie Smith. Yours was an installation [*Untitled (fruits)*, 2012] with a sort of self standing wooden shelf upon which stood a spherical watermelon and it also hid a projection on the wall in which fruits were seen being opened up by your hands to reveal other smaller fruits, what was this work about?

ANA It was a work I did around 2012. I remember the first note on my sketchbook about it said something like “to dress up a coconut as a watermelon”. I kept coming back to it without really knowing how to solve that idea, which I honestly just felt like executing. It could have possibly been a painting, but when I had the fruits in the studio I started to play with the shells and decided they should hide inside each other. The video turned out as an exploration around basic notions on sculpture: mass, containers, emptiness, relation between positive and negative volumes, and the sequence ends when I hide a grapefruit inside of a watermelon.

When I finished the video, I decided I wanted to show the end of the film from the first moment the viewer approaches the piece, creating a sort of spoiler, knowing how the film will end, but still keeping interest in watching the process. So, I exhibited a common watermelon, since the video ends with this fruit, and the idea is that only when the viewers approach it, they will discover the projection and the potential, so to say, hidden in that sphere. It is still a very important work for me since ideas around skins, costumes, mimicry or layers are still accompanying me nowadays.



Ana Navas, *Untitled (fruits)*, 2012, video, 4 min 20 sec

MARISOL I wanted to include this work in an exhibition proposal I was doing with the working title of *Trojan Taco*, which didn't happen at the time [Update: *Trojan Taco* will open at *Espacio Temporal* at Pantin in September 2021]. This is how we first got in contact and then we met in your residence at the *Cité des Arts* in... what year was it? What were you working on at the time?

ANA *Trojan Taco* sounds like an exciting title! Yes, we met at *Cité des Arts* in 2017, where I was preparing my show *I had to think of you* for the *Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen* in Germany. When I first visited that exhibition space I noticed the distribution of the rooms was quite symmetrical. I decided to use the central entrance room as a sort of introduction for the subjects and objects the

visitor would come across later: fashion, ideas around product and industrial design and gastronomy. A good example for this is a table containing different shapes of pastas in real size made of ceramics. These shapes would reappear at the end of the exhibition in huge forms painted on denim, where they became very graphic, looking more like an unknown alphabet. I organized the symmetrical rooms around the introductory space according to four categories: *urban*, *minimal*, *nature* and *modern*. One of the inspirations for the show was seeing the change on image and interior design in food franchises across the last decades. As we are about the same age, probably you also remember from our childhood how these places used to have basic white furniture, it was not the idea to sit there for long time anyway. I still visit these places often; the treatment of the surfaces imitating textures or coffee places hosting reproductions of iconic modern furniture pieces is something I feel close to my artistic research. In this sense, the titles I gave to the rooms are understood as atmospheres I wanted to have in each of them by re-ordering existing pieces of mine according to these themes.

“In general, my work is triggered by how art pieces and past art movements have an influence and circulate outside their own context.”

The idea of re-reading was very important for the whole show and was also part of the catalogue designed by my friend Santiago da Silva. As backdrops for my pieces, we used photographs I often receive from friends and acquaintances saying the image made them think of my own work. For me, this gesture provides an insight into how my work is influenced and understood by others.





Ana Navas, Nudeln, 2017, glazed ceramic, papier mâché, table, photo: Henning Krause



Detail: Ana Navas, Nudeln, 2017, glazed ceramic, photo: Henning Krause



Ana Navas, I had to think of you (Nudeln), installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



Ana Navas, I had to think of you (Nudeln), installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



Ana Navas, I had to think of you (Urban), installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



I had to think of you (Detail from Urban), Installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



I had to think of you (Modern), installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



I had to think of you (Detail from Modern), installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



I had to think of you (Minimal), installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



I had to think of you (Nature), installation view, Stadtgalerie Sindelfingen, 2017, photo: Henning Krause



Ana Navas, Column, 2017, Dyson fan, papier mâché, ink, child's chair, metal, artificial baguette and flower, 213 × 33 × 40 cm, photo: Henning Krause



Ana Navas, Land Art Drawings, 2015, paper, watercolor, pastel color powder, mirror, 23.5 × 33.5 each, photo: Henning Krause

MARISOL The arrival of McDonalds in Mexico was a big phenomenon, a very strong symbol after an economic and cultural crisis in the late 70s and 80s. Reading you reminded me of an essay by Olivier Debroise, where he uses this event to develop his critique around the use and exhibition of “Mexican” art, here goes a quote:

“In April 1985, the McDonalds chain opened the first of its Mexican franchises on a piece of land in the Periférico Sur. From the same day of the inauguration, immense lines of motorists parked on the side of the Periférico, in full sun, to devour, after two hours of patient waiting, a well-deserved Big Mac. The implantation of McDonalds in the country would not have greater importance, unless it was because, in the collective imagination of Mexico, it represented access to a new form of consumption with profound meanings. [...] Three years earlier, in September 1982, President López Portillo had declared, in an unprecedented tearful act, the bankruptcy of the national economic project, and a crisis was unleashed that had immediate, radical social, psychological and imaginary effects ... and definitive ones. The urban middle class, the bourgeois with savings with medium and long-term life projects were the most afflicted. In a matter of days, they began to modify their behavior greatly. In particular, their social behaviors. An inherited culture of saving was giving way to a culture of waste: money, today worthless, would be worth even less tomorrow. [...] The establishment of McDonalds, three years later, was experienced - and deliberately promoted - as a symbolic spearhead of a recovery of confidence. For its insertion, the American chain knew how to modify its profile and deliberately chose two peripheral areas in full suburbanization in the American style, the Periférico Sur and the Polanco area, also hiring its managers and employees among young people from active schools that corresponded ethnically to the bourgeoisie of the United States.” (Debroise, 1995 (published 2018): 107-109)

After this, local franchises quickly lost their little luster and they had to either rush to modernize or disappear, which happened to Burger Boy, the Mexican burger franchise that looked the way you describe, very basic, unremarkable. Despite all the differences and specificities, could we do a transfer of what Debroise describes for Mexico to your Venezuelan context? What do fast-food restaurants represent for you and why do this theme of food and the way food is scenographed is so important in your work?

“I ask myself, from a visual point, how an experience is created and I trace back the use of aesthetics of past art movements as, for example, modernism for this purpose; how does this (re)reading, (re)use and (re)interpretation of a movement contribute to the creation of a certain experience and which new associations are awakened through it?”

ANA I don't know the history of international franchises in Venezuela so I don't feel able to establish a comparison, but I mentioned these childhood memories earlier because I can clearly remember my first encounters with these spaces. My family moved from Ecuador to Venezuela in 1992 and, except from local ones as you are describing, I had not visited international food franchises before – I only knew them from movie scenes. However, I would say it is rather the increasing emphasis put on aesthetics during the past decades, which these spaces exemplify, that interests me the most for my work.

In general, my work is triggered by how artworks and past art movements have an influence and circulate outside their own contexts. In this frame, branding is interesting to me for two reasons. On one side, I have often wondered if the core of conceptual art (broadly, the centrality of the idea over its material execution) could eventually have had a relation to the development of branding as a strategy where lifestyle and representation (what a brand stands for), and not the product itself, are the keys to a marketing proposal.

Secondly, I ask myself, from a visual standpoint, how consumer experiences are created and then I trace the use of the aesthetics of past art movements, for example, Modernism, for this purpose: how does this (re)reading, (re)use and (re)interpretation of a movement contribute to the creation of a certain experience, and what new associations are awakened through it?

Restaurant franchises are only one example of these experiential ambiances. As I explained before, my work is quite material. Observing how these physical spaces are organized in order to accompany our basic needs with an almost “spiritual” component is stimulating for me.



Ana Navas, *Plates (in Process)*, 2021, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, 27,5 cm Ø, photo: Berke Gold



Ana Navas, *Plates (in Process)*, 2021, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, 22 cm Ø, photo: Berke Gold



Ana Navas, Department store, 2020, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, 26 x 29 cm, photo: Charlott Markus



Ana Navas, Plates (in Process), 2021, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, 21,5 cm Ø, Photo by Berke Gold



Ana Navas, Felino sobre cielo / Felino sobre turquesa, 2018, fabric, foam, acrylic, 65 x 65 cm each

MARISOL There is so much to unpack here because reading you makes me think of the now well explored ideology of the white cube but moreover about how the “art insider look” became the fashion trend of the last decade (according to The Guardian). “Art” as a category of experience has been clearly branded and you can now buy it and integrate it into your overall consumption experiences.

“You work precisely with these notions and same materials, this is the cycle of transformation of art that is at the heart of your work I think, but you go into the cycle and keep it going, you don’t stop it and take out your magnifying glass to see a dissected instant from it. You seem to buy into it, use it, and see where it takes you.”

ANA Yes, to think almost about an expansion of the white cube, less in its framing sense, but rather in the arising importance of aesthetics in the most little and intimate details of daily life maybe? How do you see this?

MARIBOL Yes, I guess western societies have become very aware of these languages of the art worlds because marketing has fully integrated them into their vocabulary, a result of art being so extremely commodified in the last 20-30 years. Being part of any art world has become an aspiration, a synonymous to a kind of luxury that is totally mundane but also intellectual and cool, and this is something you can buy and sell. The aura of anything initially legitimate dissipates very quickly (I'm thinking for instance of how something is hyped in social media by influencers) and can be cut into pieces and sold for parts very fast, the products that result can then go to all kinds of markets, from savvy and expensive looks created by Celine, to semi-industrially produced paintings and other "artworks" [Update: in the process of creating this text, we became acquainted with the notion of NFTs], like funky reproductions of Lucio Fontana's Spatial concept works made for hotel chains or fast food courts for instance, or going further I think about how the languages of painting and modern sculpture are translated into fabrics that are industrially produced in China, sold, and turn into cushions and duvets by sewing enthusiasts around the world. You work precisely with these notions and same materials, this is the cycle of transformation of art that is at the heart of your work I think, but you go into the cycle and keep it going, you don't stop it and take out your magnifying glass to see a dissected instant from it. You seem to buy into it, use it, and see where it takes you. I think your most recent series of *Platos* (Plates) is a very clear example of how you explore the circulation and transformation of art movement's aesthetics, and we can clearly use them to think about those pre-globalized food courts too. Tell me more about this series, when did it start?

"I used rectangular gears for bags or belts as frames for paintings by Lee Lozano, Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois or Agnes Martin. Another one, referring to the notion of monument, was titled "Lo que me acuerdo de la mitad del mundo" remembering a monument dedicated to latitude 0 in my native Quito-Ecuador. A third one from that time made reference to my interest in potential meeting points between "high" and popular culture on a plate which combined bracelets woven with names with text transformed into an "Eva Hesse TOM Selena a ti

transformación en Eva Hesse TQM, Selena, a ti también".

ANA I started this series in 2019 at the residency program *Cbarco-Granero* in León Guanajuato, where a lot of raw material is sold for the manufacture of footwear and bags. I used a large part of textiles and vinyl for the residency's main body of work (which were costumes for objects). There is also a large part of the industry in León dedicated to making accessories, buckles, bijouterie and decoration material. I am mentioning this because in the plates I am careful of not using pre-done small objects like the ones for architecture models. I rather want to provide those tiny fragments, decorative pieces or even small waste material from the industry a new meaning by arranging them for a new scene. The first plates that accompanied the costumes for objects served to reveal some references present in the costumes. One of the first plates, for example, was titled *My favorite female artists*, where I used rectangular gears for bags or belts as frames for paintings by Lee Lozano, Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois or Agnes Martin. Another one, referring to the notion of monument, was titled *Lo que me acuerdo de la mitad del mundo* remembering a monument dedicated to latitude 0 in my native Quito-Ecuador. A third one from that time made reference to my interest in potential meeting points between "high" and popular culture on a plate which combined bracelets woven with names with text transformed into an *Eva Hesse TQM, Selena, a ti también*. For the final exhibition in León (Ana Navas & Kiko Pérez, *Sumas y Restas. Es más fácil saber cómo se hace una cosa que hacerla*, Instituto Cultural de León) the plates served as a kind of footnote. I liked the experience of being able to see in the foreground a sculpture in relation to furniture, appliances and therefore proportions close to the body (as in the case of the costumes for objects) and then approach the miniatures on the plates, like a zoom out / zoom in movement for the visitor.

From that first presentation, I liked and kept the idea of the plates as a format to share my references and inspiring scenes; precisely as the franchises we were talking about, but also forms of displays, sculptures' and children's parks, souvenir shops, museums and, in general, different ways to understand and order objects. Sometimes, when having the opportunity to do a talk on my artistic work, I share a section of photos from my personal archive, hoping people can read some of my interests between that conglomerate of images. I think of the plates in a similar way now: they are an index of the scenes that inspire me. And I confess the isolation of the pandemic has also done its thing in finding concentration and pleasure in carefully painting well-known scenes from the outside world.





Ana Navas, Indianerbrunnen, 2019, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, photo: Diego Torres



Ana Navas, Sculpture garden, 2019, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, Ø 28 cm, photo: Diego Torres



Ana Navas, *White elephant contemplating Modernism*, 2019, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, 25 x 30 cm



Ana Navas, *Vandalism*, 2019, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, 20 x 30 cm



Ana Navas, *Lo que me acuerdo de la mitad del mundo*, 2019, plastic plate, acrylic, fabric, trinket, Ø 25 cm, photo: Diego Torres





Ana Navas with Kiko Pérez, Sumas y Restas, Instituto Cultural de León, 2019, photo: Diego Torres

MARISOL You started this particular series inspired by the proximity of the garment-industry in León but you had used before materials related to fashion, like when you used denim as canvases for your large-format paintings. In retrospect that work that I saw *Proyecto Paralelo* seems like a seed you planted from which a bunch of cross-dressed appliances have born. Tell me about them.

“There is for example a luggage trolley dressed up as a Donald Judd or an ironing board reminiscing of a Barbara Hepworth. I match the measurements of the costumes with the standard ones of their wearers. This means that I theoretically could take only the textile with me

and dress up the object on spot.”

ANA Yes. I think many artists have moments where they look back at a work that was so different in the outcome but still close related in contents to a recent one. The projects directly related to fashion and costumes started many years later, between 2018 and 2019. In 2018, during a residency at *Escuela Flora Ars Natura* in Bogotá, I produced a series of assemblages inspired by the notion of “power dressing”, an 80’s fashion trend that focused in supporting the executive woman aiming to break through the glass ceiling. The pieces departed from either a key component from this fashion theme (as, for example, the pussy bow) or a fictional accessory – nonexistent in the market but aligned with the trend (as, for example, foam’s shapes to hide the waist or ‘sideburns’ jewelry to be attached to the ear). Around these central elements defining each assemblage, I played with patterns, textures, bijouterie, found objects, among others. My process ended up in collage like pieces displayed on the wall, but it was the first time I created elements that could be potentially used, as the fictional accessories inserted on them I just mentioned.



Ana Navas, *Sunset*, 2018, carpet, fabric, shoulder pads, acrylic, bijouterie, 220 x 75 cm, photo: Otto Polman



Ana Navas, *Waist Pad (after Moore) (Detail)*, 2018, pvc, acrylic, fabric, foam, plastic, 140 × 100 cm



Ana Navas, *Nuez de Adán (Detail)*, 2018, fabric, silicone, plastic, silver 147 × 82 cm, photo: Sebastian Kissel

As you know, I have changed places in the last years quite often and I do think this was important for how I thought of the second series on garments. Basically, I wanted to connect different daily objects to what could have been their far artistic ancestor in terms of visual language. There is for example a luggage trolley dressed up as a Donald Judd or an ironing board reminiscing of a Barbara Heptworth. I match the measurements of the costumes with the standard ones of their wearers. This means that I theoretically could take only the textile with me and dress up the object on spot.



Ana Navas, Mirror, fabric, 2019, styrofoam, metal, approx 17 × 29 × 10 cm, photo: Antonin Giroud-Deloorme





Ana Navas, *Excuses (Meret and Henry)*, 2009, ironing board, fabric, acrylic paint, 85 × 120 × 35 cm, photo: Diego Torres



Ana Navas, *Ear III*, 2009, vacuum cleaner, fabric, acrylic, 88 × 40 × 35 cm, photo: Diego Torres

MARISOL Do you have a clear feminist stance when you create those works referencing Barbara Hepworth? Or when you did the plate you mentioned before inspired by Lee Lozano, Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois or Agnes Martin?

“It is important for me that the viewer, independently of my original conceptual approach, can visually relate to the pieces, their materiality and ways of being executed, making use of the historical consensus, contextual associations and implications each material embodies.”

ANA Yes, but I also feel that stance emerges naturally. I don't see the term feminist as a category to make use of. I would say it accompanies me during the creation, more than me seeking for it as a prior goal. Regarding content, it is true that I am often interested in working with objects related to domestic space and labor—such as the disguises you mentioned—and also those specific moments in which gender's reading is exposed and negotiated, as in the fashion of power dressing, which was the departure point for the assamblages series. However, even more than in particular subjects, at the level of materials and execution in general, I am interested in the quality and strength of the manual work: approaching, copying and translating through the hand feels for me like a way to appropriate and rewrite. Many of my pieces are produced with my body as an (absent or present) intermediary, they cover objects I used daily; I disguise my own body with them. It is important to me that the viewer, independent of my conceptual approach, relates to the pieces visually, to their materiality and manner of execution and can make use of the historical consensus, contextual associations, and implications each material embodies.

In 2019, the *Espacio de Arte Contemporáneo (ESPAC)* in Mexico City invited me to participate in their series *Libros Proyecto*, where I could select someone to accompany my work in a text format. I invited my friend and performance artist Sarina Scheidegger to react precisely to the disguises' collection and the Power Dressing's assamblages. I invited Sarina because I admire her work, but also because she had seen the pieces personally and knew their process and materiality very well. Sarina created a series of songs for each of them, which for the moment only exist as texts. I mention this collaboration because it is a good example of a moment where a feminist voice raised with clarity. Sarina reacted in her texts to my pieces' materials and execution, providing them with a character, language form and a strong stance, and I really liked the result. I would not feel able to do this myself, which is why I appreciate collaborations like this a lot. I feel the domain of my work is to visually spark associations' chains, but how would you read this subject in my work in general?

“For me this is as if the art experience has been so commodified that not only you can buy the “power” and “art insider” look for yourself [Update: In the process of creating this conversation the Louvre Museum ‘dropped’ a collection in partnership with Uniqlo], but also for your objects, like someone that buys a Starbucks mug to drink their morning coffee.”



Tiene palabras, ella, 2020, Ana Navas and Sarina Scheidegger, Libros Proyecto, ESPAC México

MARISOL Mh... I think its overall subtle but its becoming more and more clearly present in recent works. In the *Platos* is right there, the act itself of dissecting the values of Modern art and turning them into miniatures that you re-assemble using the visual cues of kitsch and handcrafts takes me directly to the questionings that have become so (positively) mandatory now, about how the works developed by female artists at the time (simultaneously say, to abstract expressionism) were being obscured or ignored in favor of the grandness of the lone-male-genius myth. The act of creating these miniature spaces so full of images and symbols and colors its also a tong-in-cheek commentary about this, its like the total reverse of the values that were so elevated during the XXth century history of art, that is how I read them. And I love the book with Sarina Scheidegger where she created lyrics to accompany your works, its called *Tiene palabras, ella* (She has words, her), and the cover immediately creates those sparks and associations. In it we see a sculpture that consists of a traveling suitcase disguised as a feminized stack sculpture by Donald Judd, it looks as if the suitcase put on a hoodie and its also holding a microphone. For me this is as if the art experience has been so commodified that not only you can buy the "power" and "art insider" look for yourself [Update: In the process of creating this conversation the *Louvre Museum* 'dropped' a collection in partnership with Uniqlo], but also for your objects, like someone that buys a Starbucks mug to drink their morning coffee. The choice of objects is also very clever, very intimate in the case of the suitcase (because you've been a nomad for some time) but then in the series you are working on now you use objects like containers for cleaning products, plastic brooms and other appliances which we never see and they are very difficult to recognize, they get lost under their artistic disguise, or maybe they become a new entity, no longer a disguise, as if you made them go through a full circle to be re-introduced to the realm of art.

"My first and main idea was to make costumes that their recipients (being art pieces in museums) could never wear, partly as an imagination exercise. However looking closely at their images, analyzing their shapes in order to translate them to textiles and paying attention to their silhouettes made me even more aware in daily situations of products and packaging that were similar to the formal vocabulary I was working with in the studio."

ANA Yes, the objects that I disguise are changing and I think saying I made them go through a full circle to be re-introduced to the realm of art is an accurate way to describe the current process. There are still decisions to be taken, but in the studio I feel three main differences of these new costumes in comparison to the previous ones.

As you point out, the first one is the different objects from which I am departing. I started now copying modern sculptures on Styrofoam, based on photographs and captions of the original pieces. My first and main idea was to make costumes that their recipients (being art pieces in museums) could never wear, partly as an imagination exercise. However, looking closely at their images, analyzing their shapes in order to translate them into textiles (with the help of the fashion designer Ida-Simone Brerup, who is very talented in pattern making) and paying attention to their silhouettes made me even more aware in daily situations of products and packaging that were similar to the formal vocabulary I was working with in the studio. Thus, the objects for the first costumes were based on my proximity to them, while these second ones share a common reduced, curvy, organic vocabulary observed in both, a selection of past modern sculptures and current inexpensive daily products.

“I copy by myself the motifs of these industrial fabrics to return them to their original hand-quality. The sequence of this is described in my notes as: manual work / industrial imitation of the first / manual work of my authorship imitating the second.”

The second difference is that I have not dismissed the idea of displaying the costume without its wearer, meaning that the resulting textiles can be presented autonomously. Maybe this is easier to visualize with an example of a piece we all know. It is like if before I had thought about presenting a t-shirt together with a mannequin and now I am interested alone in the abstract shape of the open cutting pattern of the t-shirt, as an exercise to imagine the body that could wear that shape. I see these ‘skins’ now as a shapes’ family, regardless of their different origins (art pieces and daily products) they keep a certain unity and, showed flat, they can work for me as paintings.

The third difference is the materials I am choosing to work on these two-dimensional shapes. I have been looking for industrial textiles that mostly imitate hand gestures, for example, a blanket with a print imitating an artisanal technique such as the Shibori (a Japanese textile dye) or a pattern for furniture based on Kandinsky's paintings. Being interested in the origin and future of an object, I copy by myself the motifs of these industrial fabrics to return them to their original hand-quality. The sequence of this is described in my notes as: manual work / industrial imitation of the first / manual work of my authorship imitating the second.



Ana Navas, *Work in process*, 2021, 98 x 50 x 50 cm, photo: Berke Gold





Ana Navas, Work in process, 33 × 35 × 23 cm, 2021, photo: Berke Gold



Ana Navas, Work in process, 2021, 64 × 27 × 25 cm, photo: Berke Gold



Ana Navas, Work in process, 2021, video: Berke Gold



Ana Navas, Work in process (fabrics), 2021, photo: Berke Gold

"We have mentioned during our conversation how I work with the idea of what remains of an art movement, its domesticated versions so to speak. For the Taras, I am interested again in this washed-out image, in this case

around painting.”

MARIBOL I want to ask you about the works *Taras*, which are padded canvases where you make pictorial collages with forms inspired by modernist art. At what moment do these works arise?

ANA There are different padded paintings under a same principle which are titled *Taras*, I finished the newest one this year and started them around 2018. We have mentioned during our conversation how I work with the idea of what remains of an art movement, its domesticated versions so to speak. For the *Taras*, I am interested again in this washed-out image, in this case around painting.

The methodology I use is to search mainly on the Internet for terms such as abstract painting, contemporary painting or modern painting and mostly observe the first results as for example, images from online decoration stores or potential backdrop images from image banks. I start to group them according to gestures that keep repeating, as for example drippings or strokes with a spatula. I then paint in a second step representations of these groups or prototypes. Finally, a selection of these prototypes is stitched on a monochromatic cotton with a padded frame creating a soft painting based on painting gestures.

“And you told me that there is also a shock upon seeing them because these are works that don’t attempt to be pretty. I like this, how you follow the nature of these objects to be awkward, its certainly absurd to say because these are works of your creation, but for me it’s as if you respect them as if they are characters with their own personalities and you follow them where they take you...”

Every *Tara* has a vertical seam dividing the surface in two and allowing it to be easily folded on that spot. When hung, that seam must be placed in a corner of the space. With this small rule I intend to break the idea of painting as an autonomous space and to place the *Taras* in dependence to its surrounding, making the piece closer to how textiles are placed in utilitarian spaces (curtains, tapestries) and, therefore, to ideas from interior design or decoration.



Ana Navas, *Tara IV*, 2019, acrylic, fabric, fake leather, 126 × 187 cm

MARISOL And they are placed rather high on the corner of a space. I remember when we saw one in your studio I told you what a sight that would be because these are very strange objects, like they are trying to escape the exhibition space, somewhere between domestic object and work of art standing still in an upper corner watching you from above, like a spider. And you told me that there is also a shock upon seeing them because these are works that don't attempt to be pretty. I like this, how you follow the nature of these objects to be awkward, it's certainly absurd to say because these are works of your creation, but for me it's as if you respect them as if they are characters with their own personalities and you follow them where they take you...

“I departed from the question what a sculpture looks like, means which characteristics does an object need to possess to be identified unequivocally as such. It seemed logical to me to look then closer into how sculpture has been popularly represented, in television, theater sets, catalogues for hobby materials and books on learning how to sculpt.”

ANA I could not agree more. *Tara* is also the name we give in Venezuela to black, big butterflies that usually place themselves on upper corners of spaces. They are seen as ugly and as signs of bad luck even.

MARISOL On the other hand you've also been working on a series of large format sculptures where you address the concepts upon which our knowledge of modern sculpture was built historically, like their monumentality, so-called purity of forms, and essentially the prescience of the male gaze on the selection of themes and valid sensibilities. But, wait! I think I recognise the form of a Nespresso machine in one of your sculptures? Tell me about these...

ANA Actually those sculptures work on a very similar principle than the *Taras*, even though I produced them much earlier, around 2014. I departed from the question what a sculpture looks like, means which characteristics does an object need to possess to be identified unequivocally as such. It seemed logical to me to look then closer into how sculpture has been popularly represented, in television, theatre sets, catalogues for hobby materials and books on learning how to sculpt. In these different sources, I started to notice visual repetitions, as the prototypes I

was mentioning when describing the *Taras*. Smoothing the rough material and leaving one part of it in its original texture, two forms melting into one or one element embracing or supporting a fragile one, in a tender, almost maternal way are some characteristics I recurrently observed. As in the *Taras*, each sculpture represents for me one of these repetitive themes. Some titles relate closely to the previous visual research, for example the one called *object for backdrop*, while another one (actually the one that corresponds to the formal idea of one element embracing a fragile one I just mentioned) is titled *Nespresso* to underline the migration of this formal vocabulary to different contexts and uses.

In regards to their materiality it is important for me that they keep a sense of “standing for” a sculpture more than being a sculpture themselves. They are made of styrofoam and paper maché imitating stones and none of them is bigger than an average person, so they are not heavy and easy to move around. I hope they visually succeed to keep their prop-like character.



Ana Navas, *Offspring*, Installation view De Ateliers, 2014, photo: Rob Bohle

MARISOL We started our conversation by talking about a video installation and I'd like to round it up with another video, a work called *Sopor* that we can relate to what you just said about keeping a sense of 'standing for' a sculpture, and as sculpture as prop. We see in this video a real urban landscape inhabited by monumental and very idiosyncratic sculptures and then two characters dressed up as the sculptures (or vice-versa? we start asking ourselves) start exploring it. Very fast we lose all sense of estrangement about either sculptures or disguised characters because they both feel at home and mutually validating. Why did you choose those particular sculptures to develop a visual dialogue, what did you have in mind when you did this work?

“I am happy when people see my work and feel a certain familiarity to it. I like when they are not able to pin down why they feel familiar with it and I like to think of the viewer as an accomplice.”

ANA I like that you describe a loss of the sense of estrangement (within a strange scenario) because that is exactly what the work is about. While wandering in different cities I had an ambiguous relationship with public sculptures: on one side they are often big and very present and, on the other hand, I sometimes have the feeling if they would be removed from one day to the other I would only acknowledge something is different without being able to point out exactly what has changed. More and more I had the feeling these encounters with public art pieces were very similar to a dream, where you just accept a presence, something surprising appearing, without disturbing the unique flow of the dream.

“Very fast we lose all sense of estrangement about either sculptures or disguised characters because they both feel at home. I really like that one, it could perfectly apply to a lot of what we have talked about here.”

I made this work during my residency in the program *De Ateliers* in Amsterdam. At that time, I had the feeling I was dreaming a lot about art pieces and this is how the idea of merging these two surrealistic moments appeared: my real dreams resulting from my relationship to my profession and our daily encounters with public art, which reminded me of a dream's own logic. The two characters are wandering around different public artworks, disguised as two of them. I hoped the gesture of having a human size copy would actually underline the presence and proportions of the originals. At the same time, the characters don't do much, as if they are just accompanying the landscapes while a voice in off narrates my dreams about art pieces. I am writing these lines on *Sopor* knowing we are slowly coming to an end - thank you so much for this! - and, while doing so, I had a flashback on something I often say about my work. I am of course only aware I say it often, because I have had several work zoom meetings lately and I became aware of things I keep repeating to the monitor (maybe because they are important, or good examples, or a thought I got used to and therefore convinced about). I often say I am happy when people see my work and feel a certain familiarity to it. I like when they are not able to pin down why they feel familiar with it and I like to think of the viewer as an accomplice. Maybe hearing this gives me the hope that, even after all the processes of distancing, abstracting or editing, there is still something from my mundane departure point to be felt in the pieces. *Very fast we lose all sense of estrangement about either sculptures or disguised characters because they both feel at home.* I really like that one, it could perfectly apply to a lot of what we have talked about here.



Ana Navas, *Sopor*, 2014, video, 8 min 23 sec

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