

ANGEL ORELLANA
IN CONVERSATION WITH
PIERFRANCESCO GAVA

ABOUT THIS FOLDER.

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process. In trying to picture what result the artists' work is getting to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

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Master
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CONVERSATION

THE ONGOING

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MAY 13 Pierfrancesco Gava [PG] to Angel Orellana [AO]
Hallo Angel,

nice to meet you. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

I saw your work in the portfolio that 1646 sent to me. I appreciate that you communicate through performances. But from the picture is difficult to feel the bodily experience. Could you tell me more about that and how the performances develop?

Could you also give me an introduction to your project at 1646?

Thanks in advance
Pierfrancesco

MAY 14 AO-PG
hello Pierfrancesco,

Thank you for accepting this conversation. I understand the difficulty of only knowing about the performances through photographs. Since in my work I have been interested in working from anonymity, sometimes not using any name and others using a different name for each job, this included not doing any registration on my own, which complicated then making a portfolio.

The basis of my work has been poetic writing, from there I agreed to my artistic and rhetorical practice. Before coming to the Master I worked as a teacher and researcher in the philosophy department of a university in Guatemala. My artistic practice consisted until a few years ago, in addition to poetry, in performances and object books, author editions and installations. The installations included audio and video that started to work for the performances, but later developed as independent works.

My current research is about de-monstrative writings. In it I try, through the use of the old meaning of monster as a divine message, to re-think writing, beyond or more than conventional language. I investigate in how in certain artistic events some incomprehension finds a way to show and that strange display,

which sometimes implies deformations, hybrids or other types of monstrosities, show not only the existence of this other, but its (non) sense. I ask myself then, using academic words to say it, about how difficult it is to identify and understand, and its relationship with nature, animality, sensuality, legality and the *subject* subject.

In this sense, in my practice I try to think also of these interspecies deformative relations. I am interested in them to feel what the name of nature receives, and with it the opposition of the subject and object. In the place where I come from, this differentiation does not stop at all, at least not at all or at all times. Our relationship with what could be named in Quiché: Pa Ri Uwachulew, is not given in terms of subjects and objects, land technologies and diverse beings are not objects, which implies that the idea of subjectivity is far from what, in modern European thinking, serves to understand and exploit. Honestly these days I have to define between two possible performances for 1646. The first option, besides being related to my research, would be to get to the gallery during the opening, with moss, enough so that in the small garden of 1646, cover my head with the moss and then leave. This action would be part of the exploration of deformations that show, in this case I will use the moss to cover a fundamental part of my human form and put in place this being that has adapted to grow on almost any surface.

The second option would be: leave the gallery to the nearby canal and with a metal hook and rope try to extract something that could be in the bottom of the canal, if I find something take it to the gallery and put it back on my body. It would be working with the same ideas, also with the idea of exposing something that is hidden, as it is sometimes the relationship of people with canals, not as parts of nature but as containers and regulators of wastewater.

I hope that by Thursday I have decided. I suppose what stops me is the possibility of not finding anything at the bottom of the canal or not knowing what to do with it. Anyway I wrote to the company that is in charge of cleaning

the channels asking if I can use some of the things that they take out of them.

all the best
Angel

MAY 16 PG-AO
Thank you for your email. I'm sorry for my late replay but normally I'm busy the whole day on Thursday and Wednesday. I imagine you are busy too, finalizing your Master. How is it going?

I'm already excited to start this conversation. It is - indeed - quite challenging to talk about work without experiencing or seeing it, but this is also what makes the conversation exciting. Through written words we have to communicate on different levels about the work and we have to do it in a common language which is for both of us not our native language. I realize that we also are (to use your words) using a conventional language to explain unconventional things (?!?! :))

It is interesting Your opening statement about the anonymity of your work is interesting but, since its meaning is 'not identified by name', I get confused when you add that you use a different name for each work. Can you tell me more about the reasons why you think your work need anonymity, or at least not to be connected with your real identity?

I suppose that has to do with the relationship between object-subject, but the idea of subjectivity in your culture it is not completely clear to me. If I understood correctly, your research focus on the interspecies deformative relations between *subject*, *object* and some '*incomprehension*' finds a way to show. Can you define more the relationship between those three elements, according to your culture? I'm curious to hear more about what you wrote: "the differentiation between object and subject does not stop". Can you elaborate on that?

Talking about your ideas for 1646, I think that both performances have great potentiality and at the same time open for different

interpretation.

I think the physical connection you want to create between your body and the 'object' is strong even if each one has its own meaning. For the first performance you want to display the deformation as a result of incomprehension that shows up in certain artistic event. I can't stop thinking about the relation subject-object. Can you define more the role and the relationship between the two entities such as your body and a living organism such as the moss?

So far, this are popping up in my head, looking forward for your answers.

Ciao

MAY 23 AO-PG

I apologize to respond so late, this last week I have been working on several things for the academy, these are the last weeks of the first year and the program is very tight. Amdeemas I have difficulty thinking several things at the same time, what in a world like this is more than complicated, so I apologize for the delay. I appreciate your answer and your questions that I will try to answer.

My position on anonymity has several aspects, I will mention two for now. The first is because it is a criticism and a cynical positioning before the art space in Latin America, specifically in Central America, most specifically in Guatemala. This European idea that has colonized many aesthetics that the artist must work to have a name, this is legitimating within the market and artistic circuit. I decided since I started writing and doing art that I would not work for a piece of prestige and I would get away from the idea of legitimation. Then, luckily, I found a group of artists who thought in a similar way with whom we formed an anonymous collective instead of working to make a name, like, we said in our texts, having a name in the art market in Guatemala is almost equivalent to be anonymous, because the conditions of the country make artistic work difficult (it is estimated that only 2% of the population of the country buys books for example,

which is also explained that due to racist policies until the 1980s close to 68% of the population was illiterate). With time in a space some people are identifying your work, even anonymous, in a movement as small and precarious as the Guatemalan becomes difficult. The second reason is that, given these circumstances, and taking the example of writers and artists during the Central American internal wars, to avoid being identified they used different names to publish or sign the works, start using different names for different work, names that can be invented, or mere graffiti, stains, denture marks, etc ... what you leave trace so that it is not identified.

With respect to the second question, this idea of object-subject opposition, is present in Guatemala, as in almost the entire world ... my culture, that's complicated to talk about ... I'm mestizo, and for many reasons, I know some of them, others do not, not all of my culture or not everything was taught to me or I am not part of the communities who live their lives according to the sacred Mayan calendar. For me as desia is a question of sensitivity, and sensitivity remember we said *aisthetiké* in Greek. From that vision of the world, which I want to learn, decolonizing as far as possible my sensitivity, in concrete actions that are not pure, in this understanding of the world there are no mere objects. The terms are untranslatable, but all lives have nucleus, this would be something like a kind of subjectivity, using metaphysical words. All the live together and our relationship with them makes us live, that's why the rivers are alive and treated as living beings, not as things.

it is from these ideas that I intend to work the action for 1646, although it is being difficult for me to take them to actions that are neither so direct nor mere representations of gestures of reinterpreting sensitivity.

These are my answers for now, tomorrow I will expand, I would also like to know about your work, if you can write me something I would appreciate it.

MAY 27 PG-AO
Dear Angel,

thank you for your openness and the answer you send me. I think we should stop to apologize to each other about the delay in answering, evidently we are both quite busy at the moment...

I appreciate the criticism to the art space and its system. Now, I completely understand the background of your choice to anonymity. At the same time it raises questions about the audience that you want to reach with your work. I can imagine that the audience at 1646 is different from the audience back in Guatemala but how are the art spaces in both countries different in your opinion? Are they different? You said also that you found a collective who decided to work anonymously and this strategy is a criticism and a cynical positioning towards the system of art space. I understand that the goal of this criticism is the hope for change. But what about propositions, how to do things differently? Is your collective creating projects within the art space addressing the topic you was mentioning? I was wondering, for instance, if the group you're part of in Guatemala is developing projects to fight illiteracy or to offer the possibilities for people to read books? I apologize for all the questions but I'm interested in the topic (not only that) related to the audience.

You asked me about my work but I will mention just a video (Excommunication, 2015) in which I lip-synched the voice of a religious leader and where I was reflecting also on the audience within the work. With this work I was questioning the power of a leader's speech and its effectiveness. In 2014, Pope Francis, visiting the region of Calabria in the South of Italy, expressed for the first time an official excommunication against criminal organization well known as mafia. The speech of Pope Francis became an invisible 'weapon', against an 'invisible' criminal organization. The act of excommunication (which is a law in the Vatican system) is not enforced by the police but lay on the value of the words resonating in the conscience of every single criminal. The Pope invited them to change their live, otherwise they could no longer be part of the ecclesiastic community or even enter a church. This was a severe disposition since the Mafia is strongly connected with religious rituals and superstition. Exactly this aspect challenged me to further question the

value of the spoken words in relation to its audience with this specific speech.

To analyse and challenge the immaterial and moral value of the speech's power, I embodied the Pope's voice, performing and lip-synching the speech, using the footage available on the public websites or YouTube. Doing so, I questioned the effectiveness of the spoken word (and the act of excommunicating) in relation to the speaker's image.

Furthermore, in this work (differently than other works) the audience acquire a different identity. In his speech, the Pope addressed an 'invisible' audience, the Mafia. In order to challenge the power of the speech in relation to the identity of its audience, I shot my performance, embodying the Pope's voice, in the space in front of the Olympic stadium of Amsterdam. The stadium is normally a place where many people gather. The footages, on the contrary, show myself in the empty space talking to an absent audience. "A public only exists by virtue of its being addressed" and "the public can be produced through the mode of addressing it" (Simon Sheikh). What do you think about that?

My latest work is more related to the complex concept of relic through which religious institutions strengthen its power on the believers, as a metaphor of institution's power...but this is maybe for the next email. :))

Let me know about my questions,
wish you a good - warm - day
Ciao

MAY 28 AO-PG
How are you doing?

As you say, the position of anonymity and its cynicism may be insufficient before a scenery like the one I describe. So we consider it an option, a way of doing and direct actions for certain circumstances. Not all our work has to be anonymous, it is not a maximum. We do other things that we sign, and I think that this also helps to sustain the anonymous proposal sometimes, or we work with different groups or institutions. For a few years there has been a discussion in the region, which includes Central America and Mexico, at least, about what it means or what is meant to be artistic in our time and space. The majority of those who attend this question are indigenous artists, many of whom do the work that gives us more to think, and that is very important. Art, as European modernity understood does not have an accurate translation in the indigenous languages of the region. This poses great dialogue challenges that do not simply translate different questions and terms for others. We try encounters of knowledge, with the greatest horizontality possible, which demands a lot of time and attention. My participation in this has been involved in several community projects, which I had to walk away from now, but I continue to talk about these issues from here. The topics of my research here are designed from these meetings, and I hope they can be useful for our conversations. In principle, some of my contribution will be published as part of "Profile of Guatemalan art" that one of the research institutions of the university where I worked, prepares.

Something of what gives these thoughts to think, or to put it more conventionally, one of the problems that are dealt with in the art of my region, and the work for 1646 responds to this also, in the distances, it is the colonization of sensibility and the desire. Anibal Quijano, a Peruvian philosopher wrote an essay in which he explains how colonialism colonizes the being of colonial subjects, going forward, desire and sensitivity have also been colonized. This means that certain affect and relationship signs were first (and in some cases still) imposed and now, by complex devices of power, they strain the ways of feeling and desiring of many colonial people. As part of a certain understanding of the world, separated from it, as if living in the world, the relationship with many beings was lost or muddled. I think of the term relic that you use, that comes from *reliquiae*, that would mean remains, or what's left, as a minimum presence, so minimal that it is almost no presence. I do not think precisely about what you say, but from my experience of seeing people contemplating relics, that is, that which is left behind (*relinquere*), people not even caressing the relic, piece of bone or cloth, but the recipient that contains it, the grave, the building where there is what is no longer there but has left a remainder. It catches my attention as people caress and kiss those remains, as they feel them. These modes of sensitivity, also colonial, find resonance with the modes of *sesibilidad* of the people of my

land. some of them say that we can remember our sensitivity and then feel, not only that the world is full of relics, but that the stones and mountains in their being there are not a remain of divinity, but the beings with whom we live in the world.

Something of that I feel and I think that's why in the 1646 performance I wanted to read a poem to the moss, and then that my face serves as a support to his face, so that it shows.

I find it very interesting that "A public only exists by virtue of its being addressed", reminds me that I recently read Tiziana Terranova "*Futurepublic On Information Warfare, Bio-racism and Hegemony as Noopolitics*" from which I thought that what is called public, and to which so many types of weapons or discourse discursive are directed, are like measure of tendencies rather than a strong and fixed point of identity (class, race, gender), that's why its invisibility and plasticity, which does not mean that the public does not exist, but that they are so dynamic that I think they appear as trends. However, the case of the Mafia is not like that, its "invisibility" is only apparent and it is a very concrete but not monolithic group.

The two works that you mention to me are related to the sacred or sacred, or to the Catholic church? How do you present them? I understand that it is the relationship between power and religion, or the religious forms of power that interest you? Could you tell me you're interested in it?

MAY 30 PG-AO

I like the attempt of your collective to discuss and challenge categories as art, art space, comparing those categories with the indigenous way of thinking. I think it is refreshing in some ways. I would like to hear more about that, if not now in the future maybe. When will be published your contribution in the "profile of Guatemalan art"?

I also think that it is interesting that you underline that colonization is -first of all - the colonization of sensitivity. In a way, I feel connected to this concept when it refer to religious institution. The church has also a long story of ('spiritual') colonization. I think that religious institutions applied the colonization of desire and sensitivity of the believers even today. Manipulating the believers, they get control on people and therefore power. In one of my last work, I was comparing the media strategies used by religious and political leaders to spread their message. In the video-essay "A glorious society", a scene of Pasolini's *Decameron* and a Caravaggio's painting offers a starting point to reflect on the strategy with which power structures, as politics and religion, use their own image in the public contemporary media to affirm their power. The images -and the voices- spread by religious or political leaders consolidate their authority, but what gives power to the leader's speech, his voice, the speech or his image? That were my questions when I started my work. To investigate the questions, I used footage that everybody could find on internet. I manipulated the footages to disturbs the viewer's perception and I challenged the consensus that generally is given to the images. Have a look if you have time:

(<https://vimeo.com/133751981>)

Now I'm working on a more specific research about the political value of religious places. My research investigates the processes through which people revitalize religions as a basis for a collective identity and how the relic or a sacred space legitimizes territorial (and thus political) claims. As a starting point or my last installation, I referred to the story/legend of the holy house in Loreto (a town near the place where I was born on the Adriatic coast in Italy) and I questioned the sacred value of the place itself. In this small town three walls are conserved that are part of the Virgin Mary's house in Nazareth (Israel). According to the legend, the house in Nazareth was made up of three stone walls enclosing a cave. The cave is still worshipped in Nazareth, while the three walls, were transported in 1294 supposedly by angels from Nazareth to Loreto. Current historical studies reveal that the walls were probably transported to Loreto by sea by the Angeli family ('angels' in Italian) who were crusaders. The purpose of the crusaders, relatives of the emperors of Constantinople, was to protect and preserve the walls from the Muslim conquest of the Holy Land, after the expulsion of the Christians from Palestine.

Since the Virgin Mary's walls were removed from its original place in Nazareth to be transported to Italy, is the holiness of the relic defined by the relic itself or by its original place? Does the removal of a relic, affect the value of the relic or the place? To refer to what you wrote, I agree about your distinction between relic and recipient. I think that in the case of this legend is even more complicated. What is worshipped inside the house is not a relic but the space itself, because the space (that means the stones too) was witnessing a possible encounter between a woman and a supernatural entity who told her that she will be pregnant and carrying the son of God. I hope it is clear what I mean, otherwise let me know.

Going back to you (because essentially this conversation is meant to discuss / challenge the work you will be present at 1646), how is further developing your performance? Are there new element/decisions emerging from your research in those last days? Let me know.

JUN 6 PG-AO
Hi Angel,

I didn't hear anything from you yet since my last email. Everything ok?

AO-PG

I apologize for this delay again, I disconnect from the post and I apologize for that, if everything is fine, thank you for asking, I hope that everything is good for you too.

with respect to your last mail. The publication of this compilation of essays will be made the following year, but I must send my version for revision in August.

I find the topics you work with very interesting and the way you do it. I agree that the religious institution is colonizing, and that it continues to be. Perhaps Peter Sloterdijk is right when he says that this is the greatest empire in history, and that one of his most powerful tools is the metaphysical logic that sustains those modes of life, that colonization of desire and sensitivity. The question of how the power of that institution is now held also seems very important to me. I think of legality, not only in the relationship that the church has with the state, but in the very legality of the church and the fundamental role of discourse, and the acclamation in this process of legality, of institutionality. The story that you share with me about the Angeli family is very appropriate for this relationship of what is called the ontotheological foundation of political and economic power.

tried to see the video that you share, but I can not do it because it is a private video and I need a password.

with respect to my performance in 1646, it is already in only a couple of days. I had some inconvenience with the materials. It was, for a moment, difficult to find fresco moss in large quantities, I was about to place an order with a large importer for a very large amount of money, but luckily, looking for other things in Action, I found that, by season, it sells what I needed it. Fortuitous. This is just to tell you some of the complications that have been presented to me. But the performances are defined and I have already practiced a couple of times, although not yet in the place. I think it has many layers that refer to many topics that interest me. Working with industrially produced "nature" shows for me the relationship that exists in this time with "nature, increasingly from the *tekné* that from the physis to say it in Greek, with this nature produced I will cover my body, with the intention to deform for me is related to the ideas of form and essence, the deformation obscures the essence, it moves away from it, my body will then be the support for these other beings to be shown and shown. In a courtyard, which is also a kind of production box of "nature" and could be seen only through the windows, part of it is also trying to approach the glass to highlight that "invisible" limit, that separation with the outside, which is part of the idea of the house or building.

As I think this work in terms of showing relationships that I still do not have very clear, which cause me more questions than certainty. I hope these actions allow me to come up with other questions.

all the best
Angel