

## *Those obscure objects of desire<sup>1</sup>*

Judith Lavagna

Berlin-based artist Tomás Espinosa (1985, Bogota, Colombia) presents "Schwulitäten"<sup>2</sup> a selection of works which investigate the field of sculpture and 'time-making' productions towards the performative. Taking place in public or private spaces, the artist creates scenarios affected by the stories of their location and the circumstances of possible encounters.

By provoking awareness towards unexpected interactions, Espinosa creates gestures, objects and expands artefacts that flirt with the audience as a kind of 'conversation starter' or as a tool to be activated. A permeable border between the creation of artworks and the emergence of actions in which the audience is challenged. Focusing on the scrubbing of fragile spaces that requires an act of closeness but also of exposure, the artist emphasises the ambiguities within our social positions and the sense of our presence through a body of work that intangibly slips from being objects to be seen to being objects to be used.



'Zwischen Uns (Between Us)', performative installation, 2014 - 2015. Clay, wood, metal, dimensions variable.

<sup>1</sup> Title taken from the film 'Cet obscur objet du désir', Luis Buñuel, 1977. The film tells the story of an aging Frenchman who falls in love with a young Spanish woman who repeatedly frustrates his romantic and sexual desires.

<sup>2</sup> 'Schwulitäten', exhibition of Tomás Espinosa curated by Judith Lavagna, Berlin University of the Arts, July 2015. Project nominated for the StartPoint Price 2015, National Gallery of Prague, September 2015.

With the installation 'Zwischen Uns (Between Us)', he offers the opportunity to interact with a great number of cucumbers that pile up on large wooden shelves. The 'gentle provocation' of the ambiguous cucumber forms, that are each sculpted in clay, 'a messenger of primordial history and an intimately sensual medium'<sup>3</sup>, introduce the notion of performativity that characterise Espinosa's work.

In this transfer, where the status of the exhibited objects evolves into objects to be touched, and even to be given away, Tomás Espinosa intends to renegotiate the presence of this work into a discussion and a durational performance in which the notion of exchange and the gift, an action that acknowledges the existence of an Alter Ego<sup>4</sup> - the visitor - could be interpreted as part of the process.



'Nachbarschaftsbeziehungen', Cruising area, Bremer Weg, Berliner Tiergarten.  
Installation with mirrors, 200 x 150 x 150 cm, 2013 - 2015.

In the search for interaction between public space and private stories, another approach of Espinosa's work includes not only the haptic senses of the viewer but also highlights issues of gender and transgression. Walking through the Berliner Tiergarten, a place full of paths, Espinosa got interested in a zone charged with intimate stories of sexual and anonymous encounters.

Located in the cruising area, 'Nachbarschaftsbeziehungen' is an installation of a mirror corner that merges with its environment, generates camouflages and simultaneously reflects its surroundings: a dispositive that can be activated as a device offering a space to show, observe, provoke or hide a fast rendezvous.

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<sup>3</sup> Panagiotis Chatzistefanou about 'Zwischen Uns (Between Us)', exhibition at Entretempo Gallery, Berlin, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> According to anthropologist Marcel Mauss, 'The Gift', 1923 - 1924.



'Geschlossene Gesellschaft', 2h performance in collaboration with Diego Agulló, Festival of Future Nows, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 30.10 – 01.11.2014.

If some works of the exhibition favour the emergence of relationships and social inquiry, 'Geschlossene Gesellschaft' acts as a radical intervention, dealing with dialectics of inclusion and exclusion within the context of a festival opening in a public institution.

Hosting a party in the sculpture garden of the Neue Nationalgalerie, a place that 'has been closed to the public for a long time, paradoxically turns this garden - once the epicentre of artistic and social events and a connection point between the inner and outer part of the building - into an exclusive, almost secret place'<sup>5</sup>. In collaboration with artist and philosopher Diego Agulló, they occupied the garden and turned it into a stage and even a playground: an act reliving this former venue and implying the possibility of entertaining the official after-party instead of a performance with a limited audience. 'While not invited, the visitors could only witness and observe the outdoor activities from the terrace'<sup>5,6</sup>. Frustrations were generated through the incapacity of being included in this micro-society.

Another aspect of Espinosa's practice is the use of clay to form his objects or installations<sup>7</sup>. The appeal of clay, both as a raw material and as a cultural memory, deeply affects the production of his works. Attracted by the essence of this mineral, its different properties and sensualities, it becomes 'irresistible' for him to interact with the ceramic shapes: a timeless and meditative gesture throughout the phases of sculpting, moulding, extracting, baking and polishing.

This handmade and sometimes mass produced method could be related to the idea of endlessly recreating an imperfect copy of an original, thus challenging the efficiency of the handcraft industry

<sup>5,6</sup> Text extract from 'Geschlossene Gesellschaft', Tomás Espinosa and Diego Agulló, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Espinosa learned the techniques of handcraft ceramic in Colombia in his childhood. I previously mentioned in this text the work 'Zwischen Uns (Between Us)' that is also made in clay.



(where others materials offer a better yield): an attempt to take-up again the tradition of art and craftsmanship and thus to explore a breach between art and technic in our occidental culture?

With the resumption of primary experiences, where the historical gesture of handcrafting joins the construction of the self (extension of the hands, expansion of culture), it becomes for Tomás Espinosa an endless recommencement: to research and re-experience contact, to explore breath, touch and to renew them.



'Schwulitäten', exhibition by Tomás Espinosa curated by Judith Lavagna, Berlin University of the Arts, 03 – 10 July 2015.

Tomás Espinosa is currently Meisterschüler of Manfred Pernice at the Universität der Künste, Berlin. He studied Visual Arts at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogota (2002 – 2007) and at the Universität der Künste Berlin (Institut für Raumexperimente, under the direction of Olafur Eliasson, 2010 - 2014).

He realized collaborative exhibitions, performances and workshops in several countries (Vitamin Space, Guangzhou, China, 2014, Triennial of Architecture, MUDE Museum of Fashion and Design, Lisbon, Portugal, 2013) and in Berlin (Festival of Futures Now, Neue Nationalgalerie, 2014, Grey Sheep Gallery, 2013). He recently presented his first solo-show 'Zwischen Uns (Between Us)' at the Entretempo Gallery, Berlin, 2015 and participated in the collective exhibition 'Friends' at Galeria Compacta, Bogota, 2015.

'Schwulitäten' has been nominated for the StartPoint Price 2015 at the National Gallery of Prague in September 2015.