

Q and A with Artist José Luis Torres

What initially interested you about McMullen Gallery and having your work in that space?

My exhibition project allows me to establish an unprecedented collaboration with the McMullen Gallery, the community of the University of Alberta Hospital, medical staff, and to reach new audiences with the local population by highlighting a new place for the dissemination of my work.

This fun and friendly installation adapts to this public space at the same time as it emerges from the landscape like an oasis of colors. It offers a real experience on a human scale that is in harmony with the principles of voluntary simplicity, and offers passers-by a meaningful aesthetic experience.

The various immersive stagings are articulated in the obvious minimalism of their assemblies and make it possible to constitute new configurations of reality. The whole creative process is an invitation to reflect on time passing and what remains. *Recover, refocus, rebuild* encourages us to slow down our daily rhythm by offering a real moment of respite to rethink our way of inhabiting the world.

We had to delay your project due to Covid - thank you for waiting patiently for a year a half! Did your initial plan for an installation in McMullen Gallery change over time and due to Covid? If so, can you describe how your ideas evolved?

The public places of our cities are the bonds of our communities. They create a sense of belonging, interdependence and social cohesion, they promote our collective identity despite our differences. The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed significant constraints on the access and use of these spaces in our communities. The impacts of the virus are diverse, highlighting inequalities between people and disproportionately affecting people already in vulnerable situations.

But, on the other hand, in times of crisis, collective demonstrations of compromise of all kinds and forms become a necessity. Opportunities to connect with something bigger than yourself are important to seize. Designed around the notion of accessibility, inclusion and openness, the entire project offers a glimpse of the current health crisis as a creative opportunity, bringing hope, by inviting citizens to reclaim their public space through art and design.

Could you talk about your experience in the U of A Hospital? You sought out furniture and equipment - what was that like going into hospital supply areas? What struck you about the behind-the-scenes views that you got?

The material culture that shapes us and whose contours we redraw in each of our daily activities presents itself to us as an objective and object world. The relationship we have with objects is complex: they are useful or decorative and become companions in our daily lives, but we must also contain them to prevent them from dominating the space we inhabit.

Thus, despite the fact that objects remain mute around us, they condition us, both by the use that is specific to them and by their mere presence. Moreover, it is because human action would be difficult to conceive outside

material limits, due to the fact that the individual becomes aware of themselves through their senses, that the analysis of the role of objects in our contemporary society seems relevant to me.

To demonstrate this, the **recover, refocus, rebuild** project aims to reflect on the place of objects in the daily context - as well as the relationship of people to objects - by introducing them into the reflection.

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Collaboration is a big part of your work – you are great at bringing people together. Can you explain why this is important to you and what you create?

The notions of initial and spontaneous gesture are omnipresent in my projects. Technically, each project that I plan will be a series of installations where objects gradually become actors in their own right. Several objects, selected for their specific shapes, colors and textures, will constitute the basic materials of each creation.

The community dimension of each installation will be promoted, which is why each work is produced with the involvement of individuals and organizations. The whole creative process is an invitation to reflect on time passing and what remains.

The surprise element of your work is so interesting – you use unexpected objects and materials and do installations in unique places. Please talk about the importance of creating unexpected moments and experiences for the viewer.

In the era of globalization, in a system that produces both excess and scarcity, accumulation is becoming an increasingly worrying subject. The last few decades have seen us produce things in exorbitant quantities and at an inordinate rate that are more easily thrown away than repaired. Social and cultural markers, these consumer goods are a direct, meticulous and indisputable document concerning the habits and behaviors of those who produced them.

My interest responds to the desire to observe the phenomenon of the accumulation of objects from a perspective of abundance. My research focuses on the passage of things, physically transposed from a factory to a domestic space and, eventually, to waste. From collected objects, I create works that allude to the fetishization of the object as a place of memory and mutation, while postulating a subtle act of resistance against a culture of excess.

Playfully and with a touch of irony, my works bring together an impressive number of colorful objects from our familiar environments and immediately situate the visitor in the face of notions of expansion and excess. Perceived as seductive and playful, they question the transience of things and our sometimes excessive tendency to consume and then accumulate objects of all kinds.

Staff are sitting in McMullen Gallery, eating, taking their breaks amidst your installation. They become part of *recover, refocus, rebuild*. What were your goals for this installation for how it might affect and include staff – or any gallery viewer?

The installation offers users a progressive immersion in a very captivating visual and tactile experience stimulating the public's interest in contemporary art.

Aware that movement is also a self-construction, I am attentive to the junctions and changes of direction that shape our contemporary way of life.

At the intersection between art and architecture, or rather the product of their synergy, the imagined device presents itself as a space of freedom where all encounters are possible.

The work is intended to be an original, stimulating experience on a human scale associated with the notions of movement and exchange. It all starts with a creative process that tries to build bridges between people, as a necessary and universal need to link communities and their stories.

An eye-catching catalyst and dynamic of spontaneous activities, my immersive installation project offers people of all ages a place to meet, discuss or simply spend time.

Lastly, the title is very poignant within the context of Covid and the U of A Hospital. Please tell us about how you came to this title.

Recover, refocus, rebuild questions the relationship between habitat (shelter, territory), which implies stability, and that of encampment, which implies a state of vulnerability. In the exhibition, the use of repurposed objects (shelving, screens, IV stands) generate associations with the notion of constructing and deconstructing a human identity. And, in this case, the work reiterates the paradigm of life, understood as a phenomenon in perpetual mutation. Like a nomad, the visitor will wander inside an architectural universe under construction or in “deconstruction”. A work inspired by a construction site represents transformation and adaptation.

Halfway between interior and exterior, between nature and culture, between temporary and permanent, ***recover, refocus, rebuild*** creates a space for questioning our reality and its’ fragility and instability, thus confirming the human ability to adapt.