



2/21/13 STUDIO VISIT with Patricia Fernández. By Aili Schmeltz. Posted on <http://losangelesartresource.wordpress.com>

Tell us a little bit about yourself... your background, history, where you come from, your education, etc..

I was born in Burgos, Spain in 1980, but only lived there a few years as a child, and later briefly as a teenager. I moved around a lot in my life- I also lived in The Hague, San Juan, and Los Angeles. I decided to move back to Los Angeles after a year studying at Saint Martin's College of Art in London. I finished my undergraduate degree in Painting at UCLA, took a few years off again, traveling, and then went to Cal Arts for a Masters. For now, I live and work in Los Angeles.

Please talk about your most current project in France, the ideas behind it, the fundraising process, the historical and personal aspects of the project.

I received a grant from the Department of Cultural Affairs in Los Angeles, and with this was able to travel to Bordeaux and take part in the FLARE Program, (the France Los Angeles Residency Exchange). I talk more about my experience at the residency here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwGWKJ_pXU8





Fernandez on the first walk from Port Bou, Spain into Cerbere, France

I wanted to go to Bordeaux because of its close ties to Spain, as it had been historically a site of exile for many, beginning with Franco's uprising against the Spanish Republic, up until the end of the dictatorship in 1975.



Jose

I left Los Angeles in late November and began my project by crossing over the Pyrenees as many Spaniards had done in the mass exodus of 1939 known as La Retirada, which occurred at the end of the Spanish Civil War. More than 450 thousand Republicans crossed the Franco-Spanish border at this time, and the French authorities underestimated the magnitude of the exodus. I began by following the footsteps of a family friend Jose Garcia, who had crossed this same path, through Port Bou and into Cerbere before being placed into a concentration camp in Argeles Sur Mer. This route was one of the several points of entry into France- I found it interesting that after having worked with a collection of buttons, each one being able to carry its unique memory, I was approached by Jose who told me that he has crossed into France at the end of the Spanish Civil War with his own collection of buttons. For him, these buttons had

served as a currency. He began to tell me his voyage, and how he got to where he is today. I became very interested in his personal history, also the shared history with other Spanish Republicans, and how it was that this group of people became exiled. I was interested in the objects they carried over the border, what they lost, both literally and more abstractly. I became interested in writing their stories through textures, documents, paintings, objects and memories. Through this walking I was hoping to recuperate a history, or be able to read and make sense of the landscape, the pyrenees....I wasn't quite sure how this would work but I knew it was important for me to retrace in this way before ending at my destination. Once in Bordeaux I hoped to be able to begin to piece together the personal histories of exiled Spanish Republicans, and meet people that would be able to map out their histories in this way.



Detail of archives

To my surprise, when I arrived at my studio in Bordeaux, I saw the massive Todt submarine base I had heard so much about, there, right outside my windows. This thing was built under the German occupation, with the forced labor of many Spanish Republicans, Anarchists, and other prisoners..it was built to last forever. Many people died in its construction and to this day their bodies remain within its huge cement walls. It was sort of hard to think of anything else, so I became really obsessed with this part of the Republican history. I met Angel, a Spaniard who had also crossed through Port Bou and he told me stories about the construction of the base. He was involved in several sabotages against the Germans. I spent some time at the Municipal Archives looking through old documents, police surveillance reports and going through political tracts. I wanted to know more about the base, this place that was the fate of so many Spaniards who thought they were leaving one dictatorship only to enter a country that was under the control of another. I couldn't find any documents. Everything had been destroyed by the Germans when they left France. So I began to construct my own archive of my experiences in Bordeaux, from the stories I was being told, and the history I came to learn while being there.



Caminos/Chemins and Un livre a lire et un livre a difusser, oil on linen with frame



Douane-Port Bou-Cebere. oil on linen with frame, 31 x 39 cm

What other projects are you working on right now, what is upcoming?

I am working on an artist book right now with my friend who has a letter press, New Byzantium Press. This book is a project I began a couple of years ago and only just completed now when I went back to Paris this fall. It's a book of collected writings, letters, and images that are about number 5 rue de Latran. I have made work about this site in the past. 5 rue de Latran was the site of Ruedo Ibérico, a printings press that was started by a small group of intellectuals, writers, and anarchists who printed books that were smuggled into Spain during Franco's dictatorship. I spent some time living in the same building as this printing press, decades after it closed. My father had also spent much time there in the 1960s. At the time that I was there though, I didn't know it. So it became interesting to me how history, or time seems to fold into itself. I also like to think that ideas are inherited, that somehow our conditions are very much contingent to our antecedent's actions.

March 30th we will have a book release at Commonwealth and Council. I will also be showing a new piece there that is a "ten year sculpture"...

In April I return to France to attempt to complete the archive that I began constructing while I was at the residency in Bordeaux. I will also be doing another walk across the border, this time in the central Pyrenees.

Please talk a bit about your studio process, both in making work alone and collaboratively.

Where do your ideas come from, how are they developed, how do you come to a final product?

I make work in the studio for the most part, but it is outside of the studio where things begin. Travel is an important part of my work- it allows me to look outside of myself. It is also through my travels to Spain and other countries I have lived in that I have been able to uncover histories from the past, the past of my family, and weave those into a larger narrative. In the studio I paint, draw, carve, construct, and collage. A lot of the work involves a repetitive task- it is labor intensive, meditative- and this is important to the pieces. But the work also stems from others. I couldn't make any of this work without the participation of many of the people whom I become interested in within the work. There are many subjectivities involved so although I am alone in the studio process it is not something I see as an individualistic practice. For example, my grandfather has informed a lot of my work. I use his x carving pattern as a way to transmit an antecedents mark. It is a way of recording time, as well as a very distinctive mark of a person who was raised in Spain after the war. By using this mark I am writing his story as well as my own. I don't think one can tell another person's story without being implicated, without telling your own.



Angel

In the most recent project, I reconstructed many personal objects that were given to me by the people I met in Bordeaux. I also found fragments of stories that added to this collection, to these archives, and quite literally all these different things are being arranged in these folders....these folders that keep growing. In some ways I feel that these are a collaboration. They are a force larger than I am, I can't seem to contain them. This particular work (working title: Points of Departure) is one that I do not see an end too. It has just started to expand. The stories keep growing and the events become connected in ways I did not imagine. What began with me retracing the footsteps of one man ended up being a map of thousands of exiled people. What I once believed to be the isolated event of the Spanish Civil War turned out to be just the beginning, the testing ground for the Nazi war machinery, the start of world war. This is how things develop in the work, in the studio and in my mind. It's hard to know when anything is finished because things don't seem to stop. For the most part one project will lead to another, and often times these projects last for years.



Installation at La Fabrique Pola

What inspires you? What do you read, watch, listen to, research about, that affects your work or thought process?

I am really inspired by people that have lived a long life and share it with me. I love watching my grandfather carve while my grandmother tells me stories about how much things have changed in the landscape and the people around her. My parents inspire me, and also people that speak about things they have lived, which I cannot ever experience. I am interested in how our memories and lives are reimagined every time they are retold. Right now I am reading a book, which is sort of a memoir, about Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz, *Cárceles y Exilios*. And I am also reading *The Spanish Labyrinth*, a book that was once printed by Ruedo Ibérico.

How does making work in Los Angeles, effect (or not effect) your ideas and studio process?

Los Angeles is the place I choose to live in because there is the room here to grow. There is a really strong artist community and there are risks being taken. What makes Los Angeles what it is seems to be constantly changing; the people that make up this city are not necessary born here, but they are part of it, they are the defining elements of the culture of Los Angeles. I choose to live here and that freedom is what allows me to create my work- to investigate personal narratives, unwritten histories, and construct a familial mythology.