

Two Ways to Disappear Without Losing the Physical Form

Commissaire : Ji-Yoon Han

Grande salle



The Many Faces of Anonymity

“The more people are represented
the less is left of them in reality.”
- Hito Steyerl

How to think in a world where images and objects are constantly competing to draw our attention—often desensitized by being over-solicited; how to think and reveal what no longer has access to visibility, is obscured and thus consigned to oblivion?

As one might imagine today, this question haunts the visual arts, a field that is particularly invested in producing images and capitalizing on the visible. The question becomes even more critical in the context that concerns us here, namely the programming for the ten-year anniversary of the Residency of the Americas, which aims to give visibility to culturally diverse artists. How do the issues of representation and visibility intersect today? How can we—should we—address them?

In the exhibition *Two Ways to Disappear Without Losing the Physical Form*, Chilean artist Javier González Pesce presents two recent bodies of work that engage these contemporary issues by **investigating the act of disappearing through sculpture**. On the one hand, in a new version of the installation *The Island of the Un-adapted* (2018/2019), recreated out of corrugated roofing sheets on the floor of the Main Hall, the artist composes

microcosms with lost objects—often stolen, abandoned, and then “found” on the rooftops of Santiago and assembled into improbable archipelagos. On the other hand, the project *Untitled (Human Face)* (2017/2019), composed of three sculptures and a video, represents the elements of a face on a constantly changing surface: the ocean.

The dialogue created between the two works refers to Chile’s past and present reality, evoking the country’s all-too-real social tensions as well as those related to remembering. Yet these often violent “disappearances” provide a starting point for **a kind of imaginary drift**. González Pesce strives to invent new modes of existence for the things and beings that have been removed from the visible world. This effort is realized through materials used for transportation or protection: a wood frame, corrugated roofing sheets, styrofoam, a rowboat. Freed from their owners and functions, the objects embark on a life of leisure. Slashed sports balls, broken cellphones, crumpled plastic bags, and other orphaned stuffed toys have stopped their frantic race in the human world and assembled to lie idle—and immobile thanks to gravity—on the corrugated slopes of brightly coloured roofs.

In response to this swarm of small, commonplace objects that ultimately find peace by “disappearing,” *Untitled (Human Face)* makes the opposite gesture:

it renders visible a monumental face that is constantly being disfigured and reconfigured, and which ultimately disperses in the surf of the waves. The artist has sculpted fragments of a face (a mouth, a nose, an ear) scaled to the size of rowboats in the somewhat wild hope of launching them at sea and letting them drift in the current. In itself, this face does not represent anyone specific. It is a nameless, featureless face, in a sense, invisible. From the onset, it is a floating ruin, but also a mask resisting any kind of submersion or forgetting.

A trajectory emerges between the two works that interweaves the visible and the invisible, giving rise to a unique image of anonymity.

Revealing anonymity: placing someone or something in the visual field that we could not previously identify. In this case, certain objects and a face have been stripped of their identity and use, yet paradoxically, they find a kind of strength in this downgraded condition. They eschew any assignation of identity. The video *Untitled (Human Face) 2* offers a striking demonstration: despite the repeated attempts of the artist, who like a swimming Sisyphus endeavours to hold together the facial fragments in order to draw a picture, these fragments, borne by the ocean current, elude any urge to control. If we allow ourselves to drift a little, we might easily imagine that this “human face,” subject only to natural forces, has a way of circumventing radar, facial recognition systems, and other detection algorithms.

In her essay “The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation,” artist and theorist Hito Steyerl discusses

how **the relation between visual and political representation** has evolved with the excessive proliferation of images, exacerbated by digital technologies. Although until recently, representation was considered to be a valued site of protest for politics and aesthetics, Steyerl makes the following observation:

While every possible minority was acknowledged as a potential consumer and visually represented (to a certain extent), people’s participation in the political and economic realms became more uneven. The social contract of contemporary visual representation thus somewhat resembles the ponzi schemes of the early twenty-first century, or, more precisely, participation in a game show with unpredictable consequences¹.

Today, anonymity—or the deliberate withdrawal from any visibility (Steyerl considers a context in which an increasing number of people refuse to have their image captured on camera in order to escape mass surveillance)—or *disappearance without losing physical appearance* become possible strategies for simply “getting away.”

Although carried on the perpetual tide of the world, like any other material production, González Pesce’s works trace small islands of hope, not without some dark humour: since they have lost their human use, the objects get a chance to have a second life of leisure on the rooftops of houses, left out in the sun and rain; as for rowboats, they become both vehicles for the dismemberment of an anonymous face and the only reliable means of floating on the ocean and therefore, possibly surviving.

As with Édouard Glissant for whom **“any archipelagic thinking is a thinking of tremors and no assumptions, but also of openness and sharing”**,² González Pesce builds on the gestures of drifting and wandering to make his own sculptural archipelago. From the South to the North, across the American continents, the drift follows its trajectory.

It is an invitation to begin a dialogue.

Ji-Yoon Han

Translated by Oana Avasilichioaei

Notes

1. Hito Steyerl, “The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation,” e-flux Journal #32, February 2012, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/32/68260/the-spam-of-the-earth-withdrawal-from-representation/>.

2. Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde. Poétique IV*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997, 231 (our translation).

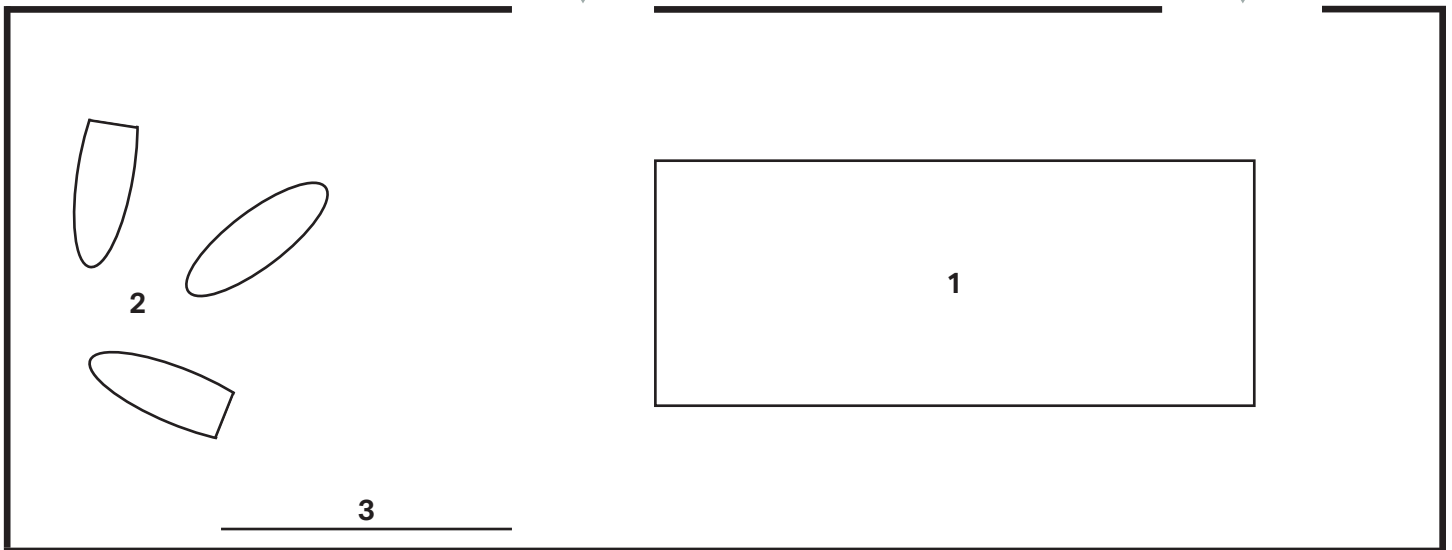
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Javier González Pesce

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Curator: Ji-Yoon Han

Main Hall



- 1.** *The Island of the Un-adapted*, 2018/2019
Wood, corrugated metal roof, found objects, 35 x 15 x 4 feet
- 2.** *Untitled (Human Face) 1*, 2017/2019
3 wooden boats and styrofoam sculptures
18 x 4 x 2, 14 x 5 x 4, 14 x 5 x 5 feet
- 3.** *Untitled (Human Face) 2*, 2019
Digital video, 16 min

Archipelago of the Invisibles

10-year anniversary of the Residency of the Americas

In the fall of 2019, the Darling Foundry celebrates Latin American art. To mark the ten-year anniversary of the Residency of the Americas, supported by the Conseil des arts de Montréal, the art centre is offering a special program to Montreal audiences that showcases the work of two former residents.

In the Main Hall, Chilean artist **Javier González Pesce** (2014 resident) presents his first solo exhibition in North America, *Two Ways to Disappear Without Losing the Physical Form*. The exhibition is curated by Darling Foundry curator Ji-Yoon Han.

In the Small Gallery, Puerto Rican curator **Marina Reyes Franco** (2016 resident) creates a dialogue between three Caribbean artists with the group exhibition *Resisting Paradise*: Deborah Anzinger (Jamaica), Leasho Johnson (Jamaica), and Joiri Minaya (Dominican Republic). *Resisting Paradise* is among the winning exhibitions of the *Open Call* program of apexart in New York and was presented in the summer of 2019 at :Pública cultural centre in San Juan (Porto Rico).

United under the title *Archipelago of the Invisibles*, the two exhibitions sketch the outline of **a community of islands**: the lost objects recovered from Santiago's rooftops and assembled by González Pesce in *The Island of the Unadapted* echo the connections woven between the Caribbean islands in the group exhibition, thus examining the

region's colonial history and the effects of mass tourism. The fragmented "tropical" bodies suspended in Joiri Minaya's *#dominicanwomengooglesearch* resonates with the oversized facial features that González Pesce sculpted, then placed in rowboats and let drift with the current. The themes of disappearance, camouflage, erasure, but also of excessive visibility run through both exhibitions, which make concrete the issues of memory and oblivion, identity, and how we view the other.

Throughout the fall, the centre will offer a series of **public programs** to encourage the participation of different audiences, particularly those from Montreal's Latin American cultural diversity (please ask the gallery attendant for more information).

Focused on visual artists and curators from Latin America, the **Residency of the Americas** is the first international residency program of the Conseil des arts de Montréal and the oldest running program at the Darling Foundry. Since 2008, twenty-three visual artists and curators from Brazil, the United States, Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Porto Rico, Salvador, Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Canada have resided in the Darling Foundry's heritage studio building in Montreal.