



la_cápsula

This thin edge

An experiment on how to create a collective exhibition in a time of physical distance

This thin edge is a project that started during the Spring lockdown in Switzerland. The title was inspired by a phrase by renowned writer Gloria Anzaldúa and it points to the two seemingly opposite forces that underlie our response to the pandemic as a society: adaptation and resistance. *This thin edge* starts at this intersection, at this edge between adapting to the current situation and at the same time resisting it by imagining new future worlds and keeping politically active. It is also an experiment on how to develop art projects outside of the traditional exhibition model.

As curators, accustomed to organizing exhibitions and events with many people, the big challenge and opportunity during the pandemic became developing strategies that would allow to keep creating and exhibiting art in a situation as unstable as the one we are currently living. With this in mind, we invited four artists based in different cities to participate in the project and experiment on how to create an exhibition as a collective in a time of physical distance: Maëlle Gross (Swiss, currently living in Lausanne), Katherine Patiño Miranda (Colombian, currently living in New York), Sergio Rojas Chavez (Costa Rican, currently living in Basel) and Dominik Zietlow (Swiss, living in Zurich).

The goal of the project was the creation of four new artworks that responded to aspects of our current situation, which in this particular case centered around two topics: interpersonal affections and interdependence to/with nature. Both topics are addressed by the artworks, while also touching on notions such as exchange, transformation, care and connection. They also question the ideas around public and private space.

The curatorial strategy was based on open discussions about the development of the artworks and the exhibition, and aimed to develop a horizontal collaborative work between curators and artists. As a result of this work dynamics, we decided collectively to use the text "Four Changes" by poet Gary Snyder as the basis of our research. The text, written in 1969, discusses four changes that our society would need to do in order to live a truly sustainable life. For every topic (population, pollution, consumption and transformation) Snyder proposes specific actions to be taken. "Four changes" is considered foundational to the environmental movement and it is as pertinent today

as it was half a century ago, since “it was rooted in a mature understanding of the political ecology of power dynamics and disparities in access to resources that were ravaging our planet, its biological and cultural diversity”.¹

The artworks

Each of the artworks deals with at least one of Snyder’s topics. The artists chose them based on their previous work and interests –which, in turn, was one of the reasons why they were invited to participate in the project.

Maëlle Gross’ piece was inspired by the processes that permaculture fosters. Her installation, occupying the center of the space, consists of a rotating soil sieve which separates a mix of rubble, soil, sticks and stones in order to obtain fine soil which is ideal for sowing. Under the machine, the artist placed a speaker with a sound piece in which fragments of the text by Snyder are read aloud and combined with a soundtrack. The piece needs the audience to participate by throwing the rubble into the sieve. The soil falls on top of the speaker and will eventually cover it. Maëlle’s artwork touches upon all of Snyder’s topics and seeks to make the viewers aware of the importance of their active personal engagement in rethinking our relation to the environment.

Katherine Patiño Miranda’s work deals with the interdependence between humans and nature and the cycle of life. She invited people around the world to join her *Practice no. 91: Inter-beings*, by growing black bean seeds at home and following certain instructions given by the artist every week. The installation at la_cápsula includes two screens and black bean plants grown by the curators in Zurich. In one of the screens the development of the collective practice is shown, and in the other one, the artist performs the life cycle of a black bean plant, which lives up to 100 days. In a second stage of the installation, a painting and a pot will be included. Both objects were created by Katherine with used cardboard that she collected from the streets of New York during the lockdown, and then processed and compressed in order to sculpt the pot and canvas. For the painting she used natural pigments that she obtained from the black beans.

Sergio Rojas questions interpersonal affections through the display of everyday objects on a bookshelf, both in the public space and in the gallery space. His installation at la_cápsula consists of the bookcase filled with several decorative items, and a series of photographs. The artist found the wicker bookshelf in the streets of Geneva during the Spring lockdown and filled it with other found objects, such as fake plastic plants, books, or plastic animals, all of them matching the aesthetics of the bookcase. He then started doing what he calls “shelf - walks”, carrying the bookshelf on his back through the streets, leaving it on the public space for the passersby to be able to have a look at

¹ Diana Hadley et al.: <https://www.garynabhan.com/news/2020/04/four-changes-by-gary-snyder/>. Snyder’s full text can be read here: <https://bioneers.org/four-changes-by-gary-snyder/>

it, and then talking to them about their ideas around the shelf and the items on it. This way, Sergio brings the domestic space into the public realm, opening up the possibility to imagine new narratives about wild and exotic nature. Sergio's performance and installation show us our own desires of being close or deeply connected to nature while, in turn, foster the questioning of both our projections onto and dynamics of consumption of the natural world.

Dominik Zietlow has been reflecting on isolation and consumption during the pandemic. His research took him to be interested in eremites and preppers –people who stockpile food and water, prepare to become self-sufficient, and build structures such underground shelters that may help them survive a catastrophe. With this in mind, he found out that it is possible to buy survival food kits: he ordered online a bucket that contained 21 individual portions of food, that is, three meals per day, for seven days. He then chose seven people to whom he delivered food during one week; each person got three meals for one day. Dominik documented the delivery and spent around forty minutes with each one of them, in order to cook the food together and to document them eating. The installation at la_cápsula consists of a selection of 21 photographs, as well as the survival kit bucket. Dominik's project interrogates our current relation to food consumption, which has changed very much over the last years but even more during the pandemic –with its rising of take away and delivery–. It also seeks to visibilize isolation, while proposing sharing –of time, meals, space– as a way to counter the highly individualistic and neoliberal habits of our world.

The process

In order to achieve true collaborative work and resonance between the artworks and individual interests of each artist, the project was divided into three phases:

1. Digital meetings during lockdown: the first phase of the project took place during the lockdown. The team of 4 artists + 2 curators communicated via email, Slack, WhatsApp and held Zoom meetings in which several questions about the pandemic –such as “how do we want the future to look like after this?”– were discussed. Participants also explained the topics that most interested them for developing new work.
2. Development of new work: each artist worked individually on the development of their new work. Periodical meetings during the summer (physically and via Zoom) were programmed in order to discuss the works, give each other feedback and find connecting points between the artworks. Due to differences in time zones, the work processes were also shared by videos and discussed via email and WhatsApp. In some cases, artists and curators also participated in the works of the other artists.
3. Exhibition of new artworks: the third and, for now, final stage of the project is the current exhibition. The four resulting works are exhibited in the group show at

la_cápsula. During the period of the exhibition, documentation about the processes will be added periodically and, given that most of the works are participatory, they will transform throughout time. Parts of the project will also be displayed online, via social media and our website, in order to make the project available to a wider public and to allow the active involvement of artist Katherine Patiño, who was not able to travel to Switzerland due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.

The work strategy and the several exhibition formats –online and offline– allowed artists and curators of *This thin edge* to create works and content reacting and connecting with each other in spite of mobility restrictions and geographical distances.