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February 23, 2015 — **Issue 1 : Margen de elección** (<http://terremoto.mx/issue/first-issue/>)

Tania Pérez Córdova

(<http://terremoto.mx/article/tania-perez-cordova/>)

by *Jennifer Teets*

Vis-à-vis a 2011 inquiry of the artist's relatively known text, "Things Above the Ground, Things Below The Ground", Jennifer Teets probes Pérez Córdova's interest in the unearthing and birthing of sculptures, age-acceleration, and the uncertainty of function and form – how do objects perform and within their performance can they duplicate and emerge as another?

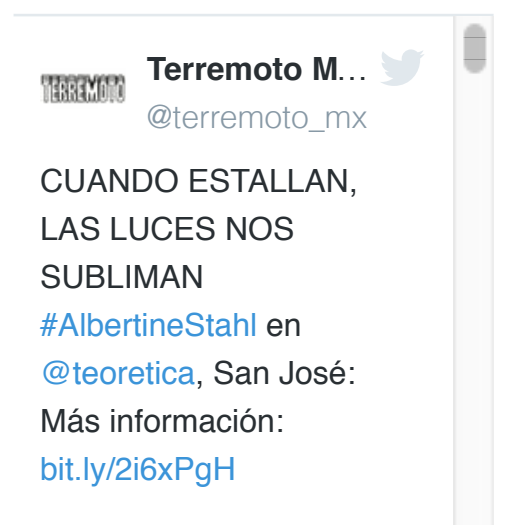


Tania Pérez Córdova, Live chat, 2012, Fluorescent Pelikan marker emptied out in tap water, marker,

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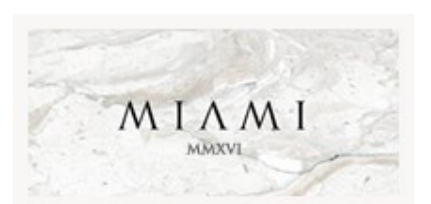
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In a 2011 text authored by Mexican artist Tania Pérez Córdova (1979, Mexico City) and commissioned for an online exhibition that I organized for NERO magazine (http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/), the artist delves into the curious life of the Coatlicue Mayor, a colossal Aztec Sculpture that was “buried and uncovered repeatedly during a period of more than 500 years”(1). Relaying this peculiar narrative, Pérez Córdova travels across a weave of historical anecdotes. She entangles her readers in the repeated burial and unearthing of the sculpture (including replicas that also were buried), and its spiritual history turned political, but also its systematic transitional life as an object.

She writes: “I will not delve into the Coatlicue symbolism or any of the fascinating tales of religious syncretism that surround the sculpture as these can be found in any history book. Instead, it is the transitions of the object, as if abstracted from history, what interest me more... In some voodoo rituals, objects are dug and later unearthed as a way of loading or unloading them with power. In these ceremonies digging in and digging up is used as a way to change the function, meaning and use of objects. In voodoo, it is believed things could have strong effects from the underground, and so one could be blessed or cursed from below the earth. The Coatlicue monumental sculpture measures more than 2.5 meters in height and weighs over two tons, as much as a small whale or an SUV. In order to get a clearer picture of the monolith tale, I have made a sketch of its episodes above and under the ground, including the replicas that were left on top while the sculpture was removed from man’s sight.” (2)



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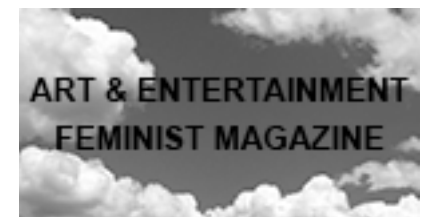


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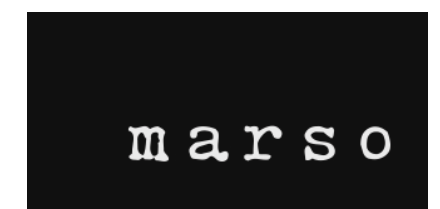
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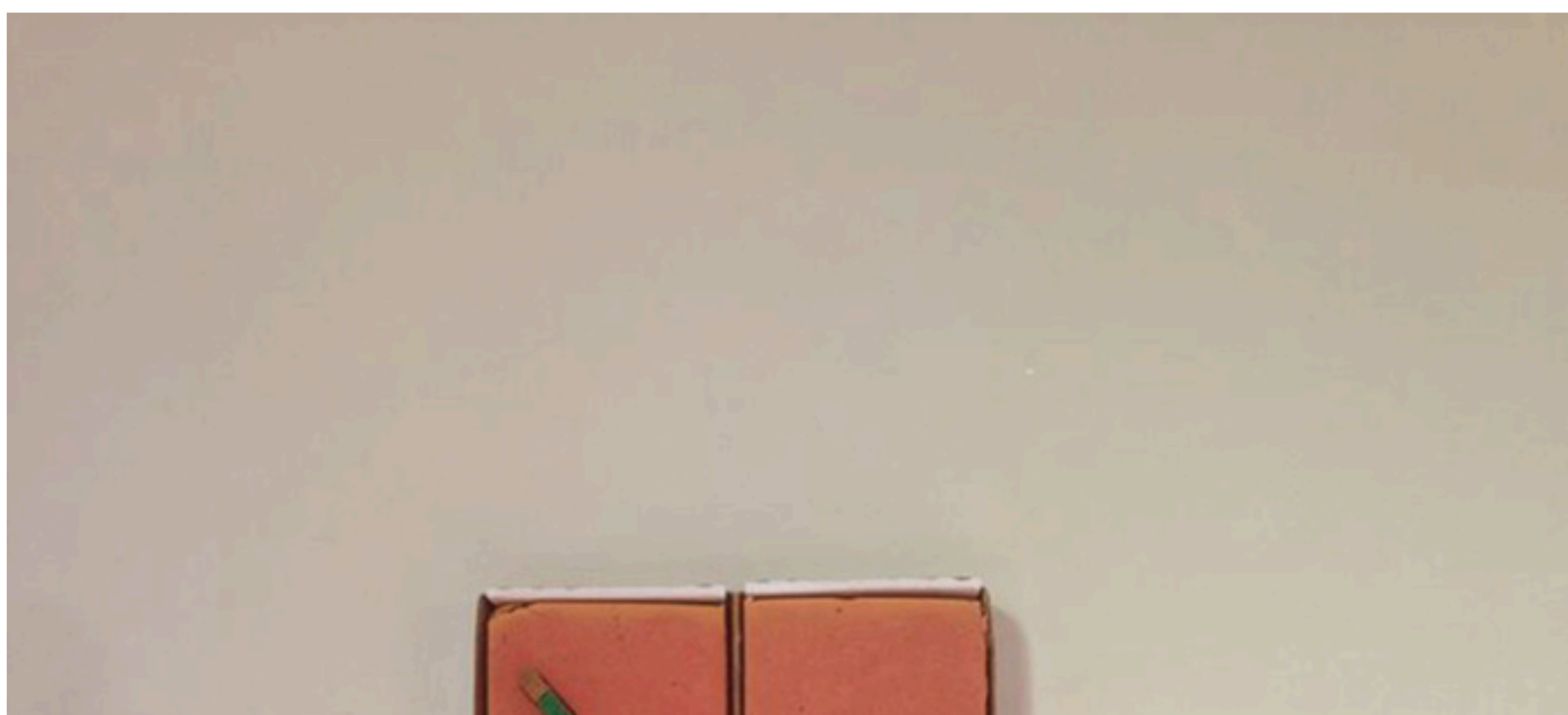
Tania Pérez Córdova, How to use reversed psychology with pictures, 2012-2013, Artificially aged fabric (once black), Linen, 150 x 96 cm

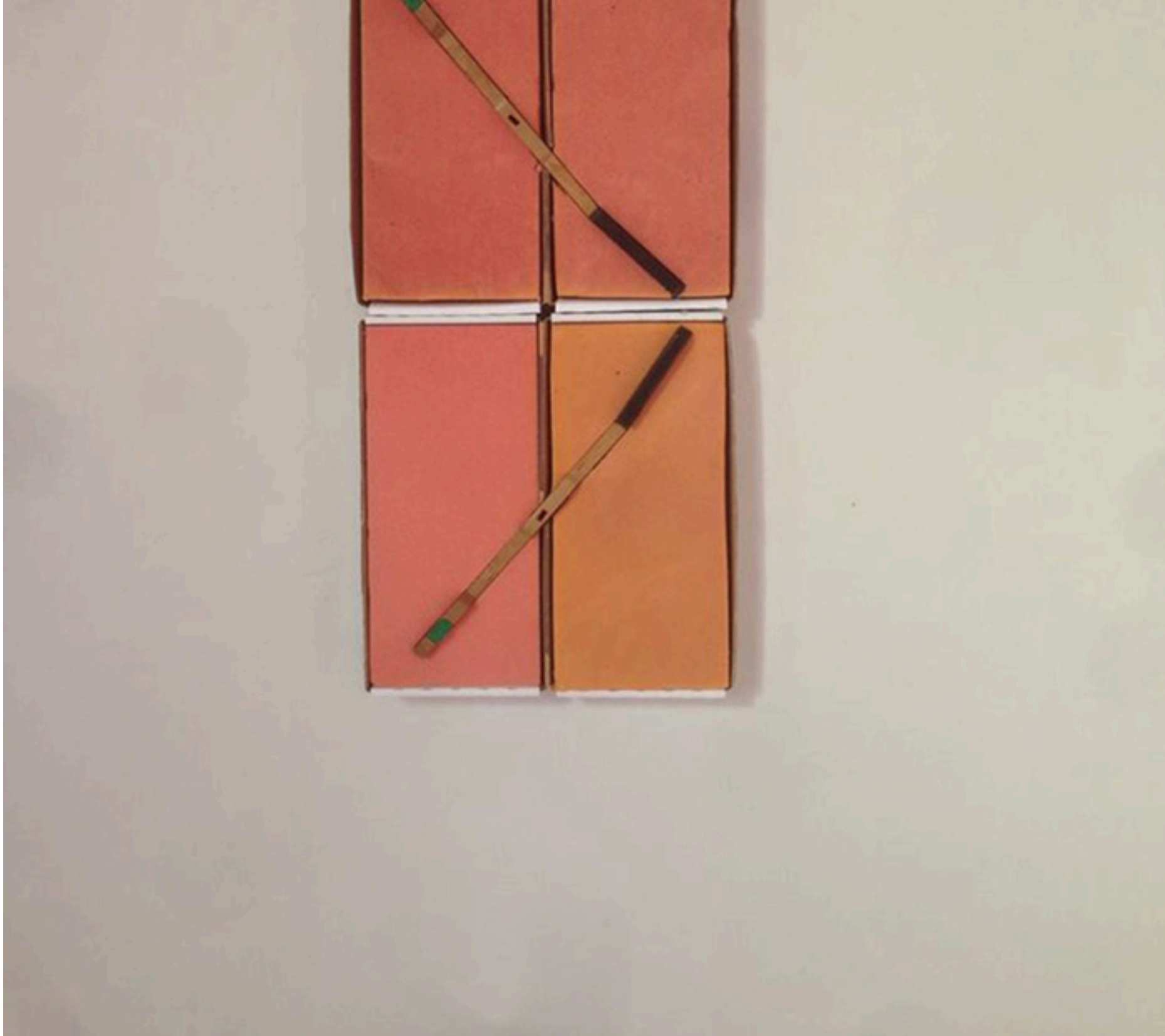


Tania Pérez Córdova, Temporarily Magnetized Objects, 2007, silver negative print

As indicated, the artist sketches out a kind of quasi-anthropological timeline of the object's transited burial life state both above and below ground. Underlining her inquiry with questions such as, "How deep can one bury an object before it is at risk of getting petrified, fossilized or absorbed by the Earth's strata?" she relates the object's "quest" to reach the top again, in the sense of a future discovery. It is within revisiting this text that I would like to bring forth a few reflections on Pérez Córdova's art.

While her work is somewhat known in Mexico City and abroad (it has shown in worldwide fairs and biennials; she's slotted to exhibit at the 2015 New Museum Triennial in New York City), it has failed to experience flight within critical review. This has occurred for a number of reasons. Pérez Córdova has always had a kind of introverted approach and hermetic style, let alone her communication of it – a significantly different symptomatic than her forefathers. Further, she claims that her work happens between questioning how to make something and how to make sense of something – a process based attitude to making art, which is also atypical to her previous generation. Lastly, her work emerges out of her curiosity and focuses upon the relationship between vision and conviction. While it would be misleading to state that an interest towards popular beliefs are absent in the art of the former, in Pérez-Córdova's case, the relation between vision and conviction is more tool-like. Pérez Córdova puts materiality into question, not only with materials, but also through them.





Tania Pérez Córdova, Things in Pause, 2014, borrowed black piano keys, foam, cardboard

In her text, like in her art, she highlights isolated episodes of visibility and invisibility and peculiar strains of abstraction within an object's life. For me, she turns to a kind of new animism within her notion of objects and their performativity. Therefore, it is of no surprise that her work *How to use reversed psychology with pictures* (2012-2013) is an artificially aged piece of linen fabric (once black) in a state of not only material transition, but a passage of vitalities. Pérez Córdova is known to age accelerate or give potency to objects including magnetizing ordinary geometric objects such as with the early work *Temporarily Magnetized Objects* (2007). These have later appeared in a film where a group of people can be seen touching and passing them around, a kind of invigoration of life force to energize the objects for a purpose we are left to speculate. Appearing like a mentalist experiment where the objects become "charged," the fabric, in turn "experiences" a fast-forwarded temporal compression, or what we believe of it. Another very simple but poignant work that expresses its material buoyancy in a similar way is *Live Chat* (2012), a pen that highlights in yellow with the point turned upside down to the interior of a glass of water, leaking and separating over time into two layers. Suffice to say, most of Pérez Córdova's work holds a visceral temperament that embraces our everyday structures of belief.

Flipping back to her text to think about her preoccupation with time, these written words come to mind: "Man has always been aware that most objects outlast human beings, and that when it comes to preserving them from possible atrocities above ground the safest place to keep things is under the ground. So if the viceroy, on the first discovery of the Coatlicue, did not destroy the monolith, would that mean that he was unconsciously leaving a message for future generations? A time capsule?" (3)

Yet, what if the time capsule were just on pause (like many of the objects of Pérez Córdova)? I'm led to look to her adoration for bastardized, orphaned, and borrowed objects. Again a nod to transition here; all have left imprints or parts of themselves behind, physically, or otherwise contextually. The series titled *Things in Pause* (2013-present) is a case in point. They are SIM cards embedded in porcelain, shirtsleeves nested in pine wood, a piano key enmeshed in a pictorial composition, an antique decorative frame of an altered shape – each acquiring new lives, each at standstill. These tokens or quasi-objects, as they have been called before, later return to their original place of origin or owners after the exhibition. And if the work is sold, an exchange occurs where the collector must replace the advertised object with an approved substitute – a changeover also implying value. (4)

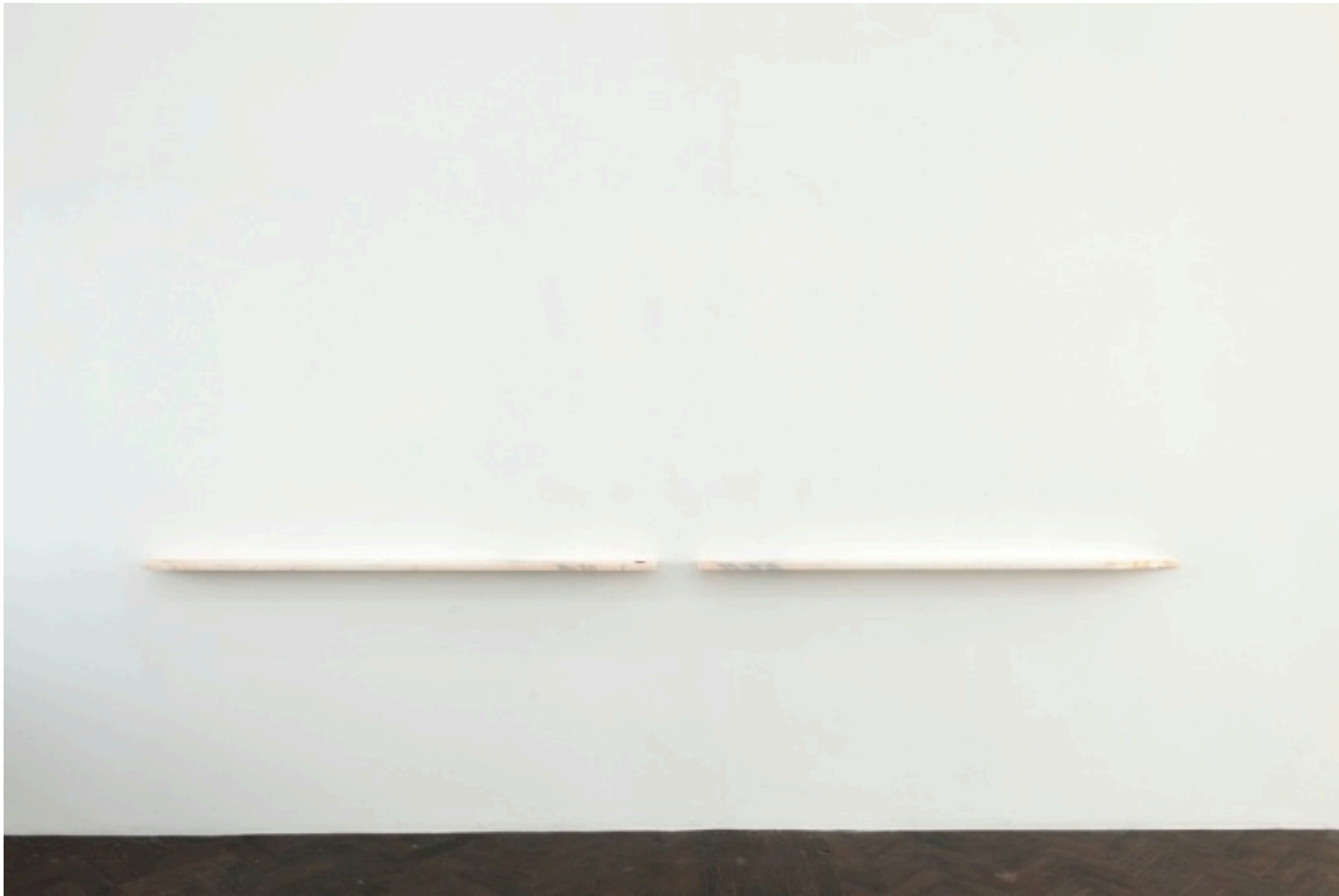
Titling is also intrinsic to Pérez Córdova's work. But it does not just encase her objects within language. It reveals otherwise disguised pretenses. It is in the connective tissue between the title and the subject, be it a photograph, action, or sculpture that evidence is portrayed. Whether this evidence be an action or a superstition, the titling is the swinging door that opens up Pérez Córdova's frame, and it is the way she communicates the otherwise elusive content to her viewers. Here too lies a narrative saturation within the object's former or future life. Titling is the stepping stone to consider the multivalent life of objects and supersede the expectations of an object's contained meaning. (5)



Tania Pérez Córdova, All the things, 2014, Brass bronze weight, 10,5 x 11 cm

She continues: “In 1939 Westinghouse created one of the first time capsules for the occasion of the World's Fair, sponsored that year by General Motors and developed around the idea of the future. The trend was to become popular and perhaps nowadays even school assignments would request students to make time capsules of their own. Yet, the 1939 New York time capsule seemed to be, more than a romantic or political act, a real hope to communicate with the future, addressing generations to come as if they were to be completely alien to their own. It included a collection of items mostly selected by a group of Americans, which were supposed to represent the human race and its principal categories of thought, activity and accomplishment. It also included

greetings to upcoming societies by Einstein and Thomas Mann. Among the buried objects was a cosmetic make up set by Elizabeth Arden, a guide to the sounds of English words and a woman's hat designed by Lilly Dache. The capsule is meant to be unearthed in the year 6939. If the request is ensued these objects still have a long way until they reach the top again. One can only speculate if then, a hat could and would still be a hat.” (6)



Tania Pérez Córdova, Something separated by commas, 2014, Marble, green contact lens, red lipstick, 1,9 x 163,5 x 11cm

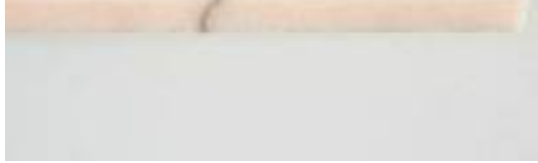
Pérez Córdova's work brings up ontological questions of the object just as her text pinpoints if a hat can still be a hat in the year 6939. This comes through in her bronze works that consider conversion and weight. For example, consider *All the things* (2014) and *3 or 5 or 4 or nothing* (2014) recently made for her exhibition *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* held at Meessen De Clercq in Brussels. She has certain affection or attraction to bronze and brass and replicating objects or their doubles, and proceeds to only exhibit their molds or residues. It is of no surprise that Pérez Córdova's approach resembles the hindered and entrenched in the work of Trisha Donnelly or the craft and narrative infused work of Lucy Skaer. It is an art that goes beyond language and into that space of conviction, where “not seeing something does not mean that it isn't there (7).” An attempt to “decode something in this day and age of a contemporary art ecosystem that is dominated by the eminently readable.”(8)

The series *Something separated by commas* (2014) comes to mind in this regard and captures Pérez Córdova's spirit for leftovers – red lipstick like blood smeared into a perfect circle resting on the corner of a thin creamy elongated marble slab facing another elongated slab holding one green contact lens. A duplicate yet slightly different work – a cigarette ashed onto a perfectly circular pattern sitting on the corner of a thin creamy elongated marble slab facing another elongated slab holding one green contact lens. Both sculptures, separated by commas and almost ghostly, appear as if some odd incident just occurred. They just sit there in disturbing silence, staring at us, and I'm encouraged to stare at them too. I wait patiently, reflecting on things below and above the ground, and speculate whether in Pérez Córdova's time capsule, if a green contact lens could and would still be a green contact lens.

Jennifer Teets is a curator and writer based in Paris.

Tania Pérez Córdova is an artist that lives in Mexico City.





(<http://terremoto.mx/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/013-Something-separated-by-commas-detail-2.jpg>)



(<http://terremoto.mx/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/011-Something-separated-by-commas-detail-1-web.jpg>)



(<http://terremoto.mx/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Chasing-pausing-waiting.jpg>)



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(<http://terremoto.mx/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/32.jpg>)

Images courtesy of the artist and Proyectos Monclova, Mexico City, and Meessen de Clercq, Brussels.

Notes

- (1) http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/
(http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/). A physical exhibition also emerged from the virtual exhibition and shares an eponymous title. It was held at Stereo, Poznan from September 2 – October 1, 2011, <http://galeriastereo.pl/en/a-clock-that-runs-on-mud>.
- (2) http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/-/?p=28
(http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/-/?p=28)
- (3) http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/-/?p=28
(http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/-/?p=28)
- (4) http://artreview.com/opinion/december_2013_opinion_maria_lind_on_going_back_to_basics_art_itself_and_earrings/
(http://artreview.com/opinion/december_2013_opinion_maria_lind_on_going_back_to_basics_art_itself_and_earrings/)
- (5) Hoptman, Laura. “Trisha Donnelly: Electricity,” Parkett 77, p. 69.
- (6) http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/-/?p=28
(http://www.neromagazine.it/a_clock_that_runs_on_mud/-/?p=28)
- (7) Hoptman, Laura. “Trisha Donnelly: Electricity,” Parkett 77, p. 69.
- (8) Hoptman, Laura. “Trisha Donnelly: Electricity,” Parkett 77, p. 69.

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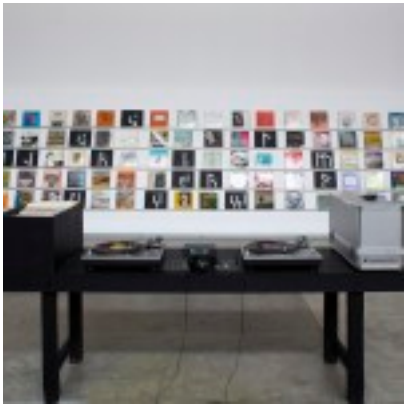
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