

APRENDICES | T1: E8 Santiago Dieste

Desgrabación corregida - Inglés

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INTRO

What I always tell students and kids at home is that if we ask them less than what they can give, it's wrong. If we ask them more than what they can give, it's wrong. What they can give, only they can know.

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But this is a matter of doing.

PREVIA

Claudia Brovetto.

Hi.

The project leader.

Everything alright?

Welcome.

Thank you very much.

I'm doing an investigation about my own creative process.

I'm in a process of analysis...

Yes, self-analysis.

Self-analysis...

Welcome.

Thank you.

I cross my legs, nothing happens. I move, nothing happens.

It's OK. The idea is that you're comfortable.

Santiago, Apprentices, take 1.

Just a second.

CHARLA

Look, professionally, I must define myself as a sculptor. I am a sculptor. Even though I take on different languages, it's always from a sculptor's perspective.

I can use a chainsaw as a tool or a camera. Right now, I'm using piezoelectric devices as tools to record sounds. But everything I do is from the view of a sculptor.

That would be the professional part. And personal... That's a little harder, but I think I'm a very strong family person. I take shelter in my family, tightly together, all four of us.

Which are your first memories? Those moments in your life where you began to feel something happening with the form, with the fabric?

I come from a family, or two families, both my paternal and maternal families, with the imprint to resolve things by oneself.

I'm talking everything from an electrical system, to bathrooms, household appliances, shoes. Shoes glued below the dining room table was a classic: Novopren and squash it with the table!

One of my grandparents was an engineer and the other was a tailor, so there was a very strong imprint to do things.

My engineering grandfather invented a construction process and had to come up with the tools for it, because he had invented a project for which no specific elements existed.

My other grandfather, the tailor, had a sewing workshop. There were places of activity. In his workshop I had a... I had, in a sense, a role.

So I think that was a defining moment. I had an inclination for expressiveness, and I held on to that activity as a kind of vital toolkit, to be able to go forward.

I can't stop thinking about this way of doing things, which is not any kind of way, but one where you have to use the existing, available elements.

If life is circular, what is circular in your life about recycling, and not doing things from scratch?

In my creative process it is important to create with what you are given. It's very rare that I work with material I purchased. Generally, I work with leftover material, or wood I get from prunings.

It's exceedingly rare for me to work with a brand-new element, or firsthand raw materials.

I wonder if there was an initial moment you associate with your first work as a sculptor.

My first conscious work, or what I consider to be such, was a lead finger I melted and left to my parents. A middle finger I'm not proud of, but I was just a kid, 16 or 17 years old.

I melted a lead middle finger and left it on the table for my parents to find it, so that when you opened the apartment door, it was the first thing you saw.

Melting metal is an ancient technical method, but that was not what inspired me. What inspired me was that my maternal grandfather and uncle went fishing a lot. And to go fishing they made their own plumbs.

As I grew up, that task was given to me and one of my cousins. So, in a tin in the broiler, down in the country house, we would take lead from old pipes and we would melt it.

Which is wrong because it's tremendously poisonous and tremendously dangerous. Because melted lead is a... Luckily, we never had an accident. But that was my task.

Once when I was a teenager I had to send my parents a message due to certain circumstances, and the tool I used was the tool I had learned.

So I used the same technique I used to make the plumbs, and I made this lead middle finger for my parents.

It stayed in my parents' house for a long time; then it spent a long time locked away in the workshop, and now, a little while ago, I don't know why but I took it home. Now it's pointing at myself. I gave it a new meaning. Now, as a parent, I point it at me.

And what happened afterwards? When that finger became an element of the house, decoration in your parents' place, what happened then?

It was like a peak, it stayed there and time went on. I made some other things, but not many. And only a while later did I begin to work systematically, in a self-taught way, at first.

My parents, very generously and openly, gave me a chunk of the apartment terrace, which wasn't very big, but it was a space for me to do my things.

Until I ran out of space. I had some minor accidents. I injured myself occasionally, so an uncle of mine said to my parents: "Take this kid to a more formal place so he doesn't get badly injured".

There's a restlessness there to explore materials, to try to communicate through them. What takes place there? What drives you?

What drives you is meaning. What starts making noise and coming up in the process is meaning. It is the why, the what for, the how.

And that's where, after certain comings and goings in two workshops, I came to a sculptor's workshop who said to me: "You're at a point where you need provocation of a different kind". He said: "You must go to Fine Arts".

I had studied Communication for four years, but I left and went to Fine Arts. I abandoned my previous career, which is great, and where I learned a lot, but I abandoned it and concentrated on Fine Arts.

Some of the people we have spoken to describe these crisis as hitting the wall and changing direction...

To me it was a very difficult time because it was a private university. My parents had undergone a superhuman effort to pay for it, but... There came a point where I had to say: "I won't do this anymore, I can't do this anymore; I don't like it, I'm not interested".

So it was a big problem for me, though my parents never said anything about it. Well, they did say: "You could've realized it sooner". But that is how processes are, and you can tell when you can tell.

The fact is that it weighed on me. Something very strong was bound up in that decision. My family did a gigantic effort for me and I was abandoning that effort. It wasn't that I hadn't put in any effort myself, but I was leaving it all the same.

That didn't stop me. I moved forward. I switched to Fine Arts and modified my way of understanding my education radically.

I remember a specific situation. In the first year of Fine Arts, there is an exercise (I think they still do it) about color leveling.

A terrible, terrible exercise for me, since I had no idea how to go at it. They give you a piece of paper with nine squares, nine color rectangles, and a white hole inside each rectangle. They give you the primary colors with which you have to make the other color.

It's a long-winded exercise that you develop over time. It took me 3 times the intended amount of time. I had never painted or colored. And you were dealing with acrylic, which shifts color when you dry them.

At home, obsessively and repetitively, I had made giant strips of paper, a white floor tile and a hairdryer. So I would create the color, test it on the strips of paper, dry it quickly and compare it. I corrected it: more of this, more of that.

When I was doing that, my dad got up from his nap (I still lived with my folks) and said to me: "What are you doing?" I told him: "I'm studying". "No, you are not. Go study".

So even though he knew the art universe and all that, he didn't conceive of it as a study process, and I had to fight against that, too. After four years of studying Communication, my parents watched me paint on paper stripes, and couldn't understand that that was studying.

It was something that changed after a little while when I won an award. Strangely, all that process, my changing careers, my painting paper stripes in the kitchen or the dining room, were seen in a different light after the award...

Sometimes, being legitimized by outsiders legitimates you in your most intimate circles.

I'd like to go further back to your process in school, which is perhaps the most exploratory period.

Were there signs that Santiago would one day be drying pieces of paper? What went on there?

What I remember the most about school, as it relates to this, is that I loved rainy days at school. Because they gave you access to the materials and you could do whatever you wanted.

I remember perfectly these giant tins with crayons, and what I remember most are the thick, weighty pieces of paper, shiny on one side and wrinkled on the other side. To me, those paper sheets were glorious.

The way they smelled and their wrinkly texture were incredible to me.

I have that memory of school. A deep enjoyment of school breaks in rainy days.

Going a little bit forward... In high school, you have subjects. Maybe you're given to understand that there is less room to try things out.

What happened to you then?

High school, for me, had two distinct periods: from first to third year, I sleepwalked... I do not say it with pride, but I sleepwalked. And I do remember with great fondness fourth, fifth and sixth year of high school, where despite these limitations... I am dyslexic, I carry my dyslexia over my shoulders. However, I acquired a lot of strategies and skills to compensate for that.

I was always a good student in the last three years of high school. I studied really hard and found composition strategies that allowed me to compensate for certain weaknesses I knew that I had.

I had to study and get good grades in the old way, which was writing. And that was my weakness. I mean, I couldn't do that well.

In those intervals, I became the king of synonyms, of trying to give the text a spin. However, these days, whenever I have to write about elements of my own work, I do it rather well... or at least I get by.

I remember a Literature teacher in the compulsory exams, when they were compulsory, Sonia... Very rigorous, very strict, tremendously strict and rigorous. She gave all the guidelines. I remember: a short lady with short fingers. I have a visual memory and there are things about people that distract me: short fingers, short lady. She gave all the exam guidelines, she looked at me, and said: "And you, Dieste, write as you wish, but write. Write. As you wish, but write".

And I remember that setting me free. I was very scared, it was my first exam, but she gave me the freedom not to worry, not to be crushed under the weight.

So, that liberation untangled me.

I can't stop thinking about your process as a sculptor. I remember what you said about drying the bits of paper little by little, and being rigorous.

Absolutely. Sculpture can be done basically in two ways: by addition or by subtraction. By addition is adding material to an element that you are making, and by subtraction is starting from a block or a volume greater than the one you want to make and removing what you don't need. When I look at the thing and I remove the excess, it's sculpture by subtraction.

The subtraction process is irreversible. So, the matter of when to remove the chunk from the wooden block is also part of the learning process.

I knew that if I wrote two pages and I didn't read what I'd written, it was irreversible: the mess had been done. That's why I understand my life ritualistically. Working from repetition. Repetition allows you to go deeper into the process.

I repeat this process until I exhaust it. I exhaust it in the sense of being done with it, and being able to go at it in a different way.

You made me think about these opposing processes of addition and subtraction. How would you link them in education and in your role as a teacher?

I link them in the role they play of choosing the method based on the needs. It's not "I have this method; I work this way". It's not "I work like this", because "I work like this" doesn't apply to every case.

What I always tell my students is that if we ask them less than what they can give, it's wrong. If we ask them more than what they can give, it's wrong. What they can give, only they can know.

So it's always about making the biggest effort, both for students and for the kids at home.

If the sculpture came out horribly... the sculpture came out horribly. But did I turn in my best effort? That's the thing.

I'll have to correct, evaluate, ask myself what did I do right, what did I do wrong. But this is a matter that I call "doing". So use your hands. Get moving.

And get moving can mean doing streaming; that's moving too. Because we must accept that there is movement there as well, even if the language is foreign to us and the space is unknown. So just do it. Get moving.