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Just What Is It That Makes Today's Exhibitions So Different, So Appealing?: Cristina Garrido Joshua Simon

The latest projects of Madrid-based artist Cristina Garrido explore what contemporary art is made of. Against a backdrop of calls for justice in the art world—returning artifacts, demoting museum board members, labor rights, diversity demands, controversies around representation—Garrido's conceptual gestures reflect on the fundamentals of contemporary art and the input of the mediators at the center of it. From an archive of installation views online, to art fair booths as happenings, to interviews with prominent art photographers, Garrido's work activates what Jean Baudrillard called "the conspiracy of art."

JOSHUA SIMON

In *Boothworks* (2017), the footage is taken from online platforms like Vernissage TV, which documents contemporary art fairs, and the text is a collage entirely composed of quotes from people who we would identify with anti-form, neo-avant-garde, conceptual art, and other trends of the 1960s and 1970s. What is the relation you see between those artistic movements and the reality documented in the video? And where, if at all, do you position your work in relation to these artists and thinkers?

CRISTINA GARRIDO

Having studied art in London, I have been influenced by the artists and thinkers whose texts I used for the video. This work is also an attempt to reread these now-canonical art practices and theories, and point out how some of their aspirations have mutated into something different from what they originally envisaged. The ideas in *Boothworks*, a title borrowed from Robert Smithson's *Earthworks*, emerged from the perception that, in recent years, galleries' presentations at international art fairs in the form of booths—a more or less standardized architectural space essentially composed by an arrangement of artworks, furniture, lighting, and the gallery members—has mutated from a more or less arbitrary display of art objects with the mere purpose of their sale to a more sophisticated attempt to create a space with its own artistic value. I also noticed that this phenomenon is enhanced by how every new art fair shortlists their "best booths."

These observations made me think of a shift of attention from the art object to the art-fair booth and the potential to see the art fair as an exhibition of booths whose ultimate authors are the gallerists. I began to see—not without a certain sense of irony—some similarities with conceptual, site-specific, performative, ephemeral art practices from the 1960s and 1970s. "Booth art" is nomadic (gallerists are constantly traveling around the world, often neglecting the physical space of the actual gallery), site specific (the selection of artworks varies), ephemeral (after five days the whole setting is dismantled), performative (only activated for the length of the art fair) and, somehow, resistant to commodification (very rarely will a collector or a museum acquire a booth in its entirety).

JS
You interrelate many of your works with the places in which they are experienced and seen. You thoroughly researched social media outlets, blogs, and websites to come up with a kind of categorical display of the ultimate contemporary art installation in *#WIIITMTESDSA?* (Just what is it that makes today's exhibitions so different, so appealing?) (2015). And you dedicated *The (Invisible) Art of Documenting Art*

(2019), a book and a medium-length documentary film, to asking international art photographers about the practicalities and status of their work. What are you looking for in the mediated aspects of the art world?

CG

Both of those projects tackled the impact of digital technologies in the production, distribution, and reception of contemporary art. *#WIIITMTESDSA?* addressed how the smartphone—which provoked an acceleration in the circulation of images of art—and the strong influence of the media constantly disseminate very specific images of how contemporary art should look. These are formal trends that we easily recognize and rapidly become obsolete.

In *The (Invisible) Art of Documenting Art I* focused on the authors of these traveling images, who are mostly professional photographers working on a freelance basis for public institutions, galleries, and artists. If, today, we are much more likely to experience art on a screen than in person, these photographers are the front-line interpreters who decide how we will perceive an exhibition or the details of an artwork. Today it is often through images that artists communicate about their work, collectors choose what to acquire, curators decide what to incorporate into their next project, critics write, award and competition juries make their selections, and a long et cetera. The book is an attempt to create a different framing than the usual one they present in order to allow us to read the works as creations by specific persons, working in specific contexts, accompanied by particular technological tools.





to start any art form.