

DIEGO SANTOMÉ

CORNER PIECE AND
OTHER CONFLICTING SPACES

CENTRO GALEGO DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEA
Santiago de Compostela

Curated by Agar Ledo

Opening: 20th June at 8 pm
From 20th June to 26th October 2014
Ground floor

Diego Santomé (Vigo, 1966)

Lives and works in Nigrán, Pontevedra). A self-taught artist, he began to work in the late nineteen-nineties. He has held solo shows in Colexio de Fonseca (USC, Santiago de Compostela, Spain), MOT International (London, United Kingdom), Casal Solleric (Palma de Mallorca, Spain), Fundación RAC (Pontevedra, Spain), MARCO (Vigo, Pontevedra, Spain), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Gas Natural Fenosa (A Coruña, Spain) and Artium (Vitoria, Spain). He has participated recently in several international and national group shows in La Casa Encendida (Madrid, Spain), ADN Platform (Barcelona, Spain), Espace d'Art Contemporain (les halles) (Porrentruy, Switzerland), Royal College of Art (London, United Kingdom), Palais de Beaux-Arts Bozar (Brussels, Belgium), Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (Santiago de Compostela, Spain), MARCO (Vigo, Spain) and CAAC (Seville, Spain). Diego Santomé is represented by Parra & Romero Gallery, Madrid, Spain.

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<http://xurl.es/prensadiegosantome>

DIEGO SANTOMÉ

CORNER PIECE AND OTHER CONFLICTING SPACES

The discursive strategies that provide the foundation for the work of Diego Santomé (Vigo, Spain, 1966) are directly linked to the concepts of utopia and failure, equilibrium and instability. In both the selection of the materials and the work process, Santomé bases his approach on subjects related to the circumstances of everyday life and their transformation, showing the possibility/impossibility of a new order leading to a balanced society.

This project brings together a series of works that sum up the issues dealt with in his work over the last decade. The pieces created specifically for this exhibition as well as the previous works boast the same dynamics—they are processes that serve to uncover a reality that emerges to reflect the failure of social utopias, whose footprints are recovered by Diego Santomé to consider the possibility of reconstructing them.

Cinema, photography, sculpture or illustration, but above all action—which is at the root of his works—are formats that allow him to approach—from a critical vantage point—the transitory nature of structures and of society. The simple shapes, linked to the minimalist aesthetic style that has marked his production from the very beginning and the ephemeral character of the materials and objects he uses, are fundamental to the construction of new meanings. What is simple and inconsequential and anything of a tentative nature have the possibility of undergoing major changes.

DIEGO SANTOMÉ

PEZA DE ESQUINA E OUTROS ESPAZOS EN CONFLITO

In *Wild Apples. The History of the Apple Tree* (1862), one of Henry David Thoreau's later texts, the author describes a humble fruit, the wild apple, which grows in the most remote woods. It is a short essay that shows Thoreau's fascination for natural history and, at the same time, addresses matters which the author of *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden* championed in his literature and life. The wild apple represents resistance, the triumph of the savage over the civilised, the struggle of certain species to strike a balance with nature faced with their rapid destruction.

Galápago europeo (Emmys orbicularis) (2013-2014) is a new film by Diego Santomé which, through the confrontation of landscapes, draws a comparison between the pond turtle's danger of extinction in the As Gándaras de Budiño ecosystem and the fight for the ideals that underpin the construction of a fairer society. Santomé's piece, like the rest of his films, generates tension between fiction and reality while at the same time creating a space for the utopia of difference, in which we acquire an awareness of diversity and the peril entailed

by the disappearance of minority cultures owing to the colonising strategies of the most powerful.

The European pond turtle, known more commonly in Galicia as 'sapoconcho' (an animal which popular Galician culture views as very old toad which grows a shell on its back), is in danger of extinction owing to the systematic destruction of its natural habitat and the presence of invasive alien species. One of the last remaining populations survives in the Budiño wetlands, an ecosystem in which the remnants of Galicia's initial Palaeolithic settlements can still be seen, and where, in 1964, the Franco regime's 'developmentism' established one of the first development hot spots, the precursors of industrial estates. It is a place of contrasts, where the flora and fauna live under the constant threat of industrialisation. Progress is portrayed as degeneration, and the destruction of the natural and social environment as a consequence of the inexorable process of producing goods.

THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE

Diego Santomé approaches cinema in a similar way to sculpture, painting and installation: the process consists in collecting and reconstructing. His work can be understood in terms of the formal or conceptual affinities that individual pieces establish between each other; relationships of circularity which eschew the linear



Diego Santomé: *Pieza de esquina*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Galería Parra & Romero, Madrid. Photo: La Casa Encendida/Manuel Blanco/2013



Diego Santomé: *Galápagos europeo (Emmys orbicularis)*, 2013-2014 (film stills).
 Courtesy of the artist and Galería Parra & Romero, Madrid

interpretation of pieces produced with very different media, but which share restrained forms, everyday materials and a minimum intervention from the artist, all in search of an experimental space from which to question the perception of reality.

These provisional narratives, associated with the ephemeral nature of objects, can be seen in *Vidrieras* (2011), fashioned with fragments of glass found among the rubble and debris in different areas. Leaning against the wall, they are shapes formed randomly and by action, presented as sculptures that speak of possibilities and transformations. Remnants of what once was, the pieces of broken glass determine the composition, the size of which is given by the setting itself. Using scrap material, the artist reconstructs the windows of a social centre in Gondomar, an abandoned building located just a few kilometres from his home. The window aperture provides the dimensions and the pieces of glass determine the composition. The simple, the irrelevant and the provisional translate into the possibility of great changes.

Ruinas y abstracciones de cristal (2011) is a practically archaeological record of fragments of glass still covered in dust. A slide show reveals a slow, meticulous work, in which the

material appears unrefined, untampered with, confronted with its own transformation. The material itself asserts its significance, its past and its present: these are items of waste, but they are also abstractions. It is in this space, between one piece and another, where the action, its beginning, and its transformational nature are to be found. *Vidrieras* is a work in progress which is complemented by a series of new developments, now detached from a specific location, where the shapes of the broken glass form an open, non-predetermined composition, as a space for experimentation which speaks of possible futures.

Action is the driving force behind the generation of a new state, on the basis of that which already exists. The place from where to understand Santomé's work, divested from a specific medium and removed from the workshop, where the result is given by a series of encounters marked by chance (objective) and by day to day matters. He is an artist of methodical production, which, ever since he started working in the late nineteen-nineties, has corresponded to an economy of resources, with situations associated with institutional criticism and with the relationship of his work with the social and immediate setting, where the work is configured on the basis of collaborations with other artists, with the public, or with his own family.

CONFLICTING SPACES

Diego Santomé perceives sculpture as an action which gives rise to an object. Like the utopian, it is a process, a space for intentions, for proposals, for confrontation and negation. Both *Pieza de esquina* (2013) and *Sobre la escultura* (2012), as well as *Estructura forzada al equilibrio* (2012) and *Diagonales negras* (2012)—agglomerate, video, ironwork, drawing—correspond to the same experimentation with space as a place of instability, where there is suppression by a determining force or a physical force is generated which stops it. They are abstract compositions which break with the predictable, formal experimentations which modify the spatial relations with the visitor and, through this coming together, acquire a human dimension.

Sobre la escultura is a film composed of recovered fragments (archive images of protests and social conflicts) and a voice-over with extracts from László Moholy-Nagy's *The New Vision*, one of the texts that represent the avant-garde's utopian spirit. Superimposed over the image, this technical text translates the instability to the present and is transformed into a critical manifesto. Sound and image come into conflict, giving rise to a dialectic space which culminates in friction between the parts—a latent tension-synthesis that pervades the entire exhibition.

Bending, as well as wrinkling, crushing, rolling-up and creasing, are some of the experimental actions minimalists used on materials in their efforts to explore them. *Pieza de esquina* needs to be understood in the context of this preoccupation for the intrinsic properties of the material. Fashioned out of wood, an element which itself does not retain tension, it poses a sculptural problem, an optical and spatial exercise of joining two walls with

a curved sheet of wood agglomerate forced at the ends, generating interdependence between the space and the object. The angle, which operates as both a container and a medium, is a setting for the encounter between tension and stability, a sort of spatial collapse.

It is the time of the experience which enables us to comprehend the temporal, open nature of certain works that are generated in their relationship with space and the visitor. Diego Santomé's works contain the tensions generated between the place of origin, the material, the process and the exhibition—an unstable equilibrium brought about by the frictions between the parts and the whole, or between the pieces and the ensemble. In *Cincuenta cubos de cemento* (2011) over the floor he randomly scatters 50 five-centimetre cubes, modules which expand or contract in the infinite variations that this sculpture can give rise to. The repetition of a formal element represents a progression, something inconclusive, new possibilities also suggested in *Detalle, club de Dinamo* (2011), a fragment from an iconic piece by Alexander Rodchenko taken in the Red Square in 1929.

In *Volumen y forma social* (2011), it is the confrontation between the form and the volume which helps to establish the meaning of a piece which examines industrial history and the current political and social situation. The abstract, geometric forms represent nearby ruined factories, and the debasement associated with them shows the state of the ruin referred to; the volume of degeneration of the place confronted with its two-dimensional representation. Engaging with the industrial models of *Volumen y forma social*, *Estructura abandonada* (2011) is transformed into a metaphor for a fruitless conquest. The action of translating an object that has lost its function to a new space allows us to reflect, from a critical stance, on the transitory nature of structures and of society. A fleetingness which Santomé addresses in *Castillos de arena* (2008), a film that portrays the daily life of two Czech immigrants who make a living by sculpting sand castles on the beach at A Praia América (Nigrán), while impassively witnessing the cyclical process of their destruction.

UTOPIA AND INSTABILITY

The discursive strategies upon which Diego Santomé's work is based are linked directly with the concepts of utopia and failure, balance and instability. His works are processes of revealing a reality which emerges as the failure of social utopias, the traces of which the artist reclaims to reflect on the possibility of reconstructing them.

This is the setting for *Apuntamentos e breve aproximación a Sargadelos, primeira versión* (2014), a film shot in Sargadelos, Cervo, the place where, in 1806, Antonio Raimundo Ibáñez founded a ceramics factory to exploit the area's natural resources. The images depict the current the ceramic production process, Sargadelos' so-called 'fifth stage', spurred on from 1949 by Isaac Díaz Pardo with the creation of Cerámicas do Castro (Sada) and Porcelanas de Magdalena (Argentina); and

completed, in 1970, with the construction in Cervo of the circular plant designed by the architect, Andrés Fernández-Albalat, symbolising the recovery of the original company's business and the spirit in the municipality.

The heyday of this stage was marked by the creation, in 1963, of the Galician Laboratory of Forms (Laboratorio de Formas), a programme aimed at recovering Galicia's historical memory subsequent to the process of 'memory loss' suffered as a result of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Spearheaded by Díaz Pardo, Luís Seoane and a group of intellectuals who had been in exile since the Spanish Civil War, the Laboratory is an institution which condenses the lines of thought which helped to form the Sargadelos group, Galicia's great industrial and cultural project, and which would become an example of the regulatory nature of the utopia, the moral ideals that encourage us to construct or transform, a metaphor for creation bound to the transformation of society.

Santomé's film can be perceived as an approach to a multi-faceted company, understood in relation to its setting, with the kaolin and the waterfall, with the area's inhabitants, the workers, the ventures, and characterised by the moral and experimental dimension which explains the appearance of the Carlos Maside Museum, the laboratories of industry and communication, the print media, the Edicións do Castro publishing house, the Sargadelos Seminary, the Laxe Geological



Diego Santomé: *Vidrieras*, 2011
Courtesy of the artist and Galería Parra & Romero, Madrid. Photo: Joaquín Cortés

Laboratory, the O Castro and Sargadelos ceramic schools, the workshops, as well as art galleries, research projects and cultural outreach initiatives.

'The principal problem suffered by practical men is that, generally, they do not believe in poetry and morality—that is to say: in ethics and aesthetics— which are the only things that have a permanent nature.' The film features texts by Isaac Díaz Pardo, such as the one above, taken from *Discusión sobre organización de industrias manufactureras* (Magdalena, 1959)¹. Alongside the images, focusing on the guidelines according to which the company was built, the words transmit the utopian spirit of an ethically based project, fundamental for assuming history itself from the modernity upon which contemporaneity should have been founded. Produced specifically for the exhibition, the film forms part of a work in progress, which started with *Abstracción posible* (2012) —a poster which uses a Sargadelos motif and generates a new abstraction by replacing the original colours with those most used by the Bauhaus movement— and a series of exercises gathered under the title *Aproximación abstracta* (2014) —a reinterpretation of the films of Norman McLaren, a Scottish-Canadian experimental filmmaker to whom the Carlos Maside Museum devoted an anthology of films on 1 September 1971.

In both the choice of materials and work process, in his films, sculptures, photographs and drawings, Santomé employs issues related to everyday circumstances and to the transformation thereof as his point of departure, showing the possibility/impossibility of a new order in which society reaches an equilibrium. Thoreau's wild apple is an example of the survival of certain species faced with the advance of civilisation, a meeting space for the natural, the animal, the wild, the other side. The search for equilibrium in a space in conflict.



Diego Santomé: *Apuntamentos e breve aproximación a Sargadelos, primeira versión*, 2014 (film stills). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Parra & Romero, Madrid

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Printed in A Coruña (Moret, 1960). The film is completed with extracts from the chapter 'Función social das artes', in *Siñificado e orixe da laboura restauradora de Sargadelos* (I. Díaz Pardo, Sargadelos, 1970), in the first of the *Cadernos do Laboratorio de Formas de Galicia* (Edicións do Castro, 1970).

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