# TANIA PÉREZ CÓRDOVA

ARTFORUM

# Tania Pérez Córdova

Tina Kim Gallery

By Paula Burleigh

**Tania Pérez Córdova**, ***Philodendron Stenolobum (70% chance of rain)***, **2022**, iron, epoxy clay, plastic, acrylic, gold-plated brass chain, patterns of leaf damage, 63 × 54 × 29". Photo: Dario Lasagni.

ARTFORUM



It's rare that the white cube does anything other than what it was intended to do: disappear. But "Precipitation," Tania Pérez Córdova's second solo show with Tina Kim Gallery, defamiliarized the space, turning it into an uncanny vacuum. No longer a neutral site for display, the gallery's "blank" backdrop, thanks to Pérez Córdova, produced a lingering sensation—as though one were witness to fragments of events no longer fully visible.

Artificial plants, rendered with exacting realism, appeared to emerge from the walls in precise arcs. Combining the literal and the conceptual, the checklist indicated that "patterns of leaf damage"—alongside epoxy clay, iron, acrylic, plastic, and gold-plated brass chains—made up all of the plant sculptures. The press release explained that the pattern of holes and tears in the leaves were meant to evoke "insect infestations, or botanic infections." The delicate metal strands were tautly suspended from the ceiling and threaded through select ruptures in the foliage, suggesting rainfall; this association was bolstered by subtitles cataloguing various weather forecasts. Pérez Córdova's fake flora operate on a knife's edge between the magical and the sinister. The resolutely still, barely visible brass links created a kind of dreamlike temporal suspension, while the plants' surface abrasions underlined the effects of real forces, such as decay and disease.

*Una reja en una reja 5* (A Fence into a Fence 5) (all works 2022) was a fragment of an aluminum chain-link barrier, melted down and then recast into its original shape. Suspended at eye level and disconnected from the surrounding architecture of the gallery, the sculpture lost any functional delineation between inside and outside. Two compact tangles of bird feathers are embedded in the object, calling to mind gentle woodland creatures that are either fast asleep or dead. Breaks in the latticework echoed the nearby patterns of leaf infestation. A sense of destruction and loss caused by mysterious forces haunted much of the exhibition.

*Breathe out 1–3* and *Breathe in 1–3* were stylized sculptural heads made of pumice stone. Split in half, they flank transparent glass vessels filled with human breath (as the press release explains). The works were inspired by the different types of breathing that induce various psychic states. But they are also studies of matter as it shifts between being gaseous, solid, or liquid. Like other igneous rocks, pumice is formed by molten lava, in its case, rapidly cooled, the result of a process of transmutation from one state to another. Pérez Córdova's choice of material may nod to her interest in melting and recasting objects. Likewise, glass must be liquefied by heat to assume its permanent form. Indeed, many artworks in the show gestured toward a relational set of identifications—with invisible or absent actors, and with past and future phases of existence. Precipitation itself is a metamorphic process: Vapor condenses into rain or snow, which either evaporates or becomes groundwater.

As a whole, the exhibition pointed toward the complex entanglements between flora, fauna, us, and the environment, be it natural or architectural. While the degraded leaves suggested incursions that may have no direct human cause, the presence of attenuated metal “rain” reminded us that drawing distinctions between natural and man-made worlds is pointless—we are all imbricated in a set of highly contingent relations. Fortunately, none of the artist’s work came across as pedantic critique. Instead, Pérez Córdova offered imaginative glimpses of our variegated landscape, complete with fraught power dynamics and fragile beauty.

FRIEZE

Featured in
**Issue 234**

# Tania Pérez Córdova Unveils an Artwork's Afterlife

At Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, the artist reconfigures objects to bring our attention to what remains of their original forms

BY **RE'AL CHRISTIAN** IN **EXHIBITION REVIEWS**, **US REVIEWS** | 09 FEB 23

Empty window frames cast in bronze, a large floral ceramic vessel and a shelf lined with ice portraits in sunken relief are among the works that open Tania Pérez Córdova's exhibition 'Generalización' at Museo Tamayo, Mexico City. Time, absence and chance encounter emerge as thematic throughlines in the Mexico City-based artist's first museum solo exhibition, curated by Humberto Moro. Demonstrating Pérez Córdova's unique approach to media, her sculptures and assemblages often integrate quotidian materials that are deconstructed and reconfigured to resemble, but not mirror, their original forms. Undergirded by implicit narrative connections between each object, the works reckon with absence and emptiness in different settings, bringing our attention to what remains.

The exhibition centres on several time-based sculptures. For her installation *Todas nuestras explicaciones* (All Our Explanations, 2022), the artist produced concrete moulds of the heads of anonymous models, which she then filled with water and froze. The portraits sit on a shelf lining one of the gallery walls. As they melt, they drip into metal buckets like a ticking metronome. This reveals, according to the wall label, a 'repository of the mind' – one that emphasizes the discursive tension between positive and negative space as a visual metaphor for the mind taking shape and a tangible accumulation of time.

Tania Pérez Córdova, 'Generalización', 2022, installation view, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, 2022. Courtesy: Museo Tamayo; photograph: Gerardo Landa and Eduardo López

In *Retrato de una mujer desconocida pasando por ahí* (Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By, 2019), a woman in a black dress with a yellow floral pattern periodically walks past a black glazed ceramic vessel painted with the same design. Creating fleeting moments of overlap between chance encounters, the artist portrays time as an analogue division between bodies.

Many works explore the tension between use and disuse. For one group of sculptures, the artist took the glass from the windows in her studio to a glassblowing workshop to create a deconstructed version of a familiar space, including *Dicen que es como una roca* (They Say It's Like a Rock, 2017). Other works include bronze casts of window frames from empty storefronts. Placed throughout the exhibition, these delicate sculptures – such as *Memoria de una cuarto* (Memory of a Room, 2022) – allude to the impermanence of deserted shops but the memories embedded in their materials, ready to be reincarnated in the future. Her series 'Objetos en sí mismos' (Objects Cast into Themselves, 2018–ongoing) features replicas of found items stripped of functionality. This series began with a brass trumpet that the artist bought from a man playing on the street; she melted it down and poured the molten metal into a cast of the trumpet (*Spare Change*, 2019), unmaking and remaking the instrument. In the same vein, the sculptures *Una reja en una reja 1*, *2*, *3* and *4* (A Fence into a Fence, 2022) comprise fragments of metal fences melted, recast in their own form and embedded with bird-like objects crafted out of feathers and clay, rendered useless through transmutation.

Tania Pérez Córdova, 'Generalización', 2022, installation view, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, 2022. Courtesy: Museo Tamayo; photograph: Gerardo Landa and Eduardo López

One of the final pieces in the show nearly disappears into the museum's brutalist architecture. With *Giro de 10 minutos* (10 Minute Spin, 2014/22), the artist crafts another metronome using a common appliance – a ceiling fan – that slowly revolves 360 degrees for ten minutes, its movement almost indiscernible. Standing beneath it, the fan becomes a marker for tracking one's own body relative to others in space.

FRIEZE

Tania Pérez Córdova, 'Generalización', 2022, installation view, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, 2022. Courtesy: Museo Tamayo; photograph: Gerardo Landa and Eduardo López

Pérez Córdova's artworks have stories to tell but they leave room for us to speculate. When I first came across *Retrato de una mujer pasando por ahí*, I saw a woman in a similarly floral-patterned dress pass by the vessel, leaving me to wonder whether this moment of synchronicity was intentional or whether she was merely a doppelgänger. The works in 'Generalización' are dependent on these types of encounters. Made and unmade, their mutability is a provocative reminder that what remains in the afterlife of the art object is neither absent nor fixed, but changeable and relational.

*Tania Pérez Córdova's '**Generalización**' is on view at Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, until 26 February.*

*Main Image: Tania Pérez Córdova,* Todas nuestras explicaciones *(All Our Explanations), 2022, installation view, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, 2022. Courtesy: Museo Tamayo; photograph: Gerardo Landa and Eduardo López*

R

RE'AL CHRISTIAN

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CULTURA |

# La artista mexicana Tania Pérez Córdova exhibe su obra en el Museo Tamayo

La muestra reúne una selección representativa de los últimos 10 años de producción de la artista, así como obras comisionadas especialmente para esta ocasión


La Secretaría de Cultura federal y el Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura **(INBAL)**, a través del Museo Tamayo, inauguraron la tarde de este sábado **1 de octubre 'Generalización'**, primera exposición individual de la artista mexicana **Tania Pérez Córdova** en una institución nacional, y permanecerá en las salas 1 y 2 del recinto hasta el 26 de febrero del año entrante.

**La muestra reúne una selección representativa de los últimos 10 años de producción de la artista, así como obras comisionadas especialmente para esta ocasión.** Pérez Córdova (Ciudad de México, 1979) trabaja principalmente con materiales asociados con las prácticas escultóricas tradicionales, como metal, cerámica, yeso, vidrio y mármol, que se interrelacionan con objetos cotidianos como **ropa, joyería, cigarros o lentes de contacto, los cuales guardan una relación de intimidad con el cuerpo humano.**

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Así, 'Generalización' presenta una lectura de la práctica de la artista a través de algunos temas, como el paso del tiempo; la naturaleza de los materiales; la mirada del otro; la inminencia o posibilidad de una acción; la forma en que asignamos valor a los objetos; el espacio negativo o la insuficiencia del discurso. Entre las obras que se incluyen en la exposición están **'Imágenes 1' (2017) e 'Imágenes 2' (2017)**, las cuales forman parte de la colección del recinto de la Red de Museos del INBAL.

Esta muestra forma parte de los ejes curatoriales del programa del Museo Tamayo al apoyar la producción y difusión de una de las principales artistas mujeres que integran la escena del arte contemporáneo mexicano, y cuya carrera ha tenido una proyección internacional. La obra de Pérez Córdova promueve también **un pensamiento crítico y transversal acerca de temáticas vinculadas al medio ambiente y al cuidado de la naturaleza**, al estudiar la huella del ser humano en la Tierra y las relaciones sostenibles que establecemos con el planeta.

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La exposición, curada por Humberto Moro, presentará un performance con el artista Francesco Pedraglio, y una conferencia magistral del filósofo **Graham Harman** en colaboración con el programa **'Futuros posibles'** del Museo Tamayo. Las demás actividades se podrán consultar en el sitio web museotamayo.org/agenda.

Asimismo, el Museo Tamayo agradece el apoyo de la **Fundación BBVA México** para llevar a cabo esta exposición.

MF

# Tania Pérez Córdova: Sculptures as Events

In Conversation with
Lauren Cornell
New York, 13 January 2021

Tania Pérez Córdova. Photo: Mauricio Guillén.

'I often redo works because I think I need to explore more possibilities of the material,' says Tania Pérez Córdova. The production process is central to her practice, with the materiality of each sculptural piece revealing infinite narrative possibilities.

ARTIST PROFILE
Tania Pérez Córdova
VIEW BIO, WORKS & EXHIBITIONS



Take *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways* (2013–2017), most recently recreated for the artist's solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (*Smoke, nearby*, 15 April–20 August 2017). Bridging a corner in the exhibition space, a slender strip of bronze held a Swarovski crystal earring. Nearby, a text read: 'A woman is missing her left earring. It is suspended on a brass ribbon in the gallery. Until it is reunited with its mate the sculpture exists in both places simultaneously.'

Tania Pérez Córdova, *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways* (2013–2017) (detail). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Ramiro Chaves.

By expanding the material presence of objects—signalling their simultaneous existence elsewhere, as in the case of this work—Pérez Córdova reflects on the mutability of time.

In the series 'Things in Pause' (2013) presented at the New Museum Triennial in 2015, the artist embedded the SIM card of a friend into a slab of porcelain. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, his calls were diverted to a temporary number. In later iterations, Pérez Córdova discovered that she was addressing other temporal dimensions as the work naturally entered the 'electronic ageing timeline', with the assigned space for the SIM card becoming too large.

**New Museum**
New York
VIEW INSTITUTION

Tania Pérez Córdova, from the series 'Things in Pause' (2013). Courtesy the artist.

Notions of absence and disappearance are as important to Pérez Córdova as materiality. Shown for her solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel in 2018 (*Daylength of a room*, 26 October 2018–6 January 2019), 'Objects cast into themselves' (2018), Pérez Córdova casts and re-casts objects so that they become frail versions of their former selves. The series began with a trumpet that she bought from a busker who passed by her house, which she then moulded and melted, bringing it further away from its original function.

Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (26 October 2018–6 January 2019). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

In her most recent exhibition at Tina Kim Gallery, *Short Sight Box* (12 September–14 November 2020), further transformations were visible in a series of contours created from windows and door frames that the artist had registered by memory. Volcanic ash, artificial tears, petrified earth, and contact lenses constituted other elements of the exhibition, which came together as a poetic 'mood board' inscribed in the past, present, and future.

12 SEP–14 NOV 2020
Tania Pérez Córdova
*Short Sight Box*
Tina Kim Gallery, New York
VIEW EXHIBITION

Tania Pérez Córdova speaks about her latest exhibition in this conversation with Lauren Cornell, director of the graduate programme and chief curator at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and a former curator at the New Museum. Cornell included Pérez Córdova in the 2015 New Museum Triennial that she co-curated with artist Ryan Trecartin.

Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC **Tania, you've described this show as a state of mind, and it feels like that: personal, psychological, a reflective step away from our time. I wrote down some of the different materials included: contact lenses, petrified earth, artificial tears, volcanic ash—such distinct elements cohered into a consistent mood. Could you speak about the state of mind that you created here?**

TPC There is a little anecdote I'd like to tell, just to keep in the back of your mind. I read one time that somebody asked John Ashbery how he writes poetry. He said that he didn't really have any specific methodology, but he gave this example of being in a public place and overhearing a conversation between some strangers, and then really liking a phrase, and taking that exact phrase and using it as the start of his poem.

Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (26 October 2018–6 January 2019). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

I like to think that he never knew what that conversation was about, and those strangers never knew that a phrase of theirs was used in a poem. I like to keep this little anecdote as a backdrop.

For some time, I've thought of sculptures as events. I continuously ask whether an object can have a situation inscribed not just in the past, but also in the present and future.

I started describing my work as a kind of mood, because my practice is not really research-based and doesn't really have a concrete story. What I'm interested in is creating an image through objects, through language, and through descriptions of objects. But there is nothing so specific.

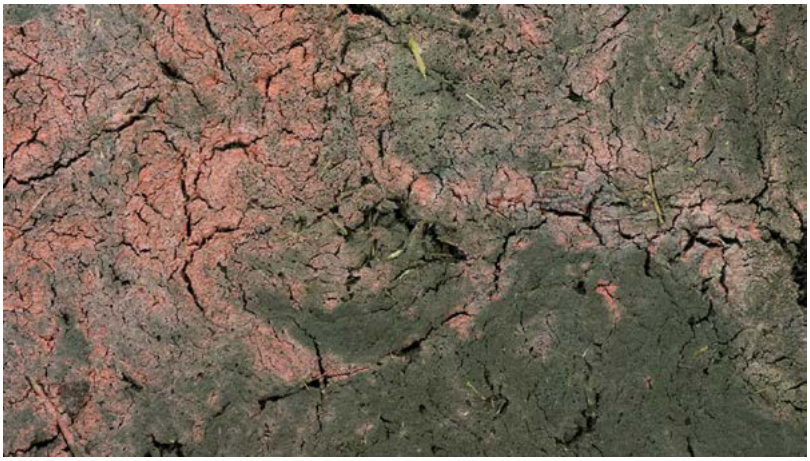
Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Daylength of a room*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (26 October 2018–6 January 2019). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

If I were to find a kind of narrative form, I would say it's more like poetry than a novel, because it's not about anything other than a mood or a state of mind. This is obviously completely intuitive and not a conscious process.

> ‘I’m interested in doubling, what it means culturally, and the value that we assign to these things culturally.’

My work is not biographical. I usually collect phrases that I read in the newspaper. If a phrase calls my mind, I just write it down. It's like a mood board. It's an attempt to grasp a general state of mind, but obviously it often ends up being about me. But I guess that's the nature of art, no?

We are all looping between the general and the personal. In trying to talk about the general, one may accidentally talk about the personal. And talking about the personal might be about the general.



Tania Pérez Córdova, *Sunning* (2017). Petrified earth dried in the sun, cigarette ash, make up. 99.1 x 69.9 x 2.9 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC **This body of work seems, to me, to touch on climate change—does that ring true to you? There seem to be strong aspects of loss and mourning, as reflected not only by the artificial tears and ash but, more subtly, in the hushed, evacuated nature of all the sculptures on view.**

TPC For some time, I've asked myself whether it's possible to address issues that matter to me in my works, especially when the work is so abstract by nature.

Some time ago, while watching an interview with Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė, and Lina Lapelytė, the artists of the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale, I realised that what fascinated me most about their brilliant piece was how they managed to talk about very concrete, scientific, and extremely urgent issues by constructing an abstract image.

One of them was talking about how scientists are recovering a dying coral reef with 3D printers. Even fascinating research like this was used to build a mood. To me, this felt like opening the possibility of addressing this urgent subject from a purely domestic point of view.

FEATURES
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Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

I titled *Iron Rain* (2020) after reading an article on the history of the climate throughout different ages of the earth and weather phenomena in other planets. In these hypothetical scenarios, there was a description of rainfall in the form of liquified metal—an image for an unreachable and uninhabitable imagined future.

I would not say that the show is about climate change specifically—I guess it's just a mood that reflects this situation and how it is echoed in surrounding information; in anxiety.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *Iron Rain* (2020). Graphite crucible, zinc. 28 x 28 x 27 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC **In previous works, you've made new objects out of existing materials, such as coins, sometimes regenerating them until they disappear. But there's a different process in this body of work—could you speak about it?**

TPC The first time I made these works was for a group exhibition in New York at Galerie Martin Janda, curated by Magalí Arriola (*A Mouse Drowned in a Honey Pot*, 10 March–11 August 2014).

The show was based around a non-existent house that had a personal relation to Magalí. I remember I was given some images of this house, and these images were very personal. The photos were of a children's party

and you could see bits of the house in background.

Tania Pérez Córdova, 'Objects cast into themselves' (2018). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

I decided to recreate some of these contours in approximation to what these places could have been. Then I did this work a few more times. When I was planning the show for Tina Kim Gallery, I wanted to do a larger series, staging an image of domesticity that was in between being inside and outside.

The first one I did was this door, which was the memory of the entrance door of my personal home. Then a whole other series unfolded. When the confinement hit, these works had just been finished, then I thought of something else.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *Contour #3* (2020). Bronze poured into sand. 178 x 130 x 2 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

I don't know if you had the same experience, but in the most extreme part of the confinement, my window view became a still image.

I remember I was once doing a residency in Scotland, and I got really claustrophobic from seeing this one mountain through the window. It was very beautiful, but I felt I couldn't escape from it.

I thought of these contours, which became the outline of an image from which you're unable to escape. This is just a thought I had when I was

looking at a contour of my window view at home, not being able to go out, just looking at this place from a distance.

Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery.

LC **Contours, yes. Here, it feels like we see contours of spaces—designations of inside and outside—within what feels like an open plane. Within a year of lockdowns, the show feels boundless to me.**

**I want to ask you about technique. In your previous works, there was a tendency to copy things, to renew them, or to follow their half-lives into disappearance.**

**Here, it feels more like you're focused on techniques of mirroring, and doubling. Is that correct?**

TPC I thought a lot about the idea of doubling. The first thing that came to my mind was this idea that when a writer is stuck, they should just write something again and it will never happen in the same way.

Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery.

> “Making objects feels a lot like fighting the idea that what you’re making needs to be preserved, like a moment frozen in time.”

Often in my work, there's also the idea of the fake and the real, which is another translation, in a way—from the original to the synthetic, for example. I'm interested in doubling, what it means culturally, and the value that we assign to these things culturally.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *Panorama* (2020). Professional airbrush sunless spray tan on canvas. 210 x 116 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC **Can I ask about your ongoing attachment to the contact lens?**

TPC Yes. The first time I used a contact lens, I was thinking of this idea of sculpture as being half of an event—a wearable object that could exist in two different locations.

I think that there's something interesting about the idea of the contact lens as a synthetic object that refers to the idea of seeing. I often reuse materials and rethink them in different situations.

I love to think that the work is not just about the object, but about thinking of someone or being forced to see someone, which is such a strange moment. When you lock eyes with a stranger, it's so uncomfortable and so unusual. The work almost creates that interaction with the people coming into this space.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *To wink, to cry* (2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC **When we worked together on the New Museum Triennial in 2015, we borrowed a contact lens, a SIM card, and an earring for the three different sculptures. It was quite challenging to secure them, to actually borrow them for a short time.**

**You mentioned that you think about your sculptures as events that pause some action happening outside of the gallery. I was struck by the semblance of a deeper pause in this show. You seem to be looking at a more tectonic shift, even though you have some short-term borrowed objects in the show. Could you speak about time as a material or a subject in this body of work?**

TPC I think what I was trying to show is that although an object might look uneventful, you can still try to think of it within the passage of time. I guess that's what happens in everyday life. You can look at any object, and you can think about what is going to happen to it in ten years, almost through the way it exists—through its past and future.

Tania Pérez Córdova, 'Objects cast into themselves' (2018). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

This body of work is more a way of understanding a still image as an object within a timeline. I started casting holes while I was doing a series of high reliefs in earth, a series I called 'Handhold' (2016). I was digging holes to gather the earth I needed and I felt the need to address the leftover as well.

I wanted to create this idea of a landscape of situations. That's why I described elements inside the holes as situations. Each of these holes could be thought of as propositions for something.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *Sincere / Non- sincere* (2018). Fake gold necklace, obsidian, water. 26 × 44 × 13 cm. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Philipp Hänger.

LC **Something that really strikes me about your work is that the final sculptures are often described as delicate, even kind of slight. And, I know they're quite fragile, having installed them, yet there's a monumental effort that goes into making and procuring materials for them. How long did it take you to make some of these? What was the process?**

TPC I feel the amateur part of the process of making the works is important. Most of the works have some accidental shape or development. It's very difficult for me to have something made without me being there, because it's so much about the incidental nature of arriving to things.

Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

The contours were actually quite a long process. First we traced the casting and made a drawing, as you would do in the sand if you were at the beach, then we poured liquid metal, which travelled across the line. The most time-consuming bit was the pressing of the earth and preparing it for the drawing.

I often work with specialised workshops and part of the process for me has to do with renegotiating the terms of production. I prefer to make agreements in terms of time rather than results because often, what would usually be considered a mistake ends up being the object that works best for me.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *To wink, to cry* (2020). Marble, copper cast, artificial tears, cosmetic contact lens, a person wearing one contact lens of a colour different to her/his eyes occasionally. 81.3 x 12.4 x 12.4 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC **The audience is inquiring about value. How do you think about value in relation to your materials?**

TPC Some time ago, I bought a one-peso Mexican coin at a flea market. I paid one euro for it. It's a small gesture, but it's fascinating to me that over time, the symbolic value of the coin had overtaken its economic value. One euro is usually about 22 to 24 pesos.

This as a process that interests me. In that specific anecdote, it's also interesting to think that the exchange rate of the story is impossible: one euro for one peso.

I think that the coins and the pearls and this idea of value are interesting, because it reflects how we assign meaning to things in culture. They are objects that interest me because they change and shift with time. Fake objects interest me, exactly because of how we assign value.

I had the idea that the chain in *Short Sight Box – Hole A* (2020) would resemble the movement of a falling a coin. It was thinking of both the image of a coin dropped for luck, or the visual idea of a falling economy.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *Portrait of a Woman Passing By* (2019). Glazed ceramic, woman wearing a dress. 90 x 50 cm. Exhibition view: *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

I started working with coins while I was working with a foundry that produces little statues for a well-known Mexican film award. When I saw them casting the pieces, I realised they were adding a lot of beer cans to the mixture to economise the bronze usage. These little things—learning how something works—are fascinating to me.

Obviously, the culture we live in is a counterfeit culture. I buy volcanic ash and I buy a necklace, they tell me it's real, but in Mexico you never know—it could be fake. In a way, I don't really care if they cheated me or not. I just wanted to get in situations where there is this tension, and I bring this uncertainty to the work.

When I started producing objects, I found that the objects were not sufficient as objects. I could not decide on making something just because it had a certain aesthetic. I needed more from it to be exciting to me.

Exhibition view: Tania Pérez Córdova, *Short Sight Box*, Tina Kim Gallery, New York (12 September–14 November 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

In a way it's the narrative that excites me. The narrative that I could either inscribe or uncover. That's why I think of things as embedded in a timeline, as it allows for them to be expanded further.

Maybe it's a way to think of the present as moving or attempt to put it in motion. Making objects feels a lot like fighting the idea that what you're making needs to be preserved, like a moment frozen in time.

Tania Pérez Córdova, *To wink, to cry* (2020). Courtesy the artist and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Hyunjung Rhee.

LC **Could you talk about the conservation of these objects? In a way, the process of maintaining them involves marking time, too—for example, in having to replace the contact lens liquid when it evaporates.**

TPC Yes, it's also something that happens without me planning it. One day, Katherine [Lauricella] called me to say the pot in *To wink, to cry* (2020) was rusting and I got so excited. I didn't think these artificial tears would make it change so fast, and it felt to me that this transformation was necessarily part of the work.

It's also a way to make the works more active—to have things happening rather than things just being.—[O]

Art in America



# Puzzles and Promises

*By Glenn Adamson* April 12, 2021 11:00am

Tania Pérez Córdova: *We focus on a woman facing sideways*, 2013–16, bronze, Swarovski crystal drop earring, and a woman wearing the other earring.
Courtesy The Artist

The materials list for **Tania Pérez Córdova**'s *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways* (2013/17) reads as follows: "Bronze, Swarovski Crystal drop earring, and a woman wearing the other earring." The work is a simple bent rod, charting a transit in space. A single earring bereft of its mate, hangs from the rod like a lure. It's meant, perhaps, to catch a thought, and hold it for a while, before throwing it back into the ocean of possibility.

There are a few things to notice here. First, observe how Córdova activates the conventional framing language of the work. The title and materials list do not describe the piece in the usual sense, but rather help to constitute it—an old Conceptual art trick, here applied to novel poetic effect. Córdova conscripts us, her viewers, into a wholly imagined, yet psychologically charged, act of looking. (Idea for an art history seminar: try pairing the work with Barbara

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Kruger's *Untitled [Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face]*, 1981, in which that phrase is emblazoned over a photo reproduction of a Classical female head, another instance of pronouns arrestingly deployed.) *We Focus on a Woman Facing Sideways*, which was part of her breakthrough exhibition, "Smoke, Nearby," at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2017, has a particularly personal association for the artist, having been inspired by her grandmother's comment that the loss of one earring rendered its match virtually worthless. But Córdova has used the same legerdemain in other works as well.

*Even* (2016) is a piece of beautifully figured marble, with a pair of tinted contact lenses resting on its upper surface. The initial impression is cartoonish—a sculpture with googly eyes. But the materials list, which includes "a person wearing color contact lenses in a different color than his/her natural eyes," transforms the minimally anthropomorphized slab into someone's alter ego. A more recent iteration of the theme, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By* (2019), consists of a shapely vase decorated with falling gingko leaves; the same pattern recurs in a printed dress worn by a woman who occasionally visits the exhibition. (Her image appears on the gallery's checklist, another occupation of the exhibition's textual apparatus.)

Tania Pérez Córdova: *Even*, 2016, marble, personalized color contact lenses, and a person wearing color contact lenses from a different color than their natural eyes.

Courtesy The Artist

The "absent subject" is only one of Córdova's oblique strategies. Over the past few years, she has created works incorporating "the glass of a window facing south"; cigarette ashes from a man who wants to quit smoking; and a friend's SIM card, embedded in a porcelain block—a tombstone for incoming phone calls. Then there is her photograph showing an innocuous-looking lump of sandcast bronze, which is captioned: "A sculpture hidden within another sculpture."

It's a pity that Guy Debord already claimed the term "Situationist" back in the late 1950s, for that is the perfect way to describe Córdova's methodology. Each of her works conjures a scenario, playfully dubious in its ontology, but rich in narrative implication. The effect is perfectly calibrated to our phantasmagoric era, when images (of art and everything else) skip away from us, so many stones across the water.

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Yet, crucially, Córdova's situations are firmly anchored in the real. When I interviewed her for this article, I explained that I was interested mainly in her approach to process and materials. She replied, "I wouldn't know what else to talk about." Córdova was born in Mexico City in 1979, and remains based there, though she studied at Goldsmiths at the University of London from 2002 to 2005. She also spends time in Italy, through family connections. This positions her within two unusually intact artisanal cultures. Despite the head-spinning philosophical conundrums she constructs, her collaboration with fabricators is the core of her practice.

TANIA PÉREZ CÓRDOVA TRAVESÍA CUATRO

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Tania Pérez Córdova: *They say it's like a rock*, 2015, glass from a window facing south and Nag Champa incense.

Courtesy Joségarcía, Mexico City

Navigating that world of craftsmen has often been a challenge for her, partly because of the gender dynamics involved—she's sometimes the only woman present in the workshop, and also the one giving the orders—and partly because she typically begins without a clear intention: "I would not want to be the kind of artist who knows exactly she wants." Córdova aims to put herself in the way of happenstance. She explains this through an anecdote about John Ashbery, who said that his poems often originated in a stray phrase overheard in public. Without knowing the context of the words, he'd write them down and later use them to trigger his own compositional process. Córdova enters the space of a craft or trade in just this spirit, opening herself to its creative possibilities, then waiting to be set off in some direction or other.

The ceramic object in *Portrait of an Unknown Woman Passing By* is one example. A particular casting mold caught her eye—a curvy vase in negative, like the well-known optical illusion involving two faces. "If I'd had to design the shape myself," she says frankly, "I would have had a lot of difficulty. I rely on randomness." When I spoke with Córdova in March, she was just beginning a project at an Italian glass atelier. She did not yet know where the collaboration might lead, but ideas were forming about breath, which gives life to blown glass as well as to human beings, but has taken on such terrible connotations in this past year of pandemic. It might take days or weeks for an artwork to coalesce around this initial notion.

Tania Pérez Córdova: *To wink, to cry*, 2020.

Courtesy Tina Kim Gallery, New York

This purposefully provisional approach is very different from the way most artists handle outsourced fabrication—which is to say, as a delivery system for plans already well in place. Córdova instead enters into the life and logic of the manufactory, riffing on its capabilities like a jazz musician stretching out a standard tune. Exemplary, in this regard, is her exploration of the casting process, which she loves for its accidental features—the spillover and flashing that are usually pared away from the finished product—and for its oscillation of positive and negative states of matter.

These dynamics were at the heart of her exhibition "Daylength of a room," held at the Kunsthalle Basel in 2018. The project's centerpiece was *Stuttering*, a group of everyday objects—an aluminum saucepan, a tin can, a length of copper pipe, a glass pitcher, silver cutlery—which Córdova had melted and recast into their original form. A helpful explanation was provided: "Imagine an ice cube, melted down, then poured back into the ice tray and refrozen. It

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finds itself a tiny bit smaller, containing a little less of itself, when remade into its own shape. Now imagine this process applied to other objects in the world." The slight shrinkage and tormented surfaces of the items gave them a somewhat forlorn air, like wool clothing accidentally put through a tumble dryer. Yet together, they read as an elegy: Córdova had invented a way to visualize the act of forgetting, to materialize loss.

For an exhibition this past September, "Short Sight Box" at **Tina Kim Gallery** in New York, Córdova used casting to create a series that she calls "Contours," made by pouring liquid bronze into rectilinear furrows in a bed of sand. When the metal cools, it is lifted out, revealing a gleaming outline, edged all over with solidified splatter. The rectilinear shapes inevitably recall the perimeters of paintings (a gentle joke about Jackson Pollock, maybe?), but also of windows and doors—more apertures into some alternate reality. At peak pandemic, the works took on an additional layer of meaning: visual echoes of all the looking-out we have all been doing lately, wary and watchful, sequestered in our homes.

Tania Pérez Córdova: *Contour #2*, 2020, bronze poured into sand, 83 by 25 1/2 by 79 inches.

Courtesy Tina Kim Gallery, New York

Of course, the metal portals of the "Contours" do not actually go anywhere—except in imagination. If Córdova has just one abiding theme, this is it: the psychic overlay that we bring to the objects and spaces around us, rendering them the props and sets of our own private dramas. She catches that process of narrative scripting in the act; holds the evidence up to the light, considers it, moves on. During our conversation, Córdova described one of her habitual activities. She likes to trawl the informal street markets in Mexico City, looking at all the things for sale: jewelry, electronics, sneakers, whatever. Most of it is ersatz in one way or another. But for Córdova, the fakeness of what's on offer—the counterfeit branded merchandise, all the materials imitating other, more expensive materials—is what makes the experience so interesting. In this shifty commercial terrain, value itself seems up for grabs. It's a point of perpetual negotiation, resettled with each deal, no more, no less. Is that a little like the art she makes? Could be. "It's almost like a promise," she says. "OK, Let's see."

The Creative Independent

# Entrevista: Tania Pérez Córdova

## Habla sobre títulos, obstrucciones, etapas intermedias, capas, vacíos, oportunidad y no saber.

Arte, Proceso, Educación

De una entrevista con Laurel Schwulst

February 24, 2017

Highlights on

**En uno de los subtítulos de tu trabajo, especificaste que el vidrio lo obtuviste específicamente de "una ventana dando al sur". ¿Qué tan importante es ese detalle?**

Las partes de vidrio venían todas del mismo lugar, un estudio mío viejo. Cuando las nombré, pensé que era importante mencionar si eran de las ventanas del norte o del sur; como para sugerir como existieron realmente cuando eran ventanas.

Cuando mostré las partes de vidrio, mucha gente me preguntó: "¿Qué pasará con tu estudio ahora que no tiene ventanas? ¿Entrará la lluvia?" Mencionar la orientación ayudó a formar esta imagen de otro lugar y otro tiempo.

Al darle un título a mi trabajo, decidí que, cuando pasa algo, como un evento o una actividad, lo incluyo como parte de los materiales. Era importante para mi poder ponerlo en las formalidades de cómo se describe el trabajo, siendo estos los subtítulos. Los subtítulos simplemente son la forma tradicional de describir las obras de arte.

Prefiero utilizar los subtítulos para crear una nueva explicación más allá de eso.

Generalmente, simplemente enumero situaciones abstractas como parte de los materiales.

Así que, por ejemplo, la parte de los aros se crea con bronce al igual que los aros que utilizan las mujeres.

*Dicen que es como una roca*, 2015. Vidrio de una ventana que da al sur y incienso de Nag Champa. 21 × 29 × 24 cm.

**Leí sobre tu trabajo, para el cual le preguntaste a un músico si podías llevarte dos de las teclas de su piano para tu obra. ¿Es difícil negociar para conseguir las partes para tu trabajo?**

Generalmente, es bastante fácil. Mi trabajo usualmente tiene alguna conexión con una narrativa real, así que no es todo artificial. Para mi es importante que sea real. Realmente es una tecla de piano que pedí prestada, incluso si hubiera sido muy fácil hacerlo de otra forma.

En un momento hice una serie de escultura, las cuales pensé como "dispositivos para crear una pausa". Al mirarlas, no solamente estarías viéndolas como esculturas, sino pensando en las otras situaciones que implican. En el caso del piano, recuerdo decirle al dueño: "simplemente sigue tocando tu repertorio sin esas dos teclas". Me gusta la narrativa de que haya una serie de canciones modificadas por las teclas que faltan.

También tenía un trabajo que incluía un aro y una tarjeta SIM. Esta obstrucción solo pasaría durante la muestra. Una vez que terminara, todo volvería a la normalidad: la mujer usaría los dos aros otra vez y el teléfono funcionaría de nuevo.

**Tienes una muestra próximamente en el MCA de Chicago. ¿De qué forma es única la preparación de esa muestra, en comparación con las demás?**

Me invitaron para que mostrara una serie de mis trabajos, y propuse que haría unos "intermedios".

Así que la idea es rehacer trabajos viejos para que los nuevos fueran transiciones entre los viejos.

Ahora que hablo contigo, ya que supongo que nunca pensé sobre esto antes, me doy cuenta que esto tiene mucho que ver con mi pareja, Francesco.

Él estaba traduciendo a un autor italiano con quien nunca había trabajado. Mientras traducía, pensó: "voy a escribir entre líneas ya que este poema es muy hermoso". Así que le añadía líneas a la traducción. Es extraño, porque no es completamente su propio poema, pero tampoco es completamente como el original. Así que, realmente es como un intermedio, y eso es lo que tiene de bueno.

**Esto me recuerda a la historia de un amigo. Su padre tiene una compañía de petróleo en los Estados Unidos. Me dijo que una de sus tácticas es la especulación a futuro. Es así que se imaginan un derrame de petróleo gigante, y luego crean una serie de planes intermedios, teniendo en cuenta donde están en el presente, para asegurarse de que el derrame no ocurra.**

Ah, entonces es como pensar en reversa. Sorprendente. Sí, estoy trabajando de una forma similar a la compañía de petróleo. Es casi como si hubieras fijado un punto de inicio y final, y luego simplemente debes darte cuenta de cuál es la lógica del medio. Es una forma de trabajar nueva para mí, y es muy emocionante, ya que al principio no me gustaba mucho mostrar trabajos viejos. Es una buena forma de disfrutar el pensar sobre ellos otra vez.

**¿Qué tan importante es para ti que las personas que compran tus trabajos los entiendan?**

Tengo esperanza en que lo entiendan, pero siempre me queda la duda. Estoy segura de que hay gente que realmente entiende, pero decidí que no tienes que saber sobre las cosas inmediatamente. Tal vez sea como una especie de capaz que llegan con el tiempo.

Tampoco me molesta que la gente vea mis trabajos como simples objetos. Acepté que tienen dos dimensiones y dos vidas, y depende de cómo quiera participar la gente. Personas diferentes participan de maneras diferentes. A algunas personas no les importa para nada conocer más de lo que ven. Creo que es justo. Queda en ti decidir cuánto quieres profundizar.

También es importante para mí no volverme enigmática a propósito. No quiero que mi trabajo sea sobre decodificar un conocimiento oculto. Me interesa más crear un fragmento. El vacío es tan importante como el trabajo. Pienso sobre cómo lo que está y lo que no interactúan entre sí.

**¿Escribes mucho para tus prácticas?**

No. Es decir, escribo títulos. Pero no, realmente no escribo y escribo y escribo. Me resulta extremadamente doloroso. Colecciono más. Colecciono idiomas o frases que me gustan, o palabras, incluso si no estoy realmente segura de por qué.

Hay una anécdota hermosa sobre la cual me gusta pensar, de una entrevista con John Ashbery interview en *The Paris Review*, alguien le pregunta: "¿Qué hace que empieces a escribir un poema?", y el responde con una historia que comienza cuando estaba en un lugar público y oye una frase que dice alguien cerca, fuera de contexto. Le gustó esa frase y la usó como la línea final para su poema, ya que era exactamente eso lo que buscaba.

Me gusta que ni siquiera haya sabido de qué se trataba la conversación, y que nunca sabrán que la frase se usó para un poema exitoso.

**Fuiste a la escuela en Londres, ¿verdad?**

Fui a Goldsmiths, pero lo odié. Me llevó mucho tiempo recuperarme. Es decir, fui allí queriendo trabajar, pero volví completamente bloqueada. Recuerdo pensar que ibas ahí a crear más trabajo, no menos, y que tenían que devolverme el dinero.

No sé si funciona igual para todo el mundo, pero crear trabajos no es necesariamente como martillar algo, apagando completamente mi cerebro. Una parte necesita suceder de manera intuitiva. No puedes tener el control total.

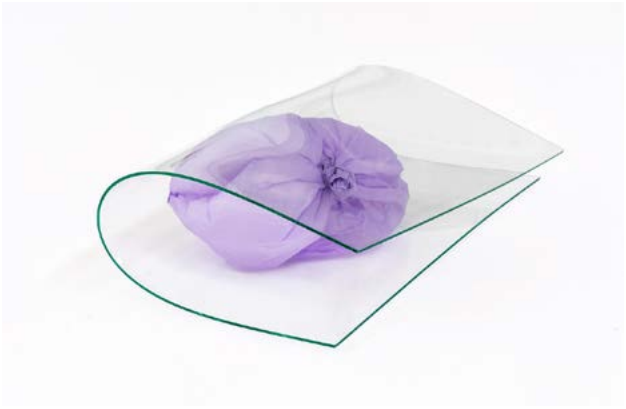
Creo que el programa de Goldsmiths es muy bueno, pero que está muy abarrotado. Es muy falso intelectualmente, y es muy parecido al departamento de estudios críticos. Es casi como si estuvieran comisionando el significado o algo parecido.

Cuando trabajo, me digo a mí misma: "no tengo un plan específico". Siempre tengo mucho cuidado cuando hablo sobre mi trabajo, porque la gente no debería saber qué significa. Esto se ha vuelto fundamental para mí. Nunca debo saber qué significa o qué hace. Simplemente debo saber de dónde viene. Esto es lo que me llevó mucho tiempo entender, pero es lo que necesitaba para crear trabajos.

**Recuerdo una cita del cineasta Ingmar Bergman, dijo algo así como: "la intuición es como tirar una lanza a la oscuridad, y el intelecto es el que se encarga de buscarla después".**

Ése es un buen proceso.

Varias veces me han pedido que de clases, pero siempre digo que no ya que estoy realmente confundida. No estoy segura de que esté haciendo algo que pueda enseñarse. Tal vez esto suene realmente romántico, pero siento que, para mí, la educación fue una experiencia muy contraproducente. Tal vez en algunos años sea más claro, pero no lo sé. ¿Qué puedo decir? Algo como: "nada más colecciono frases al azar, y realmente no estoy segura de por qué, ni recuerdo quién las escribió". Intento celebrar el no saber.



*Dicen que hace milagros*, 2015. Vidrio de una ventana que da al norte, bolsa de plástico. 13 × 45 × 25.5 cm.