

Julieta Aranda**ARTIST**

I try to resist a lot of these definitions... like I am a film artist or video artist or new media artist. I really try to not fall into these kind of labels. If anything, I always tempted to say that I am a sculptor. If anything that's the place from where I understand my work the best. Because in any case it has to do with-regardless of whatever tools I am using - if they are physical tools or technical tools, I like to think a lot about the material relationships of the world and my relationships to the world. I do not separate what I do as a solo artist from what I do when I work on projects together with Anton, which are e-flux projects, and from what I do as a publisher. I think those things are quite interconnected it is nice to have both the option of doing works and projects that are collectively authored, but there are also times where I need to not discuss my subjectivity. We have done over 60 issues of e-flux journals the texts that I am constantly reading and commissioning permeates my own research. It is not fixed, all of these things live happily together. For example „timebank“ that `s a project would have made no sense to do as a solo artist. I mean... I wanted to get as far away from individual authorship as possible with that project. Certain things are just very fit to be an e-flux project. We don't do e-flux projects too often because they tend to have very long lives. Like „timebank“ is still going strong somehow. So, maybe we do something every three years or something like that. The project I recently did, or I guess it is not recent anymore, but for the Biennial last year.

Of course I work with a number of people because when you are making a video you simply do not do it by yourself. There are actors and there is a lighting person and so on and of course there are the people that help to manufacture the work and the writers with whom I was in conversation to come up with a lot of the concepts or to finance a lot of the concepts I was working with and a dear friend of mine who made a song that I use at the end of the video. So I never... I mean I am not into running long credit lists at the end of a video in an art context. I think that is more for the movie theater but everybody is immensely credited throughout the project. I mean like that is also something that is very important to me that people get fully credited. I have several skill sets actually. I mean, I don't do everything. I don't think that it is necessary that the hand of the artist is magically touching things. I mean, I don't believe in that kind of value but I personally at least like very much to understand how my work is made. I could not divorce myself completely from the process. I mean, I come from filmmaking so I have all kinds of skills in terms of image making, like movie image making. I also do my own computed animations often. I mean I cannot draw or paint at all. That I don't have. I think of myself as a sculptor, yeah. I mean, like even when I am making videos and things like that now I do consider them very much to be part of a sculptural mode of production rather than a straight up video... a narrative media. Sometimes when you need to come down off your high horse of reading good reviews of your shows and you think: Come on, don't take yourself so seriously! Go grab that 1983 art forum magazine and read the names of people you don't know, so you chill out a little bit. So if it happens that, whatever a success my career has in this kind of visible sense dissipates, I probably will still be an artist and I probably will then need to imagine other things. Like, will I still be able to pay the rent or all these other practicalities will come up. That`s the only thing I can do, I know how to do, I am decent at doing that, it`s the only thing I want to do. I can't imagine not going through this process and not questioning myself in this way and not trying to see the world this way and not giving into the needs to put an object into the world when it wants to come. I mean, that`s that.

ARTWORK

I have an idea and then it tends to take many different shapes throughout time. One of the projects that I have been working on for the longest is a project that has an umbrella title that is called: [YOU HAD NO NINTH NO MAY!] that is based on time-paradoxes and that`s actually like the product that got me started on dealing with time as a subject matter. I found out about a country called Kiribati that is located on the South Pacific and it is an archipelago so there are 33 islands that make them a country and because of the position of the country on the map...they were divided by the

international dateline which is where basically a calendar day changes. And if you are any familiar with time paradoxes and with Jules Verne's "Around the world in 80 days" you would know that when the day changes, it is not only that it goes from Monday to Tuesday, you skip one full day. So it goes from Monday to Wednesday and for this country it was a disaster to be split like that because in half of the country it was Monday and the other half it was Wednesday. They got really fed up with it and they made a change in international date line. They basically made it to go around the country. Sort of like they punched this whole or, it wasn't essentially an imaginary line. The country because of the position, like what it is in terms of like the projections that we use for mapping, the country almost never appears on maps. And it is actually about to disappear from the planet because it is the first place that goes under if the level of the oceans goes up. But this line, this imaginary line that they changed stays. This is always on the maps. So this was very interesting to me and I started working with that shape, the line, the change they made. So the first time I did something with it, it was just to recreate this very large wall. I have made the wall out of bricks, I have made it as a flat drawing, I have made a newspaper for this country, all based on the international dateline. I eventually went to the country to visit and do a number of photographs, like a series of photographs and found out that they used to have some kind of industry at some point which was all in the production of phosphorus. So I did a series of works dealing with fluorescence and phosphorescence. While I was there I had a very funny encounter which is that on the edge of the sea and the beach there was this mountain of something that seemed very familiar and when I went to see what it was, because the shape was very familiar, I found a broken 16mm Camera and a lot of 16mm film which I took with me and then I had... I edited it, like a spliced it together like these oldschool and made an inter-negative and I kept working with them and then I made drawings out of it but everything keeps being the same project for me. So it's sort of a very long-winded way of working with an idea, it rarely stays confined to a discrete moment. I just to say, when I started making art, that I was only going to be working with things that had to do with flying because eventually what I really wanted was to be an astronaut not an artist. A lot of my work has been dealing with this notion of trying to imagine beyond the known? Which is something that's quite essential to science fiction. Like how do you describe this thing that essentially you do not know? How do you image this thing that you don't know? Two years ago the DLR - Deutsche Luft- and something.... the R stands for something, were looking for artists to do an experiment in zero gravity. I had the opportunity of going 70 times on these parabolic flights, which was amazing. I mean, like really amazing and what was really funny is that then I was stuck for quite a while trying to figure out how does that get translated into an artwork? I mean, I had a fantastic time, I was laughing and I mean like, it was glorious. But it was very difficult for me to find the place from...like, where does that become a meaningful work. How do I tackle that? It was a lot of sitting with the work and just letting it speak to me eventually and at the end the work I did in Berlin Biennale is extremely based on the experience but within time to use experience for just to try to address the colonial fantasies of the new space race and how it is really a mapping of the same colonial procedures that we have followed in fucking up THIS planet, yeah? It is like people are talking about mining on asteroids and conquering worlds and it is really like wow, I mean, I thought that that kind of mindset was already... like we already decided that that was not working. I am trying to talk about that and trying to address the difference between escape and escapism. Like, how easy it is to look up to the stars when you don't want to see the things that are kind of like falling apart around you?

PRODUCTION

I don't have a standard methodology for producing my work. It really is project by project and it follows the requirements of each project. So, certain things I do on my own. For example a computer animation - the few computer animations I have done on my own - that's something that started from my idea and it's carried completely through to the end by me. That is something like the video that you are looking at behind. There is really no other hand in it but mine. But, that's what this work called for. There are other instances in which, of course, you need certain technical help. Where you need to go to the printer and someone needs to actually output the file or put a 35mm negative into photo paper or printing paper and sometimes, if I am doing something even more precise, of course I need someone who is very familiar with the camera who will come and, like you know, help me do the lighting. Each project is calling for its own set of... for some production style.

Every now and then I have made machines as well and for that I actually work with a producer straight up because that is not something... I don't have any engineering skills. So for that I actually need someone that is able to build a machine according to a certain idea and these are the instances in which I work with regular art producers, like these kind of companies that manufacture. They take care, I will make your wishes come true, kind of thing like that. There is something like, there is a studio there are things that are done. Like if I am manufacturing something that is very large that gets done at a workshop elsewhere. Sometimes, if I am doing a show in Mexico where things cannot be shipped, where shipping would become insanely expensive, then I work on location. It is really...like, each work called for its own location as well.

A work will find way to let you know that it is done. There is also no recipe for that, right? At some point you look at it and you say: Okay that's done. Something can be done in 5 minutes because it can just be this very precise stroke, yeah!? Like this idea that is completely in a second and some things take ages to gel and crystalize into something that makes sense. I think I am a harsh judge of myself. I do not tend to think that something is good when it's not. Like, I tend to have standards for my work. So, when something is working fine then it is just working fine and when it's not working I tend to just push and push. I am not someone who gives up in a certain idea. If I decide to bring something into the world, let's say, it is usually because I already went to that idea for a while and it's worth to be translated into either an object or a video or something. So, I may have to massage it for a long time until it gives results. When I'm producing, this sounds very much like a cliché, but when I'm producing I am a bit possessed. I am just going with an idea and following an idea. Finding as I go along. I mean, normally when I'm working it is impossible for me to talk about the work that I am making. When I know that a work is done is the moment that it becomes available to me to language. There is a moment when I can explain what it is and why I made it. And why the references that I'm using and putting together, why they belong together. And at that moment I know a work is done. Before that, is just making of the thing.

MATERIAL

There are certain materials that I am very attracted to. I like certain kinds of clay and certain resins and I like silicon and I like... let me think what else I like a lot that keeps coming back up in the work... Yeah, clay is something that appears quite often. I have made a ton of newspapers so these are things that in an object-sense reappear and reappear and reappear. I also use a lot of digital materials. I think circulation is something that goes between being conceptual material very much and also a tool that I use. So that is something that straddles both places. I don't keep very clearly the issues or very clearly distinctions between things, between the work I do as well. So I tend to combine my skill sets and my tool sets quite often and I like the results. I like this sort of like a bastardization of processes let's say. I don't think that because of working with certain digital materials they are not compatible with a different set of either concepts or modes of production, right? So far, they have a happy life. At a core of that it would be circulation that has been present a lot, which again is both a material and a tool for me. It is quite an expandable notion. Thing goes with time. Time is something that keeps appearing and reappearing and reappearing in my work. I think of it very much as a material. Not subject matter but material.

MEDIUM

I consider myself a sculptor, right? Because it is not a traditional definition or a traditional understanding of what a sculptor is, everything is valid, right? Like just about any medium is valid to work and I throw everything that I do within these umbrella terms. So video goes into sculpture, or goes under sculptor I mean and certain kind of like text-based projects also go into sculpture. Or the timebank project which is basically, if I have to describe that project, that is an alternative economy. I don't think of it in terms of participatory art or relational aesthetics or a social based project but what interests us there was to actually create, or what we imagine, an alternative economic model. That is also sculptor for example. The project was trying to not focus on just like, this exchange of productive time. Just like time at large, right? Like, the time that you are dreaming, the time you are sleeping, the time where are you healing, the drunken time spent in conversation. What's the value

of that? How can I exchange that? How can I incorporate that within my own economy? It was sort of trying to investigate what happens. I mean like if one could propose an economic model that is not taking capital into... as its main center, let`s say. Within the notion of production, right? What is the time that is considered productive and what is the time that is not considered productive? It started as of kind of like a very informal exchange platform where people could really trade dreams for beans if you want. It`s skills for walks. The idea was like everybody`s time was the exact same and ideally the things that people were putting into the bank were things that they enjoyed and not things that were associated with work and with labor. That it sort of unpleasant, yeah? Like, people don`t much love what they have to do for a living, let`s say. So this was the trying to shift that notion. And so we set up the exchange platform online and we did a number of... We asked a number of artists to help us figure out what would be the currency we would use. We already agreed that the currency was going to be time but how would we represent it? What would be the token of exchange, let`s say. We got, I don`t know, maybe like 40 or 50 prototypes? Some of them were based on the actual representation of money like deal some coins, some of them were much more abstract like cookies and hugs and filmstrips and banana bread and songs...I mean, it was quite a variety...and nuts were also there. Eventually, what we chose to use were the prototypes which where very much looking like the bills that were designed by Lawrence Weiner. Because I was thinking a lot about Notgeld (temporary money in Germany during inflation) which is something that was... after the inflation in Germany, many communities issued their own Notgeld in exchange because there was no real money in the banks. Notgeld usually was very beautiful because sometimes it was retired from circulation because people just wanted to keep the Notgeld itself. I loved that idea so we wanted to have the currency that we would use. The bills themselves had an intrinsic value and then of course we made stacks of them. I keep forgetting that they are actually this big deal for Lawrence Weiner`s works. They used to become the timebank currency for me but of course people get them and then they don`t want to spend them because they want to keep this Lawrence Weiner. We did a product for the Liverpool Biennale, in 2010 I believe, and then it sort of took off and we were invited to many exhibitions and it was part of the last dOCUMENTA13 in 2012 and it keeps traveling around.

PROCESS

There are different situations. I mean, sometimes you get your work cut out for you in the sense that somebody invites you to a show that already has a very specific subject matter. So you just have to make, like a very specific commissioned thing that has to deal with the color yellow or with cats or with... I don`t know, chinese food. So that`s almost like an illustration in a sense, that`s easier. You just have to figure out from what angle you can approach this subject matter. The way that I work is that I keep notes. I have tons of notes and things that end up tacking walls and written down. Just like sentences and phrases and words that I look up and eventually, one of those will strike me and one of those will want to become. In 2009 I was invited to do a solo presentation. The Guggenheim Museum was starting a series of exhibitions called "Intervals" where they were giving museum space to younger artists. It took me some time to come up with something. I was doing a residency in Paris at a place called Récollets and I used to take very long walks in Paris - a beautiful city! And at some point I went to the - I am going to mispronounce this terribly - Museum of Art at Metier. It is like industry type objects and so on, like through the history of France, let`s say. I was quite interested in the section of the Museum that dealt with units of measure. You now like a measurement; it was like the "Pied du Roi". Like the King`s foot that supposedly would change every time there will be a change of king because each king had a different foot size and this was kind of like beautiful in a sense of it being subjective and not very unlike the metric system which is like this fixed thing. And in the same museum I found the decimal clocks because apparently between 1793 and 1795 after the French Revolution they tried to establish metric time. Like a time system where the days would have ten hours. Days with ten hours, hours with hundred minutes and minutes with hundred seconds. I spent some time trying to put those two concepts together like this idea of the metric time and subjective measurement. I ended up following that through and getting...but for medical reasons I had to get like a 24 hour electro cardiogram and I kept the data from that recording and I translated that into the seconds that would go into a clock. So what I ended up

doing like the main piece for this exhibition I had was a metric clock. So I was like trying to keep with that and of like utopic and failed conception of time but to bring in this subjective sense of measurement. I made the clock follow this 24 hour electro cardiogram recording which is completely erratic. The clock is actually trying to constantly recalibrate itself to keep some kind of measurement and each minute has a different length so the clock has to readjust so it can start counting again. I mean, that was like a very interesting process of trying to come up with these ideas and trying to figure out how long is a second and so on and so on. That was an interesting one!

PRESENTATION

I tend to have to do site visits and to really take the location very much into account to decide the presentation of a given work. So they rarely look the same. I mean like, it really would change; the installation will change depending on where it is. Often. The size of installation becomes important in terms of how to arrange things in space so maybe for only a couple of words I can have like an installation plan and site requirements. Most of the time it is the other way around like I adjust the work to the site of exhibition. I try to image: okay so what would this work feel if I was on the other side, yeah? If I was the person receiving the work, not giving the work. Precisely because the audience is not something that I consider part of the work, let's say. Like the audience's response is the audience's response and I like to give a lot of freedom to that. I think the audience does not complete the work. The work is complete by itself but I think the audience can provide other readings – like readings of the work that have not occurred to me. So that's kind of exciting! I mean, it is such a fight in this making something that I can only start thinking about an audience once the work is finished. I have two or three different audiences. One audience I don't think so much about because it is the regular art audience and that's a given. It is like the people who go to galleries and go to museums and go to Biennales. It's a fixed set of people. There is another audience, which is the audience that reads e-flux journal for example. I get access to a certain audience by a way of text, which is not necessarily – I mean like some of them are artists and art historians and curators but there are people that are sociologists and anthropologists that are not the art public. Like a different audience to which I relate differently but also I have different output for them. There are works that exist only as documentation because they cannot be preserved for whatever reason. Documentation is also quite important for me because it is the way in which a work circulates quite often. Like in an art context a lot of people will not necessarily be able to go to see an exhibition so what they see, what circulates and what becomes the placeholder for the work, is a documentation of it. You know, for example if I have a studio visit I'm not showing the works. The works are often times very big. So what people see when I have a studio visit and when I have to explain a work or discuss like presenting past work, all these conversations are done through documentation not through the experience of the work itself. It's also like in the economy of the image that we have now, what tends to circulate is not the... I am not a painter or photographer... so if I was a painter or photographer what would circulate is the one-to-one equivalence of my production but given the kind of work that I make. The documentation becomes a standard and what circulates in terms of my work. You have to be able to explain your work and you have to have images. A description does not suffice. You have to be able to visually...you know like I am an artist I am dealing in images and so I have to be able to explain an image and what it is that I am doing, yeah.

INTENTION

I think each work comes with its own motivation. Like if there is a decision to bring something into the world, it wants to be made for a reason but that's the reason of that one work. Timebank for example, right? Like the intention of that work, the motivation for that was trying to imagine an economy that was not pegged to money and to the way we understand capital. I mean like, how can an artist imagine that? Like someone with no background in the economy what so ever. That kind of question is what motivated that work to exist. I think that when a question is running in my head and it's like: must answer that, must answer that, must, must, must answer that, then that draws into it's own...There is something, like something that's burning, some kind of question and it's a question that I cannot answer through language. That's like the very first thing. If I can answer

the question by the way of telling you what it is, you know like how it's solved, then I do not need to make a work. Then that's already answered. When I run into this kind of curiosity or into this kind of... that it is not describable, that I can't even put my finger on that is, just like this thing that's hitting me in the head but I don't have the words to tell you what it is, THEN a work can start! This curiosity, this desire, this thing comes and then I need to find how to approach it. It's not even about answering but it is like how to approach, how to formulate. It's clear that I cannot formulate it in language that I cannot just write a text. It is this object that wants to be born, let's say. And then it's like: okay let's get do it!

METHOD

That goes again back to this idea of keeping notes and keeping the questions or the things that have intrigued me. Keeping sketchbooks. I am always in the computer, this is really bad and people now that I am quite available online so what happens for example is that some of the people that I know keep sending me things that they know can interest me so if I look through, I don't know for example, my Facebook feed to say something, I know that's not just photos of my cat - although there are plenty photos of cat - but there is like a lot of articles and things to go back to. It is some kind of a library and some kind of research but it's not rigorous research. It's like tidbits of magic, let's say. THAT I think is very consistent and all that almost always happens. Like, I have to go through this tidbits of magical moments and magical information let's say. Then the question comes or the desire, or whatever it is, comes and then that's when there is no consistency anymore and the methods go all over the place and something wants to be a video and something wants to be something else and then I just have to follow this one thing. An aggregating of things, of texts, of notes that come from me, notes that come from elsewhere, things that touch me. Both, on- and offline. You don't see it here because this is a quite a new studio but there is usually things on my walls and on my shelves and objects that intrigue me. Newspaper headlines that did something to me, combination of words...

ART

I try to refrain from describing it in terms of like a discipline. I mean, of course we have like the seven arts and there is like painting, there is a sculptor and now with new media there is the photography but that's just material support. I would not want to deal with that for an answer. I can try to start by elimination, maybe? I think art is not about a beautiful object, art is not about a pleasant objects. Art can be material but I think art is something that complicates the world in a very productive way. That's part of what I consider an aesthetic experience, this opening up of not the simple answers. This complexity, this way of looking at things, of looking at life and so on. I mean, art is not politics, art is not economics. Art can be informed by...and it can inform social systems or a political instance or economical instance but it's function, it's role is not that. This is also a bit of a cliché but I think it still holds through. The main function of art for me is to provide aesthetic experiences. There is something, kind of enlightening or like really profound that happens when you see something that is not just pretty, not just good looking, not just pleasing but that actually touches you at the level where you almost feel like you want to cry or something or that you cannot get an image out of your head. And that can cascade into a set of your own thoughts. If you think of the war drawings from Goya, yeah? Those are so strong! I mean like, so so so strong! The aesthetic impact that they have on a viewer is so intense! I also remember being a child, I had this encyclopedia for children and one of the volumes of the encyclopedia was about art. I remember seeing these four or five paintings that just made me feel things. Then I felt things I had no way to describe, no language for it, it was just this... all of a sudden the word opens up and you feel that there is much more than what you know. I think art enables an understanding of these complications, right? It's not like looking at a tangle. It's not like looking at a box of cables and saying like: Oh man, that's too complicated I don't want to deal with that! It's both. All of a sudden realization that things have complicated. Yeah it is both: complicated and complex, right? There are complications and there are complexities and it also gives you the tools to understand them and to try to immerse yourself in

them. It's not just like looking at an equation and saying: That's... I don't understand. I think it comes with the possibility to enter this complexity and becoming a part of it in somehow.

BIO

*1975 in Mexico City/MX, lives and works in Berlin and New York. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the School of Visual Arts (2001), and a Master of Fine Arts from Columbia University School of the Arts (2006), both in New York. Her explorations span installation, video, and print media, with a special interest in the creation and manipulation of artistic exchange and the subversion of traditional notions of commerce through art making. Central to Aranda's practice are her involvement with circulation mechanisms and the idea of a "poetics of circulation"; her interest in science fiction, space travel and zones of friction; the possibility of a politicized subjectivity through the perception and use of time, and the notion of power over the imaginary. As a co-director of the online platform e-flux together with Anton Vidokle, Julieta Aranda has developed the projects Time/Bank, Pawnshop, and e-flux video rental, all of which started in the e-flux storefront in New York. In addition to the Guggenheim Museum, Aranda's work has been exhibited internationally, in venues such as the 8th Berlin Biennale (2014), Witte de With (2013 and 2010), Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Villa Croce, Genova (2013), ArtPostions, Miami Basel (2012), MACRO Roma (2012) Documenta 13 (2012), N.B.K. (2012), Gwangju Biennial (2012), Venice Biennial (2011), Istanbul Biennial (2011), Portikus, Frankfurt (2011), New Museum NY (2010), Kunstverein Arnsberg (2010), MOCA Miami (2009), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2007), 2nd Moscow Biennial (2007) MUSAC, Spain (2010 and 2006), and VII Havana Biennial; amongst many others. Aranda's work has been selected for several international biennials including the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011 and is included in important museum collections such as: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, New York, USA; MUSAC – Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain; Fundación/Colección Jumex, Mexico City, Mexico; CIFO – Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, USA.

WEB: <http://www.e-flux.com>

Credits

The interview was conducted on Januar 8 2015 at the artist's studio in Berlin.

Interviewed by: Johannes M. Hedinger

Filmed and recorded by: Paul Barsch

Edited by: Paul Barsch

Transcript by: Lea Hoßbach, Ella Tetrault

Produced by: University of Cologne (Cologne), Institut für Kunst&Kunsttheorie