

Andrés Monzón, Artist Statement 2017  
Exhumations & The Icon and the Pall

I cover a pre-Columbian artifact with nail polish, I make drawings of cultural icons and go over them with whiteout, I prototype a lost nineteenth century china service based on an old inheritance manuscript. These are some of the ways in which I attempt to illustrate memory as social construct.

My practice is concerned with the way in which formal and material elements are utilized to shape and modify cultural identity. This interest is informed by the theory of performativity that originally comes from linguistics, which has been used to argue the capacity of speech and action to construct and reshape identity. I observe how a diva responds to societal needs for identification, and how, through body language, music and apparel, she can embody culture, and in some cases, challenge it and thus change its course. In that same way, I look for iconography that represents the cultures that have been ascribed to my own identity, even if I don't fully identify with them. I like to think that by utilizing iconography I can embody culture, and perhaps even reinvent it. This is what the diva does. I like to think that I can apply the theory of performativity to visual language, that I am not fully restricted by societal constructs because through semiology and repetition I have the power to influence them.

My interest in the way culture is represented and manipulated (how it lives and evolves) extends to negotiating the way we deal with material and immaterial culture, and specifically by the question of why we forget and *how* we forget. I believe that forgetting can be a form of liberation (like going on a vacation) or cleansing (like emptying the bin). Oblivion, like death, stands for the ultimate promise of repose, it represents absolution and therefore, we long for it. But we don't want to forget everything. It seems as though humans have two contradictory instincts: an innate desire for disintegration and urgency for preservation. We want to position ourselves in the middle of a sublime narrative, and in order to find meaning for our existence within that narrative, we constantly have to reinvent our own story - focusing on what is pertinent to us while the rest of reality fades into the background. In this way we design amnesia, by curating memories into coherent narrative (as individuals, as nations, as humanity). Thus we construct oblivion, through repetition, through performativity, through assertion of identity. Conversely, this is also how we construct memory.

Our instinct for preservation makes us resist oblivion. We hoard, archive and document in order to resist the natural course of memory. We don't want to forget or be forgotten, so we strive to be significant enough so that our legacy will be preserved for posterity and become part of that sublime narrative. We embalm ourselves in this way and, as if that wasn't enough, we do the same to others. We are lured by the remains of the past because in them we see ourselves, so we collect and archive the dead in order to dissect them, until we discover how well they fit into our own story.

I admit that I am guilty of having both instincts. I am possessed by tradition and the urgency for preservation, but I also long for amnesia and disintegration. I want to remember and forget as I please, to remind and obscure as I please, and to represent and dismiss as I please. In oblivion I long to dissolve, transcend and become one with the universe, purging from any responsibility or sin. I fantasize and dramatize. And yet I can't accept this demise because I am too romantic. The study of the past is essential to my narrative, and so I rush to disentomb what others decided to inter. It is an existential and rhetorical concern that drives me to expose and conceal the past, a matter of narrative identification. Noise, time, and distance are devices that allow me to assert my role in this made reality, and for this reason, I embrace them in my visual works.