

Interview with Daniel Chust Peters

Daniel Chust Peters (São Paulo, 1965) has been reproducing his studio in various ways for 14 years now. At the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica he used the same amount of money that the institution set aside for the production of the work to reproduce his studio three times, using five-euro notes. In *Airshow* he listed his procedures in the form of a declaration of intent (1. I've got an idea, I'll reproduce my studio; 2. I haven't got any ideas, I'll reproduce my studio; and 3. I've got another idea, I'll reproduce my studio).

David G. TORRES

You've been reproducing your studio in different ways for years now; aren't you tired of always doing the same thing?

Yes, but what can I do? Fourteen years ago I decided I was going to reproduce my studio, I can't remember why, now. Anyway, I came up with a list of criteria and now perhaps I'm doing it out of inertia. I simply don't think about it, it's a practical solution. What I have managed to do is to free myself of having to decide what to do.

It can't take much thought...

Reproducing my studio may be a one-track idea, but the results are always different: it's become a greenhouse, a small piece of jewellery, a cut-out, a doll's house, a children's playground... They're not models, they're reproductions of the studio in different formats, with a different approach in every case. It's a question of constantly reinventing the same territory. Each reproduction calls for the calculation of the right scale, detailed design, the constituent elements, their technical reproduction, and so on.

The headaches come when I have to think about the budget, who I need to talk to, whether it's a public institution or an association, the timeline, that kind of thing.

But in *Airshow*, it was that headache itself that made the piece...

That's true; I had 12,000 euros to produce it, less Inland Revenue's cut, and there they are, in five-euro notes, all nicely folded up to fit together and form the walls, windows, doors and roofs of the three reproductions of the studio.

Every time I've had an exhibition, the budget is the first thing I have to think about, followed by suppliers and so on. In this case, since I was also dealing with a public institution, I wanted to rethink it, cut out the middlemen altogether. All the same, there was a reduction in the budget that wouldn't have happened if I'd used two or more suppliers. It was administrative limits on handing over cash to an artist that defined the size of the work, just as bureaucracy established the time it took to make it.

You say you were looking for a way to do nothing, but you are in fact doing something: playing with the money set aside for artistic production.

I wanted to produce a poetic project: to apply and clearly demonstrate the procedures I've used from the outset and incorporate them into the exhibition by means of three phrases written on the wall:

'Procedure:

- 1. I've got an idea, I'll reproduce my studio*
- 2. I haven't got any ideas, I'll reproduce my studio*
- 3. I've got another idea, I'll reproduce my studio.'*

First, I've recycled an invariable idea that I've been using for 14 years. And secondly, I had some public money that I've turned into cash. There was no room for anything else, neither my emotions nor social reflection.

There was room, though, for hours of systematic work in my studio. Hours during which I've had a great time constructing the three reproductions. But I have to say that what we did with the money intended for artistic production is not a game—the project generated other effects that also form part of the procedure: how to reduce or practically rule out government bureaucracy in order to create a work of art. This is where the poetic side I was after comes out.

So your project gives precedence to the individual, specifically the artist, as opposed to the institution/government that on many occasions prioritizes a series of professionals?

The institution is a complex, abstract organism, but there's no reason why it should lose its principal function: to facilitate visibility and the views of individuals or groups of people who produce art.

In this reproduction of the studio you emphasize the role of the artist and the money he or she receives. But on other future occasions you could reproduce something else, couldn't you?

Don't tempt me! Not only could I reproduce something else, I could also stop reproducing anything and do something else. But as I've said before, I don't think about it anymore and all the 'brilliant' ideas that come to me have been done by other people.

I think that art is one of the few territories of knowledge where obsessive, absent, minimal, slow, negative attitudes can actually take form...

In my studio, all I do is reproduce that very studio, and that's all I have done for many years. It's a stupid, ridiculous attitude that I practise on the basis of a disciplined working procedure. I would do something else, but it just so happens that I'm obliged by the first sentence, by the idea I had and which I can't remember now.

In a way, the working procedure describes a process: the first sentence of this procedure is about having an idea; the second is really about the determination to act, or about inertia, acting without thinking; and the third involves self-censorship, it prevents me doing anything else.

In any case, although you don't remember why, I suppose that the fact that it's your studio is important.

It's essential. Firstly: it's the place where I go every day and spend six to eight hours working. Secondly: this space is my studio because I attribute this function to it; I had one studio in a place that used to be a rope-making workshop, another was a recording studio, and yet another was a warehouse, but at some point they all became my studio. And thirdly, the history of art is run through by the idea of the studio; there are all those images of artists in their studios, and the culture industry has undertaken the contemporary reconstruction of historic artists' studios as museums, etc. Now, with today's mobility and technology, the studio takes new forms. In all of its variants I think that it's a place that identifies the artist. All of these reproduced photos and studios exert a kind of fascination and are often used more to talk about an artist's work than the work itself.

In fact it is a work place and it is defined as the artist's working place, just as an office defines the work place of the banker, a television set that of a producer and an operating theatre that of a surgeon.

Now, my studio is an architectural space, at Carrer Massens 41 in Barcelona, but in the future it could be a park bench, a laptop or a hotel room.

So your work is actually about art, *l'art sur l'art*?

This is a concept that I love as an idea but not as a doctrine. Some artists aim to go beyond the context of art and become truly effective in other fields; they cease to produce art in order to devote themselves to something else, to avoid a kind of chronic schizophrenia: producing art without wanting to, but not doing the other thing effectively.

Although I might turn my studio into a place for children to play, as I did in 1998, when I touched on themes such as play, childhood, habitat, the public and private and what have you, it was still my studio and it was all in an art context. I suppose the same thing could have been done by a firm that manufactured playground spaces and commercialized them outside the art sector—the result would have been a space for play that could exist in any public park.

The titles of your works always include the word 'air': why? And why, in this case, 'Airshow'? Is it a show about air, an empty show?

When I left the Art Faculty in Barcelona, I took a leap into the void, and Airshow is another in a series of exhibition that record each stage of that fall.

Liquid air, air conditioning, air system, Air Wick... The titles are another limitation I've imposed on myself; I collect names, brands or expressions that feature the word 'air'. Not in order to represent them in material form; I leave them as I find them, as words that convey countless wonderful, soothing mental images and forms. So ultimately, the titles are the most sculptural part of my work.

What's your next project?

I still haven't got any ideas for the next one.