



ESPERANZA MAYOBRE

NADA SE TRATA DE NADA TODO SE TRATA DE MUCHO

ESPERANZA MAYOBRE • NADA SE TRATA DE NADA TODO SE TRATA DE MUCHO • May 17 to June 28, 2013

ESPERANZA MAYOBRE is a Brooklyn-based Venezuelan artist. She is the recipient of the LMCC Workspace Residency, a fellowship to attend Skowhegan School of Painting, a Traveling Scholars Award from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and a recent resident at the Smack Mellon Studio Program. Her work has been exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Bronx Museum, the Jersey City Museum, MIT Cava, Art Museum of the Americas in Washington D.C., the Contemporary Museum of El Salvador, the Incheon Biennial, Korea, among others. Her work was recently exhibited at Jack Shainman Gallery and the LMCC Governors Island Art Center, in New York. She has an upcoming solo show at el Centro Cultural Chacao, Caracas, Venezuela.

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“Maybe by explaining it, i kills it.”

That’s an accurate quote in an email received from the artist. It’s not included here to poke fun at a misspelling or English as a second language, but as an apt introduction to works that always appear to me as poems. From my first exposure to the work of Esperanza Mayobre, while I was drawn toward specific images and processes, I was equally struck by the sense of an artist concocting a language from which she could write and rewrite various poetic scenarios.

A persistent formal and conceptual thread in Mayobre’s art is the seemingly perpetual act of dismantling and creation. It would be misleading to think of it as “destruction and construction” because her practice and visual language are subtler than that. Familiar elements and strategies repeat themselves, are broken down and built up again, but it is never a violent rupture. It is an elegant iteration, an ongoing hybrid process in which a particular and personal language expresses itself with a recirculating newness.

Mayobre’s elements illustrate an intentional economy of both means and materials, using very direct drawing styles and simple sculptural forms in animated combinations. Most prominent and repeatable are the unmoored elements of the grid, realized as model-scaled frames. These modular miniatures are the continually reconfigured components that first exist as sculpted “maquette piles” created specifically to photograph. The photo document of the pile then serves as a foundation to be translated into drawings on paper or on site-specific surfaces.

The number of shifts involved in bringing the original plan to its finished form underscores the fluidity at the heart of Mayobre’s process, even though her final objects and images illustrate a precision of form and thought. There is considerable manipulation of elements, the erasing and reappearance of images, things falling apart and then coming back together. Elements not easily reproduced are redrawn on the fly. It makes clear that her images and sources are interchangeable elements within a highly personalized visual language.

Metaphorically, a great deal of this fluid process of dismantling and reimagining is derived directly from the

artist’s own sense of displacement from her homeland of Venezuela and her current home in New York City. There are symbolic iterations within this to distinguish an older, less prosperous city with a location that is never far from a new engine of prosperity, between an older, struggling city and one that engages in perpetual rebirth and reinvention. There is a quiet, personal statement within this work about finding one’s place, or at least trying to assemble a new sense of place from a pile of component parts.

Interestingly, Mayobre’s drawn forms—despite being comprised entirely of architectural and geometric structural shapes—never describe a new structure, opting instead to be a new pile. There is a formal and conceptual ambiguity in this, as it is often unclear whether Mayobre’s piles are collapsing in on themselves or rising up from their own collective rubble. Are we re-emergent or are we crumbling into a despairing debris? Are we rising or falling?

The pedestals and smaller sculptures that flesh out Mayobre’s installation practice are not anthropomorphic, though it’s impossible not to see them as figurative forms within these ascending/descending landscapes. They offer a solidity that is absent in her airy drawings, yet they are also almost invariably forms piled upon forms, reiterating that component parts in her work are continually seeking new iterations of themselves.

Tellingly, during my first studio visit with the artist, one of the first works that drew my eye was an innocuous color photograph of a pile of erasers in a box. Partly a document of a key tool used by the artist, its spontaneous appearance reflects a mind that is organizing and reorganizing like elements into formal clusters.

In dealing with poems about personal and geographic displacement, about aspiration and despair, about forms that sometimes pine for formlessness, it’s tempting to draw innumerable threads of meaning, but maybe in trying to explain it, I kills it.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

