

Constant Creation

Jorge Lozano in conversation with
John Hill and Jessica A. Rodríguez

Factory Media Centre, 2021

Constant Creation

This publication is an edited adaption of the Jorge Lozano May Day artist talk, in conversation with media artists John Isaiah Edward Hill and Jessica A. Rodríguez, co-presented by Factory Media Centre (FMC) and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (WAHC).

The artist talk took place on May 1st, 2021, following Lozano's online screening and exhibition at Factory Media Centre, *Other forms of being equal*. The screening featured works by Jorge Lozano (Governor General's Award Recipient, 2020) that drew on unfinished conversations begun on the picket line, the slow burn of social change, and slogans from past May Day demonstrations.

Constant Creation

His works employ what he refers to as a “visual poetics of the streets”, where he reflects on the intersections of race, class, and gender in considering who is permitted to participate in society, which lives are prioritized, and which are systematically overlooked. He pays particular attention to the presence of racialized and precarious workers, and his lived experience informs his deeply thoughtful and politically-charged video works.



**Jorge Lozano in conversation with
John Hill and Jessica A. Rodríguez**

May 1, 2021

Jorge Lozano in conversation with John Hill and Jessica A. Rodríguez

May 1, 2021

John Hill Last year you received the Governor General's Award for Media Arts. And there was that with the distinction of Lifetime Achievement as well. I thought that that was very curious, because when are the highlights of an artist's life of achievement over? Is it at 50-years plus of working?

Jorge Lozano Yeah, it's kind of strange. Because I feel that I am just beginning to do things the way that I want to do them. So then, maybe in 10 years, I will feel the same way: that I'm just beginning to do the things I really wanted to. So there's always a beginning – we're always beginning. I feel like in the arts, or at least in my own experiences, that every day is a new beginning. Or everything is an entrance to an exit, a more complex exit that bridges into more complex entrances, you know, it's an ongoing thing.

Constant Creation

John Exactly. branching paths, like twigs off branches, off trunks of trees.

John Hill Last year you received the Governor General's Award for Media Arts. And there was that with the distinction of Lifetime Achievement as well. I thought that that was very curious, because when are the highlights of an artist's life of achievement over? Is it at 50-years plus of working?

Jorge Lozano Yeah, it's kind of strange. Because I feel that I am just beginning to do things the way that I want to do them. So then, maybe in 10 years, I will feel the same way: that I'm just beginning to do the things I really wanted to. So there's always a beginning – we're always beginning. I feel like in the arts, or at least in my own experiences, that every day is a new beginning. Or everything is an entrance to an exit, a more complex exit that bridges into more complex entrances, you know, it's an ongoing thing.

John Exactly. branching paths, like twigs off branches, off trunks of trees.

Jorge Yeah. Especially like, I don't think that... to me, this profession.. is more formal living, the formal existence, mode of existence. So the art is my life, my every day, every second, you know, that's what I am. So I really don't differentiate one or the other.

Jessica A. Rodríguez Yeah, that's incredible. How do you think your practice has changed in the 50 years that you've been here in Canada?

Jorge Well, it goes along with when you get into another country. Like in my case, I came here to Canada in 1971, when there weren't that many immigrants. There were [some] but there weren't that many– not like now. I was always isolated, and I didn't speak English well. So I had to, in some ways, become like a little kid and baby learning how to talk right.

At the same time as I learn how to talk, I began discovering a kind of discrimination in the way that people are the time the concept that they have of Latino Americans and still is, is a very reduced stereotype that is an enclosure to three or four words, right? Mostly you are associated with Mexican, you know, with Mexico and the stereotypical description. So the struggle right from the beginning was to create a sense of autonomy, a way to tell the new culture, I am this way, I think in this way, I move in this way, I dance in this way, I am in this way, I am different than you are.

But you know, I don't want to assimilate — don't force me to assimilate. Art became my tool to have my own voice. I never wanted or thought to be an artist. But then I discovered when I came here, I managed to put a camera in use — a Portapak video. And in doing that, I began

Constant Creation

seeing and creating my own images. And sometimes seeing myself in films and on the videos, which I would never see people like me when I turn the TV on. So I was a foreigner, right? I had to create my own right from the beginning, as I was living my life I had to create images that will express, and put me in the picture, you know? And say, “I am this way”, basically. And so that’s been the struggle, and I still do the same thing, the theories are the same. I exist constantly.

John What is it about video that attracted you to the medium? When were your first encounters with video? Did you have a favourite television show growing up with favourite movies? How did video enter your life?

Jorge I met this person that had a video Portapak. In 1971, I went out when I came to Toronto, they came to the island, Toronto Island, and Toronto Island was full of hippies at the time. So there were a lot of young people, and there were a lot of young artists living there. I kind of saw like, collective dance, rock and roll, drugs, and everything, you know, that distinguished that apparent history. And so I discovered the Portapak. And the Portapak was – I don’t know if you guys know the Portapak – but it was a camera that was attached to a backpack and had the recorder, and it was very heavy, because the batteries were in there and the camera was right there attached, you would record like this. What makes it interesting is that with the Portapak, you could see yourself in real-time — well what was called real-time. So, you could record and playback immediately. Or you could

attach the deck to a monitor and see yourself recording or looking through the viewfinder. It was an immediate perception.

A lot of the works that were made, because of the recording playback, were observational or observations of the self. There were a lot of artists who truly began looking at themselves, in looking at their bodies, and looking at the histories in their bodies. There were a lot of naked people, you know, looking at all these cameras and things, and talking about the history and all that. It was because you could see yourself. I mean, one of the things that I remember the most is this guy has a monitor in front, right, the camera is in the back. And his cutting is scary, but he was long-haired, so like a hippie, but he began cutting his hair. So you could actually, you know, he used it [the camera] to do that action. You cannot do that in the mirror, right? You need to have a mirror, but it will be too hard. But with video production, you can do that in real-time. You could see the same thing at the same time. Even political activists used the Portapak because you could record and pass the tapes quickly, and people would play them back in to see what was happening right then, because before that it was in film, and you had to wait a long time before you could see what was happening. That was a very brutal revolutionary way to save the world, right? To be able to see it... but now it’s very common. Right now we see everything immediately. But at that time, it changed the direction of the arts.



Constant Creation

To me was very empowering, because it gave me solid self-esteem in some ways, you know, because I did a lot of actions in front of the camera as I began building myself around being able to talk and see myself in this ancient time and see what I was talking and that was really empowering, because it was me in the picture. So I began evolving.

Jessica You mentioned that you came here as an immigrant from Colombia, but then you faced a lot of misconceptions about being from Latin America. I just want to ask you in these years, what were the benefits, the challenges, but also the misconceptions of identifying yourself as a Latin American, not just in your work, but also in the academic?

Jorge It's just that when you talk about identity, when you're still solid, you know, that identity, belonging kind of, I mean that is always imposed onto you, you know? Because when I came here, I never thought of being Latin-American, I never even thought of being Colombian. I was pointed out instead, you're this, and you're this, and you're that. There was a whole reflection on who I was when I came here, because I would have been perceived as something that I had not imagined that I was. I was just me, you know? I grew up in a very poor neighbourhood in Colombia, so I was used to being with people from all different cultural backgrounds. Afro-Colombians, Indigenous, the mixture of all those, you know, in very creative neighbourhoods.

It was an actually very rich cultural environment, that I think I carry that we need that sense of diversity, and multiplicity of differences. I think that I carry it in the way that I work too, I never stick to one style. I have received information, you know, but when I came in here, I wasn't identifying as one single thing, right? And that was complicated, because you don't feel that you do add the link of your own self, you know, and then when you realize that, you start re-linking that self, again, in trying to be autonomous. And as I said before, to say I exist, and I'm this way, and I am, I am what I am. It's a process, and in that process of doing that, you begin learning from the other cultures, and you begin learning to reject the parts of the other culture that you don't want in, and then you become not in two cultures — but you become one person. This is the experience of most immigrants, you become a person that is willing cultures, you know, you're willing cultures and at some point, you become a unique person, a unique person made out of what you used to be in when you are becoming "not you". I am not a Colombian and I am not a Canadian, right, I am a mixture, a hybrid of all those experiences of being here and being in Colombia. And I go back and forth, in both cultures, I do reject assimilation and nationalism. So you know, it is an ongoing process of becoming. You're always becoming because every day that I wake up, if I go out, and I meet someone, when we were able to talk to people more, they will say, Where are you from? People will always ask you, where are you from? You're always put in that place.

Constant Creation

John That's very compelling stuff. And I think that there's this thread that comes through in a lot of your work, especially Lenin's Kiss, which we are screening on the website as part of this exhibition. I love Lenin's Kiss, it's so beautiful to me. There's this idea of self-emancipation you're talking about, as an immigrant living within cultures, and almost not being marginalized — almost being marginalized by choice, in the sense that you reject. There are certain aspects of Colombian identity and Canadian identity as official state entities, and normalized identities that you reject. How does art factor into your self-emancipation? Is it an everyday thing, where you wake up, and you say, I'm going to make art from my perspective, and that's going to be my individual vision. Or is there something a little bit more specific and a little bit more nuanced than that?

Jorge It is. The way that I work is... I mean, and I said before, art for me is a mode of existence. So I don't, in my style of work, it has always been very spontaneous.

I carry my equipment with me and I record things all the time. And so I have archives of lots and lots of stuff. What I record is stuff that impacts me, you know? I have the camera, but I don't record everything as things that impact me, and then they exist in my camera because they impact me then. But I don't have any ideas of what I'm going to do with it, I just know that something is going to happen eventually.

I work 24 hours a day at work, basically, you know, so, so

then I began putting pieces together in the images in the information in the images because I do work segmented since I don't really think that linearly, then I start pulling things together and then the images, they talk to each other sometimes escaped my own controlling comprehension, right. And then sometimes images talk to each other, but sometimes they repel, right? Images are representations of the reality that is – not images as a sort of conceptual reality, but it's not the reality right. So, somehow images and the reality they conspire to create something different, another world right, because that representation of an image is not just that image is more real especially. Now also my subjectivity is part of that. So how I record it, that reality exists different from another point of view. So then I begin learning from the images as I begin putting the pieces together, and then I begin the process of reflection on what I am trying to do.

Most of the time, it escapes my total comprehension and I like that, because a viewer can also make their own stories. You know, I'm against total truths. And in final things, they're all unfinished – they could continue in some ways, they may have a life of their own too as well. So I cannot control them, it's impossible, because of the way that I work.

So with Lenin's Kiss, I had those candles for years and years and years in a box, and they were like, melting more, changing a bit. I always wanted to do it since the beginning, I wanted to do something with them... and that's why I saved them, because I didn't want to burn

Constant Creation

them. I just wanted to create something and I knew, but I didn't know what was in there.

Only now in this pandemic, something in the house has become something else, all these things have acquired another life. And then they have opened their boxes by themselves to say, "Hey, do something with me", you know, and, and I very much do it because we had to be creative in the house – we're going to go nuts, right. Even if you're creative, we're going nuts anyway. But that was a response to that, you know, like that moment where I've been doing interventions in the house a lot, by myself, with my partner Alexandra, those hours of video and film, and she does different work that I do, but we would collaborate sometimes...

So Lenin's Kiss came and in this case, it's totally accidental. Although, you know, and that's why it's Lenin's Kiss, because I decided to burn only one because I didn't want to get one right. So it's kind of an accidental sin.

So, my work happens at that level, you know, in some ways and not unprepared, but it very much has to do with the unknown, you know, with the unexpected, and I do cultivate the unexpected and not on purpose, I tried to make my scenes the stuff that I collect, the images that I film and have them ready to work with them, to live that element of the unexpected and see, where do I go? Where do I end up?

I also follow different views too in the work, and try to make it more multi-aesthetic you know, which has to do a lot with my own reflections on epistemological and ontological

basis and my disobedience. There is a variance on or not being what you had been told that you have to be. And yeah, the epistemic epistemological disobedience, this is basically what, in the use of different disciplines, you know, is a kind of a multi disciplinary, but more than one disciplinary is interdisciplinary — interdisciplinary use of things, you know. That to me, I am in a constant state of emancipation because emancipation is an everyday thing. You have to everyday look at the world and see if what you thought a minute ago makes sense or not because the world is changing, and I know I'm being a little bit radical in this but the world is changing and we have to change with the world as well. Right?

Every day there's something new to learn basically. When it comes to self-emancipation, that comes from also the idea of Franz Fanon — and on Franz Fanon, you know, that he said the ability to decode the colonialists or the Golan, to be called anti-coloniality, or anti-colonial economic power, to decolonize oneself is self-creation.

For some creation is the capacity to see yourself as a colonized person, in the struggle every day to converse and linking that colonized self with the real self, that is your, your real self, right and autonomous independence of, and that is what I do basically. I live that — I am not only political, but I live my life politically, in the sense that I am very aware that I cannot handle thrills, you know, you know what I mean? My truths are very... they can crumble racing in and I let them crumble because... truth is also changing. So that's... I don't know if I can

We're creating our own
rhythms, our own per-
ceptions, as we live
in writing, you know,
which is where we get
to write our own code,
not just to use some
other code.

Jorge Lozano, May 1, 2021

Constant Creation

explain that.

Jessica Yeah, I think it's a very interesting idea that people may think that video I made mostly when you're, like, a project documentary, you're showing the truth, right? But what's the truth is that there are many, many truths, as you're saying, the two are always changing, as the images are always changing, as cells are always changing. I like this concept of the migrant image. The image which is always transforming and moving. That's an interesting point.

Jorge Well, it's kind of the sound coding that you do, right? You're creating this, you're living, right, and you're coding and creating sounds, obviously, there are some controls that you have, but it's something like that, you know, like, this, we are writing our own codes, as we live, right? We're creating our own rhythms, our own perceptions, as we live in writing, you know, which is where we get to write our own code, not just to use some other code.

Jessica So you think that your video work escapes yourself?

Jorge In some ways, some of the times I don't understand things that I've done. But I mean, it is not a lack of control, in the word control is kind of strange. It's always like... it's more shaping things, more like controlling which things I

take in, I allow, for a sense, certain segments do relate in their own way. And sometimes I even look for that — for scenes that perhaps don't make sense if I put them together but they played each other somehow. I can detect when scenes can create their own meaning. So although sometimes I do check them in the way that I want them to — but in parts, not in the whole work, I like my works to be kind of incomplete. I said they could continue, you know, I just stopped them because I stopped there, but they could continue also dealing with issues that are important. I think about the world, thinking about politics in different ways, something to do with the aesthetic of politics and or the politics of aesthetics, you know, that kind of stuff is that kind of relationship.

John There's something paradoxical about feeling that a work isn't complete until there's enough of it to exist on its own, but also not so much of it, that it overwhelms the viewer with, you know, objective truth and objective meaning. And I think that's a big part of my process, when I create my own works is that I put as much of myself as I can afford in them, but also I want people to be able to fit themselves into it as well, because the more people can empathize with my work, the better. The best thing that my work can do is make a new world imaginable. And so even if I'm taking you even if I'm writing a poem about like a park that I go to every day, as long as I make somebody else view, a park near where they live a different way than in some ways I'm doing something correct in the sense that I'm creating through just through a slight kind of destruction or obfuscation.

Constant Creation

I think living under a settler state like Canada, decolonization is about imagining a new world, and there's this tension in decolonial and anti-colonial and postcolonial studies with the past as it existed pre-contact — as it existed before colonization. And this is sort of a mythic idea of returning to the old ways. And I thought what was very interesting about this idea of self-emancipation decolonization is that you reject the present and the past. But can decolonization exist without some form of the past? Whether it be some sort of imaginary before contacts? Or is it or is decolonization about moving forward in a new way, by taking as much as taking only with us into the future, the things that we see as helpful, valuable, productive, that kind of thing?

Jorge No, I think that the past is the past. And what is the past is an accumulation of knowledge, right? So there is information in there that is really important, and especially that kind of knowledge that is non-distracting knowledge. And that's why, for instance, Indigenous past is really important, it's very relevant, and besides that, a lot of indigenous cosmologies haven't really changed — this is in their person, not in the past, to take care of nature, right? That should be the present. So in some ways, this actualization of the past is really important. It's not that we want to go back, it's just that we want to bring that past into the present, because the changes in the present, in the future, is that present that we have changed. That's what the future is... the future is changing that present.

Produced and Edited by Factory Media Centre

Special thanks to the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre



Text by Jorge Lozano, John Isaiah Edward Hill
and Jessica A. Rodríguez

Design by Michael DiRisio

With program contributions from FMC Staff: Kristina Durka,
Eliyahu Nolet, Jeanne Fries, FMC Board: Katherine Diemert,
and WAHC Staff: Kat Williams

Printed in Canada

Edition of 2021

Factory Media Centre would like to acknowledge the generous support
of its funders, donors, and sponsors:



Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Hamilton

