

May 2, 2017 - Francisco Cordero-Oceguera is an interdisciplinary artist living and working in Mexico City. He received his BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and while in Chicago, founded Lodos Gallery. He moved back to Mexico City in 2013, relocating the gallery and its program with him.

As told to Gabriela Jauregui, 2209 words.

Tags: Art, Collaboration, Inspiration, Process, Multi-tasking.



# Francisco Cordero-Oceguera on art and friendship

A conversation with Gabriela Jauregui

**Your gallery started in an apartment in Chicago, why there and then why move it to Mexico City?**

The most interesting thing that happens in that scene when you're studying art and you're young, are the so-called apartment galleries. Almost every professor or artist who's not working with a commercial gallery starts their own project. That's what's known as an apartment gallery. In Mexico they're usually called "independent spaces."

After I finished studying I stayed for two more years, and during the first year I missed being part of a conversation, I was sorry not to be in student critiques, to have that conversation with my classmates or artists every day, like when I was in school. This also left me without the desire to make work: I didn't want to make art anymore because there was no real-time feedback.

No one was showing my work, or if they were, it wasn't what I needed. So I decided to make a performative situation: I did one last show in an apartment gallery titled Formerly the Artist. It was me saying goodbye to art. After that I didn't want to make any more work, and since my studio was in the basement of a house I shared with three other artists and we each had a mini studio, I decided to take out my table and mounted a platform with three white walls and so Lodos started.

After Lodos started, it went really fast. The month we started it, I found out I had to leave the U.S. because my visa was about to expire and there was no way to get it renewed. But we already had a program, so we squeezed the entire program into three months and had about five shows. It was cool because finally in Chicago I felt like I belonged to something I wanted to be a part of, and the artists I started working with were what I liked about art. It was also an excuse to talk with the artists that interested me and start a friendship. For example, Noah Barker was our first show at Lodos in Chicago, and he still works with us today. That's something valuable to me, and it's what I want to accomplish with all the artists: that friendship. I think it's important. Lots of people don't talk about friendship in art or if they do it's as if it were something unfortunate, but I think it's what's most valuable, because they are your colleagues. They become your accomplices in what you're doing.



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I'm bread, 2016. Medium: Talking bread.

When I left the U.S. and came back to Mexico it was a hard blow: being abroad six years and then coming back without knowing anything or anyone in the art scene. The only people I knew were Brett [Schultz] and Daniela [Elbahara] because I was an intern in their gallery, Yautepec, as well as Gerardo Contreras, because when I was there, Gerardo was organizing a show at the gallery. Through the three of them I got reconnected to a lot of people here, and again the need to open Lodos was the same as in Chicago. I needed to continue with the space here and show the artists I worked with in Chicago. I was sure that, eventually, people from Mexico whose work interested me would also come. It's taken time but I now have access to work with Mexican artists or artists from the local scene.

**As you were describing the way the project started, I heard you mention the words "dialogue" and "conversation" a number of times. That, and "friendship." I wanted to ask if you see Lodos more as a dialogue rather than a gallery or independent, dependent or codependent space.**

Yes, it's just that. A conversation; a dialogue, too. It's been a steep learning curve for me. I mean, I never wanted to put myself in this position. It was never about becoming a dealer, that never interested me. After the four years that the gallery has existed, many bonds have been created through dialogue. It's a conversation and I like to see it that way. The program is based on how to create an intelligent conversation, interesting for the artist, me, and the audience too. It's based on generating a situation that makes space for more dialogue. I think one of the strengths of the project has been to think that an exhibition doesn't end when the show closes, but rather something comes out of that, and then something else. I don't like thinking of art as something that stops once the show opens. Just as there was a process before, then the exhibition, I hope there is a process afterwards—I think it's important.



This photo is an exhibition view of Dear Chantri... by Korakrit Arunanondchai, at the old Lodos location. It opened February of 2016.

**You went from being an apartment gallerist, and sort of closet artist, to a new level of conversation. In the meantime, did you stop making art altogether?**

People often ask me, are you a curator? What are you? I say no, I don't consider myself a curator, but I also can't consider myself an artist. When I am sitting here I don't feel like an artist, but I do feel like I am generating something that goes beyond an economic position, since that's not my focus. I am interested in talking to artists. I like that. I didn't become a closet artist. It's just that the gallery required more and more of my time. My work became more site-specific, so if they invite me to a show, since I don't have a studio practice, I have to look at how to insert myself in the space.

What I do here in Lodos has always been parallel to my practice, but I've never seen a crossover, beyond the conversations. When that connection happens, you learn so much from the artist. You put into question all you've done. It makes you question why you did this and you start building new ties with other artists and you start to think again about something that excites you.



► [Play Audio](#)

From a solo exhibition I did in Lausanne in 2016. The exhibition took place at No Conformism, and my show was titled 'No! , Conformism'.

**Does it bother you-or not-when people say, this dude isn't an artist, he's a dealer?**

Being seen as a salesman can make you be very cynical in relationship to art. You have to protect that. In the beginning when we started to sell in the gallery, my way of thinking about art got lost completely. That hurt me a lot because when you're only thinking about, "Fuck yeah, I know how the market works. I know how collectors work," you start to think about economic systems that go beyond what you value in an object or idea. But I realized this quickly and that was a good thing. Now I can let that go and differentiate certain situations. But it was hard.

I was talking to a German curator the other day, and she told me something I really liked. She was really interested in the spaces and the prices of the works and I asked her if she ever thought about opening a gallery herself. She said no. I asked her why not and she said, "Because I never want to get a chance to think about art in that way; it would kill my love for the work." I understand. It happened to me, and it's difficult to recover an innocent sensibility after doing three fairs in one year. It's hard, but it's also cool to find artists who can teach you that again—that's why I like doing what I do.



This photo is an exhibition view of *Se nos cayó el teatro*, a group show at Lodos. Opened in December of 2016.

**So artists themselves—the friendships you have and the banter—are the antidote so your soul doesn't die?**

Yes, for me that's really important. I like the banter in Mexico especially because it's tremendously open. I've talked about this a lot with foreigners. Like now that the art fair started, a friend told me, "You Mexicans are hard, like, you talk shit openly." I think that's really valuable because that playback between artists, curators and gallerists is good. I think backstabbing is less rough that way. You get to the next level where we can be friends or not, but you know who your friends are and who aren't. You get along in a more open way instead of talking shit behind people's back.

**Instead of being polite and then hating what that person does and not saying anything.**

That's precisely what I like about the artists I work with: they have that openness. They surprise me; they're super critical of themselves. They implicate themselves in their shows and sometimes many of them say, "I hate art," and that's important. I like saying that as an artist because it speaks of something more external, but it also speaks to how we're all conscious of our own position within the system: like we hate art but we want to make work—especially in the context of Mexico. I love this country but we know what happens here: if you become cynical you lose. It's important not to forget that.



This photo is an exhibition view of BAD BASKET, a solo show by Kasia Fudakowski at Lodos, it Opened in February 2017.

**Growing together and friendship aren't usually things that people perceive in the art world, right? Amongst artists, yes, but rarely between a dealer and an artist. But with you there's a situation where you grow together with your artists. You keep growing together through friendship...**

Yes, and that's why I am not their dealer. We're accomplices. That's why I've always been very open about Lodos being a multi-person project, even though I might be the director, the space wouldn't exist without them.

They're my friends. Sometimes it happens the other way: I start working with someone, and they become my friend. I always approach projects with the attitude that I am there to help. If I don't know the artist and I invite them, I am here to make the project happen. But within that there's a level of trust that in the end breeds a friendship. A project here lasts two weeks, but before that, there are months of production. Something beyond the work we did is also generated. Because that's how I am: I am a person who wants to generate that intimacy and who, like any other human being, wants to be liked.

**I'm sure that's not always the case, though. There must be times where during that process of collaboration and production a lot of tension is also generated, and everything ends up badly.**

It's happened with people I've known for years. Since we've known each other for so long, like with Noah [Barker], we've not had a single show where there's not tension between the two of us. But that's also because we know each other so well, so we know we can yell at each other and not see each other till the opening, and then, everything's good. So those things happen, but that's true for family and anyone.

**Something with family is that despite fighting, you often reconcile because there's that blood bond. So when there are tensions here, are friendship and art what saves the day?**

I don't know if art does... I think it's more about friendship and trust. At the end of the day, art has a lot to do with friendship.

Francisco Cordero-Oceguera recommends:

Leonard Cohen - "Tonight Will Be Fine"

Nina Simone - "Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free"

Nina Simone - "Trouble in Mind" (Live at Newport, 1960)

Pere Ubu - "Breath"

Roland Barthes - The Eiffel Tower

Name

Francisco Cordero-Oceguera

Vocation

Artist, Lodos Gallery Founder

Fact

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Photo: Ramiro Chaves

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