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As told to Elliott Cost, 2101 words.

Tags: Art, Painting, Beginnings, Collaboration, Process.



# On opening galleries and sharing spaces

Quintessa Matranga and Rafael Delacruz discuss painting in the city.

**You've both started several galleries in the past. What made you want to start those spaces?**

Quintessa: I liked when I did it in San Francisco. I thought it worked there because there's really nothing else to do and it seemed to make sense. But then moving here [to NYC], I felt like there was less need for a gallery, so I kind of stopped curating or organizing things.



Mission Comics and Art Gallery, San Francisco.

**I was talking with another Bay Area artist and curator the other day about how one might archive an apartment gallery once it's closed. Both of you have a few under your belt. Any recommendations for archiving something like that?**

Quintessa: With Mission Comics, I never even got any of the shows photographed. There are just phone photos for the most part.

Rafael: It was pretty raw.

Quintessa: It was just all posted on a blog.

Rafael: It's still on there.



Installing Body by Body's exhibition at Mission Comics and Art Gallery.

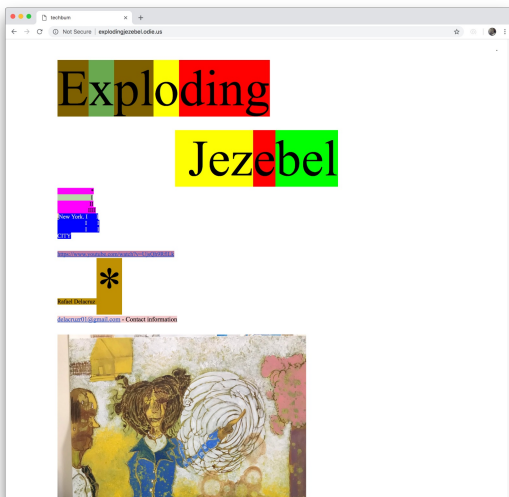
Quintessa: It's still on there and I don't necessarily think that's such a bad way of doing it.

Rafael: You did want to make a book at one point.

Quintessa: I did, but that never happened. I think that if I were to do it again, I would just have it all in folders, like the little folders on your computer's desktop.

**Ralf, you had a space called Exploding Jezebel, how did you come up with that name?**

Rafael: It came from the name of a song, or the name of a band. Something with similar words, but I just misread it as "Exploding Jezebel." The band name is referring to a website, and the music was kind of like weird experimental music.



The Exploding Jezebel website.

**You told me once that all the artists that you showed were fake.**

Rafael: That was actually another project called Rapid Spirit Guide. That might also be gone, too.

**That was located in the same space as well?**

Rafael: Same space. No one really saw it, honestly. Maybe three people knew about it, or like four. Actually, the *New York Times* did ask me about it when we did that article. They asked about documentation, and I was just like, "I don't have it."

**Quin, Mission Comics was just this strange space at the back of a comic store that you were working at. Can you tell me how you started it?**

Quintessa: That was a kind of completely serendipitous occurrence where Ralf just saw the job listing.

Rafael: Yeah, I saw the job ad.

Quintessa: Where did you see the job ad? Like Craigslist or something? Or in their actual store?

Rafael: Yeah, in their actual store.

Quintessa: For a curator.

Rafael: Yeah, a curator. A paid curator position.

Quintessa: I'd never done anything like that before, and I had just graduated school.

Rafael: I thought I couldn't do it, because I was like, "Oh, curator. Oh my god. I don't know what that is."

Quintessa: For some reason he thought I could do it, even though I'd also never done anything like that, but of course I got the job.

Rafael: Immediately.

Quintessa: Immediately. And I kind of had full reign, so I just did whatever I wanted. Very unlikely situation. I don't think that would ever happen again.

**For a while you were showing work together, and you still share a studio together. Is it more productive to work in the same space?**

Quintessa: It's just more economical to share a space. I think we have a good way of working now. We figured it out. It's not too distracting or anything. We have different schedules, so we're not always in there at the same time. We don't really show together anymore.

**Quin, your solo show, "Rhetoric," just opened at Sandy Brown in Berlin. All of the paintings are shaped like caskets. How was it carrying the casket paintings through security?**

Quintessa: Surprisingly, no one asked about them. They were packed up really well, and nobody asked me any questions. It was a relief.



Installation view: Quintessa Matranga: *Rhetoric*, Sandy Brown, Berlin, 2018.

**A lot of artists are moving to Berlin these days. What were your initial impressions, being there for the**

**first time?**

Rafael: I really liked it because it reminded me of an old San Francisco—all the parks and the people.

Quintessa: I like that the city is not gridded out like New York. It's more of a spider web. It's also interesting that they don't use as many ice cubes as we do in America. I don't think it would be so good to live there, for me.

**How so?**

Quintessa: Well, it seems like a very small scene there, kind of like how San Francisco was.

Rafael: Maybe it just takes a longer time to break through.

Quintessa: It also seems like there are very few good jobs there for artists.

Rafael: Our friend who we were staying with was doing social media for a lamp company.

Quintessa: It would be a good place to be if you just want to have some privacy.

Rafael: There are really cool galleries there.

Quintessa: Yeah, there are a couple of good ones.

**Would you guys ever retire?**

Quintessa: I would. Any day now. Oh, from painting? No.

Rafael: I don't know. I don't think so.

Quintessa: I think I would retire, as in move to a farmhouse.

Rafael: Me too.

**If you did, what would you do for a post-art career?**

Quintessa: Post-art career? Maybe a politician or a macrobiotic chef.

**Ralf, I've heard you describe characters in your paintings, particularly the SF ones, as "tech bums." Where does that come from, or what does that term mean?**

Rafael: There was this weird mural on the General Hospital that I was living across the street from. It was of a homeless person on a laptop.

Quintessa: It's kind of like the San Francisco dichotomy where you have either really rich tech people or homeless people. That's all there is. There's no in-between.

Rafael: Yeah, there's no middle. It's just like extremely rich or extremely poor.

**Can you talk a little bit about your series of Ridgewood paintings? The ones of Topos bookstore and Gottscheer Hall?**

Rafael: The one of Topos is inspired by Martin Wong, a Bay Area painter. I painted the bookstore with a big flame coming out the window and an eight ball connecting into a character's eye, which is supposed to be me as a bum with my underwear and a trench coat. The other Ridgewood one is of Gottscheer Hall, this German bar. It has a DJ on top of the building because they do DJ nights there. That was kind of related to the idea of the tech bum, too, because it's kind of a geographical thing. The Topos painting got me in trouble because it looks like I hate them, but I actually don't.



Rafael Delacruz, *Djaying at gottscheer hall*, 2017.

Yeah, I heard about this controversy.

Rafael: It was a very big controversy in the neighborhood... with the young people.

Ralf, a lot of your paintings are referencing the Bay Area, and you guys constantly travel back there. What's your relationship with the Bay like now that you're in New York?

Rafael: Envious. I go back to visit my family, and Quin goes back there because her sister lives there.

I recently curated a show called "Bay Area Now & Then" with Sean Tatol at his mom's house in San Rafael. The space is called On Purpose, and the show was all artists from the Bay Area. It was kind of reacting to Yerba Buena Center's "Bay Area Now," the weird biennial they have. It wasn't trying to make fun of them. I just liked the idea.



Install image of Bay Area Now & Then at On Purpose, San Rafael.

Quintessa: Yes it was.

Rafael: It wasn't trying to make fun of them, but it was reactionary. I was just making my own.

**You once told me that you plan out all your paintings on the computer before you even start painting them. Can you talk a little bit about how that works?**

Rafael: Yeah. I draw a bunch first and then I color them on the computer. I'll color them multiple times in different color schemes, and then I'll get to a point where I like it and I'll paint that exactly on the canvas. Once I finish that, I'll add different things to it. It's easier for me to do it that way, because then I can really concentrate on the colors. It's better to fill in the blanks.

**Do you guys give each other feedback as you're going through a painting or a process?**

Quintessa: Yeah, it's pretty constant. Since we work in our house, we are always around our paintings. When we're on the way to the bathroom or leaving the house, we can look at each other's work and talk about it, or not. I think it works well to always have the paintings in the background, and the psyche.

**You also have a film project called Half Moon Bay Center for Theatre & Performance Art that you run together with Marc Matchak. How did that come about?**

Quintessa: Well Ralf and I both studied film, and when I graduated school, I was only making documentaries, and Ralf also had documentaries he was working on. When we moved to New York, we started a very small videography company. Kind of an extension of my job in the Bay Area, where I was a videographer for a law school. I filmed all their online classes and lectures. We still don't have a name for our company. I'm thinking of calling it La Video Loco, but we'll see.

I guess we're always thinking of movie pitches, but we never had anyone who was willing to act in them. Luckily, our friend Marc was very willing to star in the first movie, so it was very easy, and it only took two months to make.

Rafael: All improvised.



Filming *Lebenswirklichkeit*.

**How do you direct your actors?**

Quintessa: I like to work in a style where it's completely improvised and completely based on the actor's own ideas. That's been working out. That's how our first movie was made. We just tell them about the scene very quickly, and there's no script. It usually only takes one or two tries to get it right—with Marc, at least. Our second film has already been two years in the making, and we've only shot one scene successfully.

Rafael: No, that's not true. There's a Christmas tree scene.

Quintessa: No, that's deleted.

Rafael: Yeah, never mind.

Quintessa: That movie is kind of on the back burner now. I'm really excited about this movie about grapes we're supposed to be making called *It's Just Grapes*. But no one wants to be in it, so that'll probably never happen either.



Rafael: Yeah, we'll see.

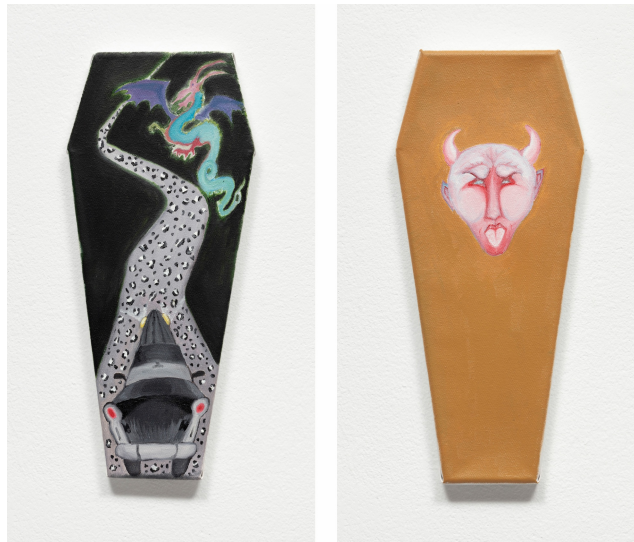
**So your films are improvised, but what about your paintings?**

Quintessa: My paintings are pretty improvised as well. They're definitely not as mapped out as Ralf's. They're more immediate, but sometimes I do work from drawings.

**What was the idea behind the caskets?**

Quintessa: Well, the show was called rhetoric. Originally, I was going to do stop signs, but then I thought the coffin shape would be more fitting, since it's Halloween. Then I realized they don't have Halloween in Germany.

Rafael: That was a shame.



Left to right: Quintessa Matranga, *Lovely*, 2018; *Gold*, 2018

**Any other projects in the works?**

Quintessa: I'm working on a cookbook.

**What's it called?**

Quintessa: *No Butter, No Salt*. It's about my very unpopular philosophy of cooking. It'll be handwritten.

Quin's list:

Concord grapes

American Express delta blue card

Wallace Shawn's oeuvre, especially *The Wife* (1995).

Medieval Technology

Ralf's list:

<http://19933.biz/onpurpose.html> (my gallerist)

<http://51symptomsofspiritualmomentsinhistor.odie.us>

<http://1111111111111111low.odie.us>

Rafo's Brew

Name

Quintessa Matranga and Rafael Delacruz

Vocation

Artists, Curators


Fact







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