

# CITY AND ART FORUM

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CITY *and* ART

115

Presentations - Art and Design Practices in reference to City and Art II



## Key Portilla-Kawamura

Kawamura-Ganjavian

Hi, good afternoon. My name is Key Portilla-Kawamura and together with my partner sitting on my left, Ali Ganjavian, we formed the architecture and design studio kawamura-ganjavian based in Madrid. And farther to my left is Luis Urculo, another architect and designer from Madrid. We've come here to Istanbul together with our students, seventeen of them, they are in the public, from the Instituto Europeo di Design. Firstly, thanks a lot Mr. Görgün for your invitation. It's a pleasure to be in Istanbul to participate in this forum and especially to participate in this discussion panel on the topic of art and design and the city. Public art is a topic that is very dear to us. Maybe before we start showing briefly our work we'd like to very quickly state in very simplified terms the position we, kawamura-ganjavian take as regards this discourse on public art which as we know is a very discussed topic.

We believe public art is not the art that is simply placed on the streets or in a park or in a plaza in a very passive way. That's simply art that is placed in the street. We believe public art is the operative art that generates public space or that puts public space into performance, into like a test. In this sense we could say it's the art that creates space of negotiation or a space where public expression can take place. This in a nutshell we'll show you two projects; one of them in London and the other one in Madrid, both cities where our practice has been based, currently as we said in Madrid.



## Ali Ganjavian

Kawamura-Ganjavian

Key and I met in London almost eleven years ago now and we joined for common interests. The city is a fascinating place and it's an inspiring one too. We're based in the east of London where we're currently studying. We found this incredible phenomenon which is the empty space: the empty space in the city and what the empty space generates. So what we started to do is to map these empty spaces and trying to understand how the empty spaces influence a city and generate a new one. Initially we really didn't know why we were mapping empty spaces. We needed to identify where the empty spaces were and understand the patterns. So we talked to several agents, we talked to a postman, to squatters, to fruit sellers, to our friends, to messengers to start helping us identify empty spaces in cities. We got in touch with many bloggers, many squatters' websites to really identify why and how these spaces were transforming the city. So we started generating a map of the city to identify where these empty spaces were and how these empty spaces were creating bubbles of activity or non-activity in many cases and try to identify how we as designers, as architects could intervene in these spaces to create public space.

So one day we started to identify and started to map these relationships between these empty spaces and understood how these empty spaces were transforming and actually moving. So we created a project called Space Search Engine which actually created a corporate entity. We pretended we were an official company who was looking for spaces to transform the city to create new nucleuses and establish new relationships between different disciplines, to start establishing new relationships between different sectors and actually provoke new situations in these spaces. Obviously this was a utopia because we weren't a company and we couldn't create the scandal although we became agents ourselves by creating a link between the agents and

clients. So we took one step further and we said we really need to do something and we really need to intervene in a city to create a new space in the city for the people in this real state, in this real form.

So we created this project which took over and communicated what Space Search Engine was. It was a mechanism to create a project in a very simple way; a project we call 30 Minutes Museum. The idea behind Space Search Engine and 30 Minutes Museum was to generate a relationship between a public space and the inhabitants of the city by creating one action which lasted 30 minutes through the city, through certain voids of the city that we had found basically interesting and inviting communities' local people to participate in this event. This museum took 30 minutes and with the help of Luis Gallo, a performance artist and a dancer, we transformed the city for those 30 minutes and encouraged people, the local community to take part. What was very interesting was that as the trip went along and as our journey through this part of the city evolved, more and more people would join this route, carry on discovering that certain parts of the city which have been completely empty, derelict, decayed has only transformed for a few minutes hence creating a new experience, a new sensation and a new relationship with the city.

**O Key Portilla-Kawamura** The streets of this part of London which is quite a derelict part suddenly became the corridors of museum. This abandoned part and abandoned site became galleries of performance, museums, the kids who were playing football and don't have much access to culture suddenly became involved in a museum without even paying for a ticket. The strangest thing about this museum is that at the end of the tour you could not really get the postcard of the museum. There was no icon, there was no logo. The tour finished on River Thames in this abandoned pier into the river with a little party. We really left no trace in the city, no physical trace. We believe that the people who accidentally participated in this museum now have a very different understanding of all these empty pockets dispersed in their neighbourhood.

Next project we'll show you is located in Madrid. Madrid is a city, a metropolis of about five million people that has changed quite radically in the last ten years. Spain as a country no longer exports migrants but imports migrants if I may use this expression. This community in Madrid forms half a million people of mainly Latin American origin and has pushed the urban culture incredibly. There's a very new energy in the last ten years thanks to these emerging communities. Very often they don't have centres where they can gather, cater for their needs in very sophisticated ways at all. But it's more spontaneous actions and places that actually helped their social network to be established, mainly these Locutorios, these public call centres from which they call their countries, where they go and look for jobs, where they exchange information, where they can make money transfers to their families back in Latin America. So they are extremely interesting places where this new social composition of the city of Madrid is expressed. There is thousands of these call centres but they are mainly located in the periphery of the city which is where this population mainly lives. So the city centre doesn't really experience or witness this cultural and social richness of the periphery.

**O Ali Ganjavian** What we found particularly interesting about the call centres is that there's suddenly in the city of Madrid thousands of emotional spaces that have appeared. When we talk about emotional spaces, we talk about places like airports' arrival halls, departure halls,

hospitals. Locutorios are extremely emotional places because they are points of connection with people who migrated to a new country to work and to earn money. It's the point where they relate back home. They talk to their children, to their wives and they are highly dense in the emotional sense. What we found particularly interesting was how this phenomenon, how this emotional context could be generated in the public space. So what we did was identify the relation that currently the city of Madrid has to Latin America and we try to create a new pocket.

**O Key Portilla-Kawamura** The project is located in Plaza de Colon which is Columbus Plaza. It's a huge space in the middle of the city in one of the poshest neighbourhoods. What called our attention was the name Columbus; Columbus was the first communicator with America. In Spain you learn that he was the person that conquered America. What we wanted to do is not conquer but communicate in the inverse sense. So the idea of Locutorio Colon that can be expressed in very simple terms was the placement of a call centre in Plaza de Colon during the length of a month to call Latin America for free. We were not so much interested in the call centre itself but more in the collateral effects on all the things that we had to do prior to its installation; to spread the word of its existence, disperse in the news, using existing networks, appropriating radio stations that the local Latin American community have in Madrid, distributing flyers...

**O Ali Ganjavian** And then came the Locutorio as this rumour spread through the city. We generated this space and this space was, as Key said, a free call centre which was something quite radical because most people didn't believe it. You can go there and you call free, "With what intention?" everyone asked. So we generated a space where it was open from nine o'clock to twelve o'clock everyday for the period of a month, where 4600 phone calls took place, thanks to the help of Telefonica which is the biggest telephone company in Spain. We have exceeded our budget by double but they were quite happy to keep contributing to this. What was quite interesting about Locutorio, as Key mentioned, it wasn't necessarily about saying "Hey, that's public art", "Hey there you go, viola, it's beautiful". No, it's about generating this rumour. What we were interested in was how to map this rumour. So when people came to Locutorio we asked them five questions: Where are you from? Where have you come from in Madrid? Who you're calling? Where did you hear about the Locutorio? And how did you hear about the existence of Locutorio? It was quite amazing because when we started mapping this information three agents who were there gave us information such as "I'm from Cuba, I'm calling Cuba, I live in Madrid, my mother told me to come here to call her". And suddenly that would be like "Okay, so your mother told you to come here to call? You're calling your mother, you're from Cuba and you come from this place in Madrid. How's that possible?" "Actually last night when I was talking to my mom, her best friend has told her there's a free call centre at the centre of Madrid where I can go and call her for free." So that's where the project really comes to birth, where you start creating this rumour that travels across the world over night and arrives to someone in Madrid, and "I've come to call", generating once again this intention that we had of creating an emotional space in the centre of the city.

This is one night of a Locutorio (Picture 5).

**O Key Portilla-Kawamura** As early mentioned, before we carried on this survey whe-

re people were telling us how they have heard about the existence of this project, we realized that in the most cases people have passed walking in front of it and discovered it that way. Also 30% of the people have heard through word of mouth, hearing from other people. We realised our campaigns had actually failed. These flyers, these radio station news, those all have failed. We also asked them where they were coming from, most of them, 90% were coming from the periphery of Madrid. So in this sense we succeeded. The project had succeeded in bringing this social richness from the periphery of the metropolis to the very heart of the city, a bit linking to what Andreas was mentioning before, we created this micro heterotopia bringing the outside to the centre, making something more evident. At the moment we are negotiating again with Telefonica, the company that sponsored this project to invert the sense of the communication and to bring the project over to Latin America, to different countries where obviously many families have relatives in Spain. We pass over the word now to Luis.



**Luis Urculo**  
Architect

I'm part of a project with the students here from Istituto Europeo di Design. I will try to explain my work. My Studio is based in Madrid. We investigate how to work with small things, small scale and also

about questioning the logical issues of expectations in the city. The kind of projects we create are mostly related on ephemeral issues. Small scale works that have to do with making things a little bit more democratic between the user and the results.

The first project has two parts. One is a proposal and the other is an evolution. It's a project I made in Madrid for a solution about how to light the streets during Christmas time. This is a crazy competition because Madrid now is nonsense about it. They want to be the number one city on Christmas lighting and they're spending all the public budget on that and probably if they would save a part of that money they would do a lot of better things in the city. I chose one of the parts of the competition which was 'lightning on small streets'. I questioned how could I solve the problem, without spending any money on energy, just using the sources that I have in the city. The project was called 'desenchufado' which means "unplugged". I'm not using any electricity, I'm using what is in the cities: cars and urban furniture.

This is a simple drawing explaining the project (Picture 6). The City centre is made out of a lot of urban junk and also a lot of cars passing by. Just with the headlights of the car we can activate the project. The cars are my guests, my principal elements of the project, the activators. In Madrid we have an extensive catalogue of lighting poles, plastic trash cans from the communities, street construction containers (Picture 7)-Madrid is always 'under construction'-and also there are empty walls where they put posters from concerts and events, the supporters. There are two kinds of materials, one is photo luminescent-used for emergency exits on any public building, and the other is reflecting level-2-like the one used on the highways or local roads, brought to life by the passing cars. I made a map of this small area and a timetable relating daylight during Christmas time and traffic, and you can clearly see that the project would work because there are always cars passing by and it's dark enough for this to happen.

I proposed a community project with the local neighbourhoods to create their own set of icons to decorate their community trash cans, their walls, in the areas where the cars could interact.

This work was finally abandoned by the organization but at the same time I had the oppor-