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The city: a research and experimentation laboratory.

About the No Lugar residency in Quito, Ecuador

*“Guided by the city, its landscapes, parks, avenues, gazers
and the social framework, the resident artists present
experiences developed during their 3 weeks stay in Quito in
their artworks; these can immerse us into drifts, fictions,
appropriations, symbols, appearances and memories; knitting a
collective narrative of the city”*

Eduardo Carrera

Written by Byron Toledo

Considering tourism as a global and social phenomenon that mobilizes cultural consumption, artist residencies inevitably stand out as an answer to the same matter. Both tourism and residencies have to do with matters such as

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territorial displacements and also with the definition of

~~territory through architecture, gastronomy, landscape,~~

history and social dynamics that are part of a specific place. However, a residency – different from tourism –

intends to provide a perspective based on the act of residing. Now it's opportune to ask: What's the function of these places that host artists, curators and researchers? How big is the incidence that residencies have on the creative process of these specific cultural agents?

To a large extent, contemporary artistic production focuses its interests on context specificities and experiences that are the product of a direct relationship with the place where the work is produced. That's how many forms of contemporary art such as site-specific, relational art and performance have been developed. These practices have formal characteristics that correspond to their creative processes: direct relation with the territory, and those who inhabit it, is one example. In this way, residencies become some sort of in-situ laboratory where these contextual conditions get empowered in the sense that they generate a diversity of perspectives into the territory in direct or indirect ways.

In these days, residencies have become a new way for contemporary artistic creation, related to the experience in a determined context, and using many formats and ways to approach this context; having more general or specific themes for its development but always thinking in terms of creation, research and formation.

It seems logical to think that the curatorial guidelines of any residency should facilitate the mediation of residents' experiences, as well as the process of mutual exchange between specific interests (resident-residency).

In the specific case of No Lugar, the artist residency is defined as a project that hybridizes artistic production with curatorial practices. It is focused on research into

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new contributions in the Ecuadorian artistic field, and is
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~~an arena for workshops and exhibitions as well.~~

This residency program - or research and production laboratory - develops around Quito. The residency is located in the Historic Center of the city, whose characteristics and contextual premises contribute to the resident's processes from many angles. This is also why we understand the act of residing as an indispensable way to experience and recognize ourselves in the territory. The role of No Lugar's residency program is to generate possibilities to create a relation between the residents and their current context (historical, social, political and cultural), by a monitoring process and specific activities like studio visits, meetings with local cultural agents, city walks, among others, that allow concrete encounters and exchange.. At the end of each residency we organize a public presentation that could be an exhibition, open studio or lecture that contributes to the social integration of the residency process.

Since 2011, No Lugar's residency program has developed 5 collective, and over 53 individual residencies. Collective residencies were developed under specific guidelines in order to think about the city and territory through intensive production processes. We have thought of issues such as public space use and the relation between body and the city to generate the themes of the residencies in this format. On the other hand, in the individual residencies the residents apply with personal projects that are related to the city and territory as a platform for research and creation.

The residency program has resulted in many exhibitions where the discursive possibilities of the artworks in relation to the city and territory get articulated. Among these we could name: 'Muertos Levantaos' (2013), 'Se dice Monte' (2014), 'Para Pasar Hilo' (2014), 'Con ocho puntos se hace una

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línea' (2015), 'Tiempo Fuera' (2015), 'Procesos' (2016).

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~~These shows have approached themes such as landscape,~~
architecture, relation with nature, history of the city, its traditions and geographic location. Hence, in part, the resident's processes are aligned with the curatorial guidelines of the residency program.

The website www.n989.org works as an archive in a visual and written diary for the residents. This site intends to communicate the work developed in the residency. Thinking of the residency as a laboratory, the process of residency is as important as the final product developed from it.

Many artworks that are produced in the residency context also make evident the relation between the body of work of every artist and the city. We could mention the work of some residents who have taken part in No Lugar's residency program. The works by Nicolás Laiz (Spain), for example, reconsider the touristic souvenir. During his residency Laiz researched the relations that this element generates in a local context, and its variables. For this matter, the artist visited diverse places designed for tourist consumption like shops, pre-Columbian art museums and artist workshops questioning, from different angles in which he situates himself

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as a tourist, the ideas of how and where the

tourist souvenir is produced. His main question being: What is it that tourists *really* consume in Quito? Based on such experiences he makes Frankenstein-models out of diverse, assembled objects that he has bought at souvenir shops and markets in the city.

‘We are all trim tabs’ (2017), a project by María Lucía Cruz (Portugal), begins from a research of nature and the cases where it has been taken to court in legal cases. During her residency the artist did research on the Chevron case, nature rights in the Ecuadorian constitution and the indigenous community of Sarayaku, that has been the only legal case won by nature in a judicial court. During her stay, Cruz made a series of interviews with activists, ecologists, lawyers, artists, communities and others involved in cases of nature defense and environment. Her research continues in North Dakota and Belgium.

On the other hand, the artworks and processes that happen at the collective residencies also have a clear element of uncertainty. Times are short and approaches to the territory are generated from a methodology proposed by the program that helps to canalize certain ideas from the residents. In one case the artists Sophie Saporosi (Belgium) and Alejandro Uribe (Mexico), who were part of the residency Ciudad de

Cruces (2014), made an action based on drift through the city. The action began at a specific point (the residence) where they started walking guided by the flip of a coin that tells them where to go in every corner of the streets they pass by (heads=turn right, tails=turn left). After several hours the artists find each other at some point of the city and the action ends; two cameras in a continuous take record everything.

These processes and artworks show us different forms of production and research in the residency, in which in many ways the trail of the city and its dynamics get inscribed in the residents' proposals.

In this way, the residency is configured as an in-situ laboratory in the city that merges the approach to the territory and context with the idea of a local artistic, historical and cultural scene. The experiential and contextual gaps made manifest by the displacement to a new place, in combination with the exhibitions and sketches created during the residency, certainly accelerate the investigative processes of artists and researchers.

It may also seem important, in a residency project, to consider the fruitfulness and rigidity of alternative guidelines for artistic practice. No Lugar aims to sketch out methodologies and conditions for artistic projects and researches in a way that dynamically resonates with, and critically reflects local issues and trajectories.

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