

An Introduction by Kristin Korolowicz

“Arquitectura y amistad” is an itinerant project featuring site-responsive works by New York-based Chilean artists Felipe Mujica and Johanna Unzueta. The project developed out of a dialogue that began in 2010, while I was living and conducting curatorial research in Puerto Rico. I was interested in Johanna and Felipe’s work as well as their involvement with artist-run initiatives in Chile, which I desired to connect to similar projects in San Juan. During our earliest conversations, I learned about the collective that Felipe formed in Santiago in the late 1990s with fellow artists Diego Fernández and José Luis Villablanca. Under the moniker Galería Chilena (1997–2000), this nomadic, for-profit project organized exhibitions and events throughout Santiago. Like many (if not most) DIY initiatives, GCH was born out of necessity. It was an ambitious endeavor to create a critical art market for the benefit of recent art school graduates like themselves and, as curator and longtime friend of the artists Michele Faguet has aptly stated, “Galería Chilena . . . sought visibility for a generation of artists who had come of age in those post-dictatorial years of political consensus marked by both euphoria and the cultural blandness of globalization’s rapid encroachment.” Johanna and Felipe’s method of collaboration, although they rarely produce work together, is significant to understanding their object-based practices both individually and in contrast to one another.

Felipe makes objects and enacts sculptural actions that address issues related to exhibition design. He is probably best known for his two-dimensional fabric panels that contain vibrant geometric abstractions. They are usually placed in gallery transit areas, where they partition and reorganize the flow and perception of the space while also serving as backdrops that foreground Johanna’s sculptures. Felipe’s “collapsible sculptures” redefine the space of the exhibition with an interventionist flare that recalls Marcel Duchamp’s 1942 exhibition design for “First Papers of Surrealism” at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in midtown Manhattan. Duchamp created a sprawling web of thread that ran between the paintings mounted on panels and the interior architecture, so that the strings seemed to direct the viewer to potential

sight lines within the exhibition space. This historical reference is also pertinent because Felipe’s sculptures examine the legacy of European modernism, while considering the visual codes of geometric abstraction.

Johanna’s sculptures, which include a tiny replica of an industrial warehouse or a piece of commercial pipe protruding from a gallery wall, are all made from materials associated with craft, such as felt. Conceptually they tend to reference political geography and engage with issues of urban planning and the organization of architectural space. However, the fuzzy, organic quality of the felt humanizes these cold, hard industrial buildings and utilitarian objects. This approach is quite the opposite of, say, artists like Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose deadpan documentation of industrial architecture chronicles a vanishing aesthetic. Johanna’s idiosyncratic sculptures seem to be more about the subjective apparatus of memory. The precious materials evoke a sense of nostalgia, while the warm, handmade quality of the actual objects relieves them of any utilitarian function. Together Felipe and Johanna turn the spaces they use into uncanny, intimate experiences; their distinct visual languages are carefully composed to create a duet between color and form.

Thinking through radical forms of collaboration and reimagining new support structures for artists are at the core of their larger project, which is intertwined with an interest in the social aspects of European and Latin American modernism. During our initial brainstorming sessions, we discussed at length the neglected histories of modernism in Latin American and the Caribbean (in contrast to the canon of the European avant-garde), specifically the social impetus and yearning for the democratization of the art object. We mulled over the modernist legacies of collaborative methods of artistic production, for example Russian Constructivism and Bauhaus. According to Felipe and Johanna, the installation of their work is as important as the work itself, particularly the accompanying network of associations that seem to cleverly ruminate on the modernist preoccupation with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Creating spatial dialogues, rather than making a single art object for a

gallery setting, is their preferred form of collaboration. The activities of Galería Chilena challenged the assumption that collectives are a harmonious melting pot of artistic expression channeled into a unified voice. Instead, Felipe and Johanna's concept of collaboration has more to do with promoting a confrontation of ideas in order to build a broader and more generous context, which recalls Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe's thoughts on agonism and the productive potential of making space for conflicting viewpoints. In any given exhibition one can see the two artists exploring the spatial and architectural idiosyncrasies of the gallery itself, but this interest in architecture is also mirrored (on a sort of macro-level) in the way that their initiatives connect to other artist-run spaces across the globe to create a broader support structure that bridges geographic contexts.

The main objective of our initial proposal was simple: to provide Felipe and Johanna with the opportunity to create work in a new context at the nonprofit art space Beta-Local in San Juan, Puerto Rico. What new collisions could we achieve? From there the project evolved into creating new work in multiple contexts: they began to conceptualize smaller projects at alternative spaces throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. An artist residency at Beta-Local in San Juan was thus followed by exhibitions at Proyectos Ultravioleta in Guatemala City and Die Ecke Arte Contemporáneo in Santiago.

After several years of being nomadic myself, I arrived to Chicago where I met Chelsea Culp and Ben Foch, who had a temporary (two-year) artist-run space called NEW CAPITAL. I discovered that they were also interested in working with Felipe and Johanna, so they agreed to temporarily reopen their space in order to host the final installation of the project. NEW CAPITAL's history of independent exhibitions, along with its location in the Carroll Avenue industrial corridor, created a perfect backdrop for their work. The title of this show is inspired by *Architectura et Amicitia*, an association of young Dutch architects founded in Amsterdam in 1855. Felipe and Johanna found rich connections between their ongoing collaborations and the Dutch group's objective to

create a hub where a new generation of architects could work together and support one another while generating critical dialogue. *Architectura et Amicitia* published magazines and organized discussions, talks, and exhibitions. They sought to develop and promote a modern and socially aware architectural practice, predating the twentieth-century avant-garde. With a very careful consideration of architecture and the spaces their works inhabit, Felipe and Johanna presented a selection of pieces that were produced during their stays in Puerto Rico, Guatemala, and Chile. Highlights from the exhibition included Felipe's vibrant, silk screens on paper and fabric panels hinting at a tropical color palette along with Johanna's large, weathered-looking, felt chain sculpture and a poetic, silent video projection.

"Architecture and Friendship" makes explicit the role of personal relationships as a facilitator of creative production, which is seldom acknowledged within the writing of art history. Nonetheless, it has played an important role in the creation and development of artistic networks and experimentation between artists, from the Russian and European avant-garde movements of the early 1920s to movements in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. This issue occupies both the center and background of this exhibition in form and content.

Here Felipe and Johanna's way of working is more nuanced than the binary and outmoded thinking of studio versus post-studio practice or individual versus collective art production. As current artistic practice splinters in various directions, it becomes necessary for art and creative cultural production to be understood in more complex ways. In the case of Felipe and Johanna, their project is best understood as outlining a geography of collaboration that navigates away from the oversimplification of artistic practice.