

Douglas Rodrigo Rada

A different perspective about Latin American Art

At 9000 ft. high altitude, lays the city of Cochabamba in Bolivia it is a beautiful valley with terrific weather surrounded by mountains and covered, almost at all times, by deep blue sky. The weather, geography and vegetation remind me to L.A. California.

On one hand, it is impossible to compare this two places if we notice that we are in South America and not in the US, but the sky and the light are so similar that we can tell, that it does not matter where you are in the globe, every place has something from another, like in this case, every place can be common and different, such as art is, but at the very end, all becomes universal when the doors of curiosity and knowledge open to show the "intime" view of each culture through its expressive and creative interpretation.

Douglas Rodrigo's Studio is addressed at this place and I had the chance to visit his peaceful and poetic corner of the city in front of a park. The place is full of light, very organized and with not a lot around.

Painting, old ones- as he remarks- is hanging on one of the walls; two big tables are the support of many drawings and sketches, ready and in progress for current and future projects.

Writing and editing about art is one of his diverse activities and the books and dated journals are perfectly organized in shelves that cover two of the studio walls.

Conceptual art cannot, in most of the cases, be collected as objects or commodities; this is something you can appreciate at DR's studio. Most of his work on his studio tables and all around are not totally developed ideas ready to be completed in his performances, activism, drawings and writing.

Douglas Rodrigo Rada is a Bolivian born artist who embodies, as an international contemporary performer, the influence of different cultures. He lived for almost ten years and got his art education in Mexico. After returning to Bolivia around ten years ago he is considered one of the few curators and conceptual artists in Bolivia that has an education in contemporary art. He calls himself an activist more than an artist. His work is analytic and very critic, but at the same time it is poetic and exquisite.

Our conversation began talking about politics and freedom of expression, which is a very usual topic in the day to day of Bolivian people.

Do you think that freedom of expression is being controlled at this moment in Bolivia?

Not in the arts.

And what about Political Art?

Political art happened only between 2004, and 2011 here in Bolivia now it is different because people are not feeling uncomfortable any more. They don't

have a good reason to complain, as it was years ago. At that time the most important political art happened in the south, in Santa Cruz, not that much in the other cities. There was a lot to say, Bolivia was undergoing a huge social and political change.

You lived the politics and arts in Mexico while you were there, do you think there is a similarity to Bolivia?

Not at all, in Mexico all artists are dependent from Governmental cultural politics, there is no real freedom for creativity, there is more a purview after scholarships, sponsorships and attention, than real political art. Bolivia has none of this; there are no cultural budget or cultural politics in this country. I can say, that the countries that really are at the head of this type of art in South America are Argentina and Brazil.

Do you think that Latin American Art is always considered in relation to politics because of its history? Is there a kind of cliché around that?

We can't make art without having a relation to politics, especially in Bolivia, where the social changes are growing since this government was elected. Even the most political groups like "Mujeres Creando", who call themselves anarchists, are becoming their project's financial support by the international institutions, like the Museum of Reina Sofia in Spain, the Biennale of Sao Paulo in Brazil, and other European Countries.

Bolivia is a country that totally depends from international money for real art projects, given our local budget for culture. It is really low or almost no one at all.

And you, as an artist, how do you see yourself in this context? I mean, local and international. What is your position or vision in relation to?

I think it is interesting, I studied in Mexico and while living there I opened a gallery, named "La Albahaca" it was between 1998 to 2004, it was more an alternative space. Financed by the Mexican Government. We were allowed to experiment with arts in all its expressions and was back then when I started to do performances.

Do you identify yourself more with performance as another media?

I am interested in the human body, as you can see in my drawings. From there I have bounced to performance, which allows me to reflect over the body itself. All what I do has relation to it; the human body is something that I consider my impulse for creation but not everything has the same message. The bodies that I painted in my former work, where more about identity, and they turned to be something else with the evolution of my work nowadays.

My videos are also related to that subject matter, this was the media that opened the possibilities as an artist/activist here in Bolivia.

So how would you resume your work or art?

I call my work Relational Art, based on the concept written by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Esthetics*. Is a very paradigmatic word that has been criticized and discussed by the art critics?

To make this point more comprehensible, let me paraphrase Bourriaud's concept written in his *Relational Esthetics* book. He defined it as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space"