

**KF: I'd like to suggest an overriding concept for our discussion — inspiration. Clearly as viewers we all come to the table with our own political, personal, social, creative context that informs how we experience or read a work of art. Although often much of the artist's context is implicit, some of what inspires or provokes the work is unable to be seen. I'm endlessly fascinated by some of the less obvious backstory of an artist's practice and the relationship between how artists are living from a more broadly defined perspective and their work.**

**How do you find inspiration?**

**DC:** I work as an archeologist, but rather than sifting through dirt, I rummage through media and its incessant flow of visuals and information: Google images, newspapers, design and architecture blogs and art magazines are usually the source of such images. Also important are my own snap-shots of things I see throughout my travels around the world.

When I am paying attention and not anaesthetized by quotidian busyness, certain images starkly scream for my attention. I print them out and slap them onto my bulletin board. My inner voice says something like: "I want to do something that looks like this." That picture could be a scientific image of fluid dynamic studies, or a smashed-up telephone from the '60s in an abandoned office building, or a painted manhole in the city of Moscow. I just follow this feeling of "wanting to do something that looks like this." And as I sit down and start writing and thinking about that image, I not only start to understand how it relates to ongoing threads that run through my work — sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways — but I begin to get mental snap-shots of what this future artwork may look like. This is the real inception of the artwork.

I store these emergent art ideas, and wait for a good opportunity to develop them. Unfortunately this opportunity usually comes attached to a deadline for an exhibition, which in the end is what usually gets me going on the "materialization" phase of the artwork, while also provides for funding. One of the big challenges I have in the studio right now is to not work for deadlines, but have ongoing projects that are getting developed all along and that are ready to be inserted into whatever exhibition invitations come my way. I'll be extremely proud of myself if in the future I am able to steer my studio practice in this direction. I'm not quite there yet!

**KF: This would be commendable! It's so hard to explore ideas in and of themselves these days and not only be driven by deadlines in our oversaturated hyper-socially networked world. Some people run away to a cabin to disconnect for example to get any work done. How do you find your focus?**

**DC:** I spend great moments of introspective meditation at 30,000 feet (flying), uninterrupted by phone calls and emails. I start paying attention to my through process, take notes, space out looking out at the clouds. Unfortunately Internet is becoming available on many flights, so will have to fight off the temptation.

Speaking of focus — and inspiration — I just finished *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin*, a book that compiles conversations that writer Lawrence Weschler had with artist Robert Irwin over the span of thirty years. Weschler has done an amazing job at weaving all these stories together. It's a great read, couldn't put it down.

Reading about Irwin specifically reaffirmed a belief that I hold strongly, and that I struggle with in my also Internet-driven ADD: the need to pay attention. When I am able to silence the inner-babble in my head, I start paying attention to my environment, a state that provokes utter joy: the pleasure of noticing the small details that are so present they are almost invisible. Robert Irwin's leit motiv was paying attention to the subtle light nuances of his immediate environment.

My best artwork always comes out of these "altered states of attention." I am presently doing an artist residency in the Montalvo Arts Center in Northern California. It's probably as far as I could possibly get from the "noise" of my busy studio in Madrid. For seven weeks, I want to be a sponge and pay attention. I need to do this more often, it's so appealing.

**KF: What are some of your other creative influences?**

**DC:** Velazquez, Francisco de Zurbarán and Goya, always Goya. I find these three painters utterly haunting, and their use of light and darkness is something I try to capture in my own artwork. I feel very Spanish in that way, and I think it has to do with the unrelenting harshness of sunlight and the deep shadows that are thus created, in the Castillian landscape. Lately I am very taken by Japanese artist Ryoji Ikeda, and his massive projected installations. Centro de Arte La Laboral in Gijón just presented his installation *Datamatics*, a spectacularly brilliant installation. I cried when I saw Chris Marclay's *Video Quartet*. I remember sitting in the dark with six or seven other strangers, and when it was over, we were dumbstruck and spontaneously started clapping, unable to contain our deep response to this amazing visual and aural experience. The impact this artwork had in me still resonates today. Few artists sustain my interest throughout their careers. It's usually an individual piece, a series or time period that totally absorbs me.

I'm presently going through William Kentridge's Norton Lectures at Harvard (they are online at the Mahindra Humanities Center web page): six one-hour-long lectures that are, like with the Robert Irwin book, allowing me to take a good long look into an artist's mind. Kentridge has always been interested in precinematographic artifacts, Goya, the dark side of the Enlightenment movement, memory and other themes that I have also negotiated in my own practice.

My interest in these artists is purely egotistical: I am scavenging for clues on how to proceed with my own artistic explorations. I'm starved for role models, and how Kentridge or Irwin work makes a lot of sense to me.

**KF: I remember when we last worked together on your exhibition *River of History* at Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul [January 2012], there were a number of things going on socio-politically that were affecting you and your work, the environment, waste and recycling was a predominant theme, in particular the Pacific Waste Vortex. I also remember you being very enveloped and inspired by the various uprisings internationally, specifically what was/is going on in Spain, the Arab Spring and Occupy. What is determining most of your attention these days?**

**DC:** Spain is on my mind every day. I scan the news daily, looking for clues that will "solve" our economic conundrums. The government has just raised taxes on cultural activities from 8 to 21 percent, at the worst possible time, when so many professionals in the cultural sector are teetering on the edge. This affects the purchase of artwork, museum, dance, theater and movie tickets, amongst other things. As actor Javier Bardem so well put it, "21 percent of zero is zero." At a time when culture is most needed, when small businesses could be the seeds for a future sustainable economy, when unemployment affects a quarter of the population, we are being dragged down by brutal austerity measures.

I'm really upset about how we have squandered great resources in Spain, and the visionless policies that are being put into place to get us out of the mess. So these days I'm thinking a lot about how committed I am — or not — to my identity as a Spanish visual artist.

History has taught us that great creative potential can be found in moments of great social and political instability. Some great artwork will come out of this upheaval, no doubt, it's just a matter of time. Art has such an important role in these moments, which brings me back to Spain again and its present need for inspiration.

**KF: Have any of these concerns found their way into the aesthetics and content of your current or recent work?**

**DC:** One part of me wants to just walk away from this mess in Spain, but on the other hand I can't stop "watching," each day with a new twist that thickens the plot. Only this mess is also my mess, and I have no alternative but to deal with it. Art allows me to process complex and contradictory perceptions of the world, a lifeboat of sorts that gets me through treacherous waters. If I remain a mere spectator of such perceptions, I become paralyzed and profoundly depressed. So I know I need to "artistically process" the current situation in Spain, and am beginning to jot down ideas, sketches, etc., but it may still be too early as things seem to change on a daily basis. I don't have a sure footing on how to enter this subject matter yet, but I feel I am getting closer.

**KF: In the context of hearing more about all of these threads that inform you work, I'm curious to hear more about what you are working on at this residency.**

**DC:** The residency mission is to research the creation of a public art installation using repurposed technology. I want to take advantage of Silicon Valley — where the Montalvo Arts Center is located — as the epicenter of the technological tsunami that spreads globally in the form of computers, gadgets and electronic devices, but also as a location where some of the most sophisticated programmers and engineers work. Placing a panoply of obsolete technologies outdoors, and have them communicate with each other, presents major challenges that need for some of the most astute technological tinkerers in the field.

I'm quite satisfied with how my research is advancing, but in ways that I wasn't expecting. This happens to me often: I have a vision for a particularly challenging art piece, and kind of imagine how it will get made, only to discover that the road takes a very unexpected turn. The art piece very often gets made, but not where, when or how I imagined it. I guess this is the definition of an authentic journey. In Spanish we have a saying: "The road is made as you walk." (El camino se hace caminando.) I always loved this saying, it is so on the mark.

I will be back next year to Silicon Valley to hopefully start fabricating this art piece, if the road allows me to do so!

**KF: Earlier you referenced ongoing projects not attached to a particular deadline or exhibition. I expect this means different tracks that we haven't seen from you yet. Can you elaborate on some of the current new trajectories that are occupying your brain?**

**DC:** Airplanes are always on my mind. I would like to find a way of making an art piece about air traffic: I'm astounded by the engineering logistics involved. I am also fascinated by the fragility of the human body in contrast to these metal behemoths.

I love freeways, particularly when traffic is flowing on ten lanes of asphalt, a veritable river of steel and rubber that gushes through the landscape. I secretly collect freeway moments from different cities, some of my favorite are in Southern California. This interest dissipates instantly when traffic comes to a grinding halt.

And there is my increasing disappointment in the human species — that I can't help but see as a terrible virus that is environmentally raising havoc on our planetary ecosystem, is compounded by my utter fascination with animals, all kinds. Their behavior fascinates me, and reminds me that I too am an animal. I'm trying to figure out how to make some artwork about these feelings.

**KF: Something I really like about your work is this tension between incredibly playful, broad-appeal imagery that gives way to a layer of heavy political content that reveals itself over closer investigations of the work. *Tajo* for example is one of the most gorgeous, visually mesmerizing works I have experienced, but the content is not necessarily pretty conceptually as it is a reference to a culture of waste. Likewise with *Tide and Drift*. Can you speak to this a bit?**

**DC:** That's a strategy I picked from many baroque painters and architects in Spain and Italy. The history of art of the Baroque period is full of examples of painters who created stunning visual effects that pulled in the masses, yet hidden in the spectacular seduction were messages that were much more complex and nuanced than initially visible. Controversial subtext was often introduced surreptitiously in these art works without the clients (aristocracy, the church and monarchies) noticing. I guess I have this way of working in my blood. I want to pull in the public with works of great visual impact as a way of diverting their attention from quotidian noise, and then transport them to a contemplative place that will allow them to hopefully meditate and cognitively process what they are looking at. I am interested in creating a meditative and ritualized experience for the public, and also seek out such focused experiences when looking at art myself: taking notes and having an inner dialogue with the artwork. Such outings to view art exhibitions give me enormous pleasure, and make me feel connected to a larger community of artistic practitioners trying to make sense of the world they live in.

**KF: Aha, so I think we have come full circle, to a place where not only are we talking about your personal inspiration but also how you hope for your work to influence an audience. Seems like a good place for me to let you get back to that road made as you walk. . . . Thank you Daniel!**