

Conversation with José Luis Blondet, Lupe Álvarez, and Tamara Díaz Bringas

00:03 - Many thanks, Tamara. We're going to have a conversation with three of the afternoon's speakers: José Luis Blondet, Lupe Álvarez and Tamara Díaz Bringas; please join us here onstage, and I think there are two people, once again Zuleima, I think, and Isaura, who are taking up the cards with questions; I see a few here.

00:30 - They are taking up the question cards that we'll read right now in our conversation. Just so you're aware, there will be a brief recess immediately after this talk and before starting the third session of the day, which will have the structure of Pecha Kucha. One of the things to note of the three exhibitions presented today as case studies is their relationship with, not exactly a theme, but with a geography, and this seems to me something we're going to debate here. We have the case of Caracas, which is not exactly Venezuelan art necessarily, but particularly a type of art, an exhibit about the contemporary art of a city. We have the project that we have just heard about from Tamara, which is about a region, Central America, and in fact in her presentation she mentioned various other exhibitions, that also have to do with this same region, with the association and uniting of forces in a given place, and obviously also the lecture by Lupe Álvarez which, as its very title *Ante América* also says, gives an analysis, a presentation, on what is happening in Latin America, also about the importance of uniting forces once more within a wider region, Latin America,

02:00 - to be able to make a wider case. So, we'll begin our conversation, and once more could you raise your hands, Zuleima and Isaura, I can't see you. They're taking up the question cards. Does anyone else have question cards? Raise your hand so we can see. No? Well then, they're all in and now they'll pass them to me. Very well, very well. OK, one of the, these

02:30 - exhibitions are very diverse and they are diverse for different reasons, not only because the artistic production is carried out in each of these regions (Thank you, thanks so much, I don't know if we'll have time but we'll see.) One of the things that happens is that artistic production in each region is very different and if you could have seen the images that were being presented, the themes whether of identity or phenomenological experiences, which is something completely different,

03:00 - they are being dealt with in one single historic period, let's call it the decade of the 90s, which doesn't necessarily have to start in 1990 and end in 1999, but that's what we're using for practical reasons. In the case of *CCS-10* (Caracas 10), one of the particularities and one of the, let's say, aspects that led it to have a major impact was the importance it had in presenting works of installation art. Which it seems to me that

03:30 - *Ante América* also in some way proposed, and that *Mesótica* did as well, and even though the images aren't very monumental because the exhibit spaces here in Venezuela

are immense, right? it seems to me that one of the great differences between a current production and one from the 90s in this country is certainly one of scale, right? So, this has a political context but also obviously

04:00 - it's made out of artistic and other decisions. The theme of scale or of the object such as the paint, such as the frames, sculpture and other traditional (formats), also speaks a lot about the place of these works. José Luis Blondet spoke of the works that stayed at their sites, works that are realized for an exhibition and in many senses the work of the 90s, whatever the format, was thought out for the place

04:30 - from which it was produced, it was part of its content or part of its very dimension. So, I'd like to begin with José Luis Blondet speaking a bit about the project of *CCS-10* in relation to the exhibitions, as has been mentioned, but also in relationship to an artistic production of the 90s in Venezuela, or specifically in Caracas, that had this type of scale and that made a very advanced proposal in the region

05:00 - in general. And, in fact, before we start I should mention, I don't know if they are still here but some of the participants from *CCS-10* were here with us in the auditorium in the morning and I just want to know if Álvaro Sotillo is still here? Perhaps he'd like to stand up so we can give him a round of applause, the curator of *CCS-10*, as was mentioned by José Luis Blondet, thanks for joining us. I also saw Sigfredo Chacón and I now see he's right there, another round of applause for Sigfredo Chacón,

05:30 - an artist from *CCS-10*. And I also saw Héctor Fuenmayor was here in the morning, there he is, very well, very well. Anyone else who would like to stand so I may recognize you, so we can applaud you? I don't know, only if you want, here we are feeling very affectionate today. So now, let's start with José Luis please **05:54 José Luis Blondet** – I don't know, I keep thinking about an exhibition that Carmen Hernández did at the Museo de Bellas Artes

06:00 - that was called *Casanto* and that is an exhibit, I don't know how it was possible that this exhibition took place in Caracas in the 90s and I think that certainly it would be impossible to do it now. One of the, for those who remember the exhibition, one of the small details that made this show so unique was that according to the wishes of the artist one of the works consisted of removing the glass from the windows

06:30 - of the museum, the windows basically defined the space of every floor, so that the park entered the museum. So, for three months the museum had a gallery with the show by Antonieta Sosa that was totally open, and pigeons came in and everything you can imagine came in. Then, when you began to talk about scale and how scale has changed, I immediately thought of this project

07:00 - by Antonieta Sosa and *Casanto*. Another project of the Museo de Bellas Artes, where I worked for several years, I'll mention two shows by the Museo de Bellas Artes

that also in some way reflect this yin/yang I wanted to talk about with *CCS-10* and the intervention of continuity. A totally international project

07:30 - also about in situ installations that was called *Intervenciones en el espacio* and was basically the idea of showing once again that international appetite, but this time they weren't Venezuelan artists for exportation but rather importations of great artists, Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, they came to do installations at the museum and I think that in some way *Casanto* was exactly the opposite. No? The place of the home in the museum, to open the windows

08:00 - to the park, I think that these two projects give an idea of the scale that we're talking about from the 90s. **08:08 Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy** – Yes, truly, also the scale of the exhibitions, in the case, for example, of *Ante América* to think up a project from America, above all the continent and the participating artists from all over. I don't know if you'd like to speak a little about... **08:25 Lupe Álvarez** – No, I'd like to, because in an exhibition that was so brief,

08:30 - clearly *Ante América* is so fully a cultural essay that, as I said, each of its topics could be the subject of a specific essay. In the plane of the formal question, or really of the question of how do you place the works, etc, *Ante América* was very diverse, but it was diverse more due to a theoretical-conceptual and political justification than from a question of aesthetics. *Ante América*

09:00 - wanted to position a vision in relation to the ailment, what I call an ailment, of our context, which is the constant confrontation of artists or conceptions of contemporary modern art, as if we were living together in spaces where you could close one door and start another. To me it seems that to get it right in bringing together artists of

09:30 - different ages, generations, there were artists who were already mature, very mature, as well as young artists, artists who did not veer from a vision, if we looked at them formally we could call them even modernists, but with a liberality to approach creation that did not have to do with, let's say, administrated criteria,

10:00 - with the clearly contrasting background of modernity behind it, in dialogue with it. To me it seems that the openness, and obviously *Ante América* also had a great interest in the plane of scale and space to show, for example, a work such as one by Amalia Mesa-Bains that is an altar to Tonantzin, which has all these elements, it could be next to a work by Luis Camnitzer, a skeptical work,

10:30 – superimposed upon this play on objects of torture, which are deprived of their context and only have the plane of language to dialogue with them. The way in which these diversities confront each other, I think it was a sort of political question that kind of suggested to the majority of people: We are sometimes trapped in conflicts like this or that that do not have to be.

11:00 - Without a doubt, our modernities are modernities of coexistence, modernities of simultaneity, not modernities of purifying confrontations. Western modernity is a purifying modernity, one that decants, because that is its paradigm; it's the paradigm of teleological and linear Western history, and Latin American modernity doesn't have, doesn't position itself in that otherness, but rather a propositional otherness, to say yes,

11:30 - this, we are like this, these are the ways to live contexts that can be any which way, and all are named within the concept of "Latin America," because there was this other way of positioning. *Ante América* said, to an extent, well, what unites someone from the Caribbean with someone from the Dutch Antilles? What unites us, also at that time, obviously, is the power that post-colonial authority had

12:00 - and the power that critical theory had; many clung to versions of Marxism that we could call "updated" and less orthodox that put the conditions of production in the primary place. What brings all of us together? A cultural condition, the subaltern condition. And all this focus of openness on the plane of what was, exactly, paintings, toys, really

12:30 - the instrument for four people, works that sold at market, because the work of Everaldo Brown, he makes work to sell. It is this context of plurality, that additionally is not a plurality that says, "Everything is valid in the realm of post-modernity!" but rather a plurality that can be rooted culturally and socially in that which can truly acquire the possibility of thinking of itself with legitimacy.

13:00 - So then, I think that these... obviously in this plane, for example, that José Luis describes in which exhibitions like these that have a much more daring proposal from the point of view of space, of thought—well, like the one you told us about just now with the opening of the windows and all these things, obviously not, because I think that *Ante América* was, I believe it was an overtly political exhibition. Or, there was the weight of

13:30 - a discourse that had reached maturity and I think it was the opportunity that the (Biblioteca) Luis Ángel Arango needed to seize the chance. **SHCC 13:37** - Well, this is very much related to one of the questions from the public, from the artist Eli Márquez; there are a few questions, I'll choose one, but it points to the shared sentiment in the region that is noted in all these exhibitions that in reality have to do with forming a community, whether on a large or small scale, and I'd love for you

14:00 - to help us begin to respond to this question, which is if the decade of the 90s could be considered an integrating moment, a historic period of integration? I think this question is knowingly interesting, as for example, you had to have come out of this decade in Cuba, as did almost all the artists that we know from the decade of the 90s, there was a mobilization and certainly the boom of neoliberalism that created another kind of

14:30 - mobilization of information, and the insistence on the local also comes forward perhaps as a form of resistance, but how would you respond to the characterization of the 90s, for example, as an integrating decade? In what way, can we see this in *Mesótica*, if you think we can? **Tamara Díaz Bringas 14:51** – Yes, well, in the 90s where? Because we have spoken of specific places, which are situated, when I mentioned *Mesótica*

15:00 - I also tried to emphasize the Central American political context of that moment because it was an urgent need, right? Just as it was an urgent political need, and I also brought us to, in the end, the idea of a network, the thought of more collective articulations that it signified in that moment and from there, well, you could interpret or dialogue with the idea of integration from the idea of networks, of generating webs, of more extensive interlocutions,

15:30 - more consolidated ones, but I would always take great care to do this in firmly situated places, specific and not generalized ones that integrate globally. **SHCC 15: 45** – There's also the question of who these exhibitions were for, independent of the participating artists. We've got the case of the artist Virginia Pérez-Ratton, with the project relating to the project of England that you also mention, as well as Raúl

16:00 - Quintanilla in his video and the symposium that José Luis Blondet mentions, with regard to the visitors who were here and others, no? What really is the positioning, to whom are they talking, with whom do they want to engage with these exhibitions? There is a tension with the local public but also with the international public, which is very clear, right? The concept of Latin Americanism is highly debated in terms of who was it that set it. So, I'd like

16:30 - you to speak a little of these tensions, or the openings, that appear with this positioning of the local open to the international market, to a market of ideas, in the 90s in the region there was not as big an international market as there is today, but if you would please speak to this. That symposium, I didn't know about it, it's great. Perhaps we should do a reenactment of that symposium, just as the MASP is doing one of

17:00 - Lina Bo Bardi, the Seminario Fundación Cisneros could gather all these people again to have them speak to the same exact themes and see what comes up, right? Anyway. **JLB 17:11** – I thought of the symposium with that previous question about integration. What exactly was the question about the 90s? **SHCC 17:22** - Eli Márquez's question from the public is if the decade of the 90s could be characterized as a decade with

17:30 - a sense of integration? **JLB - 17:31** Because what I immediately thought was in the opposite direction—more that, I don't know, for it was, it had for me more to do with disintegration of those things instead of consolidation, or a discourse, or an artwork; and the poem by Montejó, *Islandia*, I think it has to do with this. **SHCC - 17:50** The poem that

we handed out at the entrance is part of José Luis' presentation. **JLB - 17:55** With that idea, that desire to go out, that desire to, the need

18:00 - to think of Iceland and its distance from us and finally to say, well, I'll never go to Iceland, my lot is to plant palm trees next to the fjords and fold that map and bring Iceland closer, right? But I think in the opposite direction, of wanting to leave and wanting to stay, of wanting to export and wanting to import, for me it has a lot to do with this disintegrating aspect of the 90s. **SHCC - 18:28** There are several questions

18:30 - here, clearly because we are in Caracas, about this exhibition and the many many questions that come up, that have to do with different things; I think I'm going to summarize them in one because it seems to me that they aim in different directions, right? One of them is whether an exhibition—and perhaps each of you can respond from where you are—whether an exhibition that brought together maybe ten artists

19:00 - from one city is something that would work today, that could have an impact, we could say, similar to that of *CCS-10*? I don't know if in Ecuador something like this would work methodologically, if it would also have a public impact? Or if in Central America, even, with your very project of the Biennial? Earlier we heard Inés Katzenstein say that in the 60s the artists themselves set the challenge: We don't want a prize, right? How can financial support be divided up to create

19:30 - a context of community? Then, I think that the question is whether, less whether a *CCS-10* would work today, but what kind of exhibition do you consider would best serve an artistic community today, in Venezuela, in Ecuador, even in the region of Central America? **JLB - 19:54** I'm thinking of your initial question about scale and that drastic reduction of scale,

20:00 - of the quality of materials, that it's not a *conditio sine qua non*, to produce a work of art, but certainly there is a limiting factor; so it seems to me a kind of project that would be interesting to institutions commissioning new projects, a bit like *CCS-10* and the GAN, a group of artists. Then, I don't know if this would certainly have the impact of defining a decade, but it would notably help the artists who have shelved projects that

20:30 - can't be produced for lack of resources, they could be produced, a relationship could be articulated with some group, and, I don't know, start another kind of conversation. **SHCC – 20:41** Of course; there's a question, yes? **LÁ - 20:44** I don't put much stock in the art world's definitions; I think that today we must have increasingly greater consciousness that when we propose something in the art world it's a proposal with an essayist nature,

21:00 - that it has its meaning, it can act to propose or mobilize a set of ideas, but I believe that we can no longer aspire to the idea that there are ten artists, or fifteen artists; I mean, I'm no expert in the exhibition of which you speak, and evidently that was a

different time, but I think we lack this, I keep thinking of the idea of Justo Pastor Mellado that an archive is lacking, an academy is lacking,

21:30 - infrastructure is lacking, really, these three components, three pillars. And I believe that what we were talking about at the lunch table today, that artistic communities, even those in very small areas, are not artistic communities—there are very diversified communities that need and are proposing different relationships to their communities, with their neighborhoods, with their

22:00 - territory. So, when there are no mechanisms for constructing value, when legitimacy is not measured by, for example, by processes of historicization, by processes in which the academy takes into account, makes visible, reflects on these processes, and when one pretends to make these kinds of things with “ten, twenty guys” what it does is to cause a kind of

22:30 - friction in the environment, because it’s as if you went back to believing the idea that an idea of the world exists that you can propose. It’s as if instead of saying, “Look, let’s see, we’re going to test a proposal that has to do with this kind of phenomenon that’s occurring,” I don’t know, “Alternative spaces that construct from their own logic a set of mechanisms of action, diffusion,

23:00 - writing, put into value; we’re going to make another that has to do with critical dialogues that are produced with artistic disciplines.” There are a number of proposals that also attend to diversity in the art world. We are in diverse societies, we are in societies where difference is a value, and if difference is a value, we have to walk through this art world much more in search of this,

23:30 - to see where we can give a tone to diversity so that it’s sufficiently relevant, so that what it has to say to society is well stated. **SHCC - 23:43** Very well, we loved this workshop. Everyone get ready to pitch in because there is a lot to work on here. I think it’s really great and truly this workshop worked, don’t you think? Now it’s time to get ready to listen to what’s proposed in the

24:00 - *Pecha Kucha* presentations. There are many other questions and one that I’d like you to briefly respond to is whether it seems feasible to you to find what are some of the differences that you identify in the art produced from Central America and the art produced for example in South America? This question also comes from the public. If you can, in one minute. **LÁ - 24:26** The public asked this? **SHC - 24:28** The public asked this, yes.

24:30 - There were many questions, I just made a brief selection. **TDB - 24:33** I find a singularity in Central America, more in the mode of production, in that network that has been configured, that you also know, right? That really consists of very long-term relationships, that are done in relationship, I mean, productions that are done in

relationship, that are made in different contexts but that have a permanent dialogue that has been there since the mid-90s up to now, right? That for me is one of the

25:00 - singularities of this context, how they accompany each other, how there is a permanent conversation, but in these terms, generalizations, I wouldn't dare, no. **SHCC** -

25:11 No, that's fine. Now, to close, I'm going to comment, to remind you that Aixa Sánchez wrote an article published at coleccioncisneros.org that basically presents a proposal of which artists, specifically women,

25:30 - could have been considered for *CCS-10*. I invite you to read this article and I invite you also to read all the other articles. Have a coffee, go to the bathroom and we'll see you here in fifteen minutes for our third session. Thanks, Thank you, congratulations all, this was great.