

## Alejandro Cesarco – the ongoing story



In the past two decades Alejandro Cesarco (Montevideo, Uruguay, 1975) has been making art as well as publishing books and curating exhibitions. Using film, photography and text, his practice investigates the agency of meaning, and how the expression of that agency is embedded within the practices of writing and reading, translating and misreading, repeating and remembering. The formal strategies of Cesarco's (isolating a footnote from its context, the ongoing compilation of indexes for an as-yet unwritten book, a video whose narrative structure is based on secrecy, for example) are often marked by an emotional register, where affect colludes with language to produce a series of metanarratives in dialogue with the histories of Conceptual Art. In addition to his studio practice, the artist has curated several exhibitions and is director of Art Resources Transfer (A.R.T.), a nonprofit organization that publishes books by artists and distributes free books on art to public schools, libraries and prisons.

Being fascinated by conceptualism as an 'ism', as a movement, a lot of the formal aspects of his work reference past works from the 60s and the 70s. In this regard, he flirts with the possibilities of memory as both the object and instrument of our desires, putting in relation different methodologies of documenting, describing and accounting for the passage of time and the forms used to recall it. On the occasion of his third solo show entitled "The Ongoing Story" at Galleria Raffaella Cortese in Milan (Italy), Cesarco talks to us about his work and delves into the exhibition project.



**Francesca Interlenghi:** You're returning to Italy five years after your last solo show at the gallery. How has your practice developed over this time? What themes have you focused on in recent years?

Alejandro Cesarco: Yes, it has been some time, and what very strange times it has been! The world, and the art-world in particular, seem to have gone through massive transformations since then. Some positive and some negative. Overall, however, there seems to have been this wonderful shift in the generalized critical vocabulary (MeToo, Black Lives Matter, etc.) but I wonder what positive / systemic change has actually taken place? Italy's recent election, and the fact that, across the world, inching our way back toward neoliberalism from neofascism is celebrated as progress is a case in point. But in regards to your question more concretely, I think I work with a rather narrow number of themes, if we are to call them that. Perhaps they are actually a number of questions I attempt to better formulate over time. These questions are explored through my work in a variety of media, methods of research and strategies and perhaps most overtly have to do with ideas of indexicality, identity, narrativity, the archive, and the construction and preservation of memory.

**FI:** Taking a look at the exhibition project, I can see that you are delving into the main issues of your own poetics. Memory is one of the „topoi“ of your research and in the show you investigate it through the work *Interlude* (2017). The malleability of the memory, the fact that it has no rigid structure and that each new story is somehow its re-formulation are some of the aspects that you are inquiring. Can you tell me more about this?

AC: I wrote a short, perhaps somewhat general or abstract, introduction to the show: "The exhibitions is a selection of recent works that explore the emotional contours of life during increasingly precarious times. The works provide an affective framework for felt experience and circle, in various ways, around an identity built in relation to someone else's." The works included, which are mostly photographic, address the pain of estrangement, the embarrassment of memory, and the panic of oblivion; they reveal the precariousness of the human habitat and the fragility of intimacy. It is very true that I keep circling around the idea of memory, flirting with the possibilities of memory as both the object and instrument of our desires. Over the years, I've considered and put in relation different methodologies of documenting, describing, and accounting for the passage of time and the forms used to recall it. In this way, the works chronicle a sort of love affair with memory. (And of course it ends with a broken heart!)

**FI:** Another theme on which the exhibition is focusing is that of desire, more precisely the possibility of its duration over time. I'm thinking in particular of the work *The Long Term (A Measure of Intimacy I – V)*, 2020. Here the main issue is that of interpersonal relationships, another cornerstone of your research. Could you elaborate a bit on this topic?

AC: That particular series of works function as a portrait of a couple. The strings, their changing colors and configurations, describe particular moments in their relationship. The overall measurement of the strings refer to the joint height of this couple. On a more formal level, these works carry a long line of references: from Marcel Duchamp's or Stanley Broun's meters, to André Cadere's round bars of wood, to Guy Mees, or the Surface/Support group. However, they also refer to my own work portraying couples, their relationships, and the limits of language. And, as the title hints at, the work stubbornly insists on questioning the sustainability of desire in the long term. In this case through allegorically measuring or quantifying the comforts of intimacy, its distance.



FI: The word measure frequently returns in your titles. You called the previous show in the gallery *"The Measure of Memory"* and here you talk about the measure of intimacy. There is always a mutual dialogue between rationalism and poetry in your work that finds a harmonious balance in the outcome. Can you explain how your creative process heal the oppositions? (rational/emotional – inclusion/exclusion – strength/vulnerability and so on...)

AC: That particular series of works function as a portrait of a couple. The strings, their changing colors and configurations, describe particular moments in their relationship. The overall measurement of the strings refer to the joint height of this couple. On a more formal level, these works carry a long line of references: from Marcel Duchamp's or Stanley Brouwn's meters, to André Cadere's round bars of wood, to Guy Mees, or the Surface/Support group. However, they also refer to my own work portraying couples, their relationships, and the limits of language. And, as the title hints at, the work stubbornly insists on questioning the sustainability of desire in the long term. In this case through allegorically measuring or quantifying the comforts of intimacy, its distance.

FI: *Long Casting (A Page on Regret)*, 2019 — from "a series of indexes for books I have not yet written and most probably never will" — is probably the work that better highlights the conceptual side of your work, the one that is connected with your reflection on language. In our previous interview you told me you have a penchant for creating stories around a void, around something that has been denied and hence a state of uncertainty that doesn't allow the viewer to fully understand the work. Denial, emptiness and regret, what role do they play in your investigation?

AC: As you mention, that work is from a series of indexes I've been working on for the last twenty or so years. So far I've made six or seven, depending how you count them — in the sense that not all of them go from A–Z. The series maps the development of my interests, readings and preoccupations and thus has become a form of self-portraiture that unfolds over time. *Long Casting (A Page on Regret)* is particular within the series in that it zooms in on one particular word/concept (regret) and that there is a text (my PhD dissertation, "Under The Sign of Regret") that loosely shadows it. The particular text and art-work are byproducts of misunderstandings, misjudgments, poor decisions, etc. And, to go back briefly to some of your earlier question, time and memory acquires a particular texture when viewed through that lens. In terms of the different modes of address employed, which you are right, often have to do with secrecy, obscurity, fragmentation, it perhaps has to do with avoiding a definitive answer and rather attempt to locate the work in the realm of something that is yet becoming, a form that does not foreclose its potentiality. As regards regret more specifically, I would venture to say, paraphrasing Sianne Ngai for example, that this persistent attention to "useless/minor/ugly" feelings is all about action: about how and why it is blocked, and about how to locate motives for political action when none is visible.

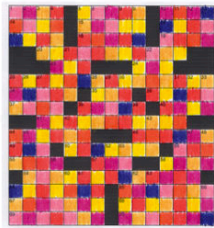


FI: To conclude, with reference to the work *Down & Across*, 2020, I cannot help but ask you what impact the pandemic had on you as an artist. In your definition it was "a period of apparent suspended meaning", can you talk about that?

AC: That work was made during the first months of Covid-19 lockdown and document, a period of apparent suspended meaning through color and received clues—the work involves coloring NYT crossword puzzles. This was a period of time in which our personal and collective narrative (again, also our conception of time) was very hard to make sense of. And to tie it back to the beginning of our conversation, I think we are in the gradual process of discovering what kind of change (or break) the pandemic and its aftermath has brought to our lives and what kind of decisions we want to make about our lives in the light of it.



Tuesday, March 17  
Down 64: Cleanhousehold  
Across 29: "Shut," "Tennally"



Thursday, March 19  
Down 6: Cu of the wind, at sea  
Across 17: One who goes coloring



Wednesday, April 6  
Down 4: Endowed w/ry south of the border  
Across 1: Not to be heard from anyone



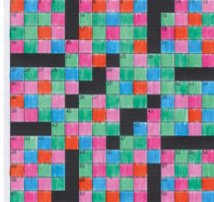
Monday, April 13  
Down 2: Just there for looks  
Across 21: Kind of economic, disparagingly



Thursday, April 16  
Down 19: (verb) to be asleep  
Across 28: Put down to words



Saturday, April 19  
Down 11: (verb) to be (verb)  
Across 64: (verb) to create



Tuesday, April 21  
Down 60: Sign of defeat  
Across 28: Authorial



Monday, April 28  
Down 63: (verb) to think done that  
Across 21: Pretextual cost



Friday, May 1  
Down 20: The paper back of the "per" Notebook  
Across 19: Parts of a Facebook feed



Monday, May 4  
Down 27: Full of (verb)  
Across 21: Last words of a trial



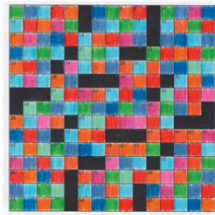
Wednesday, May 6  
Down 36: Sign of defeat  
Across 28: (verb) to see



Wednesday, May 6  
Down 48: (verb) to play with the fingers  
Across 28: Person who makes (verb)



Friday, May 8  
Down 18: (verb) to do of work  
Across 18: Work through, as feelings



Tuesday, May 12  
Down 67: Puffy in bath  
Across 24: First thing to do on a to-do list



Thursday, May 14  
Down 29: Clear (verb)  
Across 8: "Oh, yeah!"



Friday, May 15  
Down 38: Beginning of a timeline  
Across 47: Setting for many (verb) paintings of the bourgeoisie