

Interview with Pedro Deniz

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FROM TRAVEL TO POLITICS.

Artist Pedro Déniz (Gran Canaria, 1964) recently participated in the *Espacios Mestizos (Hybrid Spaces)* exhibition in Finca de Osorio. From his earliest work, this creator has questioned the role of the media. The latest armed conflicts have stimulated an artist who believes that art can also act as a vehicle for considering the manipulation of information, politics or social injustice.

You used to live in Tangiers. What did you learn from your stay?

It was a big change because I came close to another culture. I lived there when I had just finished my education and everything was new for me. I wanted to take the world by storm. I met artist Mounir Fatmi, who I have worked with on several occasions, there.

In *Adrift*, an exhibition presented in La Palmita in 1997, you talked about how the information provided by the mass media in general invades our public and private space.

The Gulf War represented a turning point in my work. It is not the same to live in Spain as to live in a Muslim country when there is a war that creates social tension. This situation is hidden by the media. The news reaching Morocco was highly contradictory. We were afraid to leave the house because we realised that it could be dangerous to be a foreigner. There were street riots in Casablanca. It was in that context that the bottle arose as a symbol.

In *The bridge*, presented at the Villa de Agaete Island Culture Centre in 1998, you developed a project in collaboration with other artists. What was that experience like?

It was marvellous because I learned so much. I was in contact with more than a hundred artists through that project. They sent me creative proposals that I placed in bottles and they were thrown into the sea on the island of El Hierro. For me the project is still open, because bottles continue to appear. They have been found in San Sebastian, La Palma, Cuba, The Bahamas and Florida. The project will not end until the last one turns up. The piece is a metaphor for travel.

What does the bottle represent for you?

In *Diccionario de símbolos/Dictionary of symbols*. Cirlot says that it is like the ark, a place where you can be safe. I like to see it as something positive than can be binding. Binding are the bottles from which you pour the drinks that you have with friends. The bottle represents hope for the castaway.

The term 'mixed race' refers to the intercultural context in today's society. How do you approach this concept in the work that you presented in the *Espacios Mestizos (Hybrid Spaces)* exhibition?

I was thinking for months about the concepts I should develop. I realised that society has evolved thanks to the thinking of multiple cultures. Knowledge is open and of mixed race. I made an arch of triumph, the type of work that architects use to commemorate wars or armed victories. I wanted to pay tribute to man as the bearer of a specifically human territory: thought. Tribute had never been paid to mankind in that way. In the arch, I drew a bottle that now arises as a huge vacuum through which we can see the landscape. The bottle goes back to the idea of travel.

Your work has recently become more radical, closer to political art.

I have become more radical in the way I say things. I am at an age now that I have to say what I think, even if it could go against me. In the *'appy New Year* performance that I took to Brussels for Camouflage last year, I was being ironic about Christmas cards. I spelled 'appy with an apostrophe (') because I wanted to be a nuisance. I see it as an encounter between the prosperous world of capitalist society with lights and glamour, and the tragic idea of having no future, of looking into a vacuum. Western society does not wonder why an individual decides to set himself on fire, to commit a barbaric act. But neither do we question why one country can invade another, much poorer, nation. With this piece, I want to ask why these things happen. Some people may be shocked when I set myself on fire with Christmas lights. But they do not mind seeing terrible situations on the television, as we allow such things to continue to occur. We believe that we are sailing in an ocean of information and we are actually mass media castaways.

Has the bottle also become political?

Yes, so much so that it has become an icon of May 1968 in France, a Molotov cocktail.