

Project Drainwash

*Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past
And imagine their world anew. This one is no different.
It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.
(Arundhati Roy, "The Pandemic is a Portal")*

ABOUT PROJECT DRAINWASH

Project Drainwash is a cycle of site-specific interventions aimed at creating ephemeral artistic collectives, activating communities and generating dialogue about the socio-political realities of the contemporary moment. While its core is the integration of hair-mats in urban art, each actualization is adapted to the specific geographical realities encountered in each city. It has been conceived in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic and the global climate emergency, a critical moment for our environment and planet. We believe that the ongoing violence against nature has deep roots in a Euro-patriarchal system that problematically produces it as the Other, turning it into an object for exploitation. The pandemic has exposed ruptures in the status quo and the exploitative system upon which it relies: Arundhati Roy has described it as a portal, as an opportunity to imagine the world anew and think it otherwise. Our project concurs with Roy in that we refute the imperative of 'business as usual' and the relentless flow of capital and growth encouraged by such a system.

Project Drainwash disrupts the relentless motion of the neoliberal project by drawing on the concept of porosity. A porous material is one whose continuity is interrupted by small gaps. As such, the gaps are simultaneously interruptions of continuity and mechanisms enabling alternative forms of movement *through* – a filtered, viscous movement that represents an alternative to the uninterrupted flow of capital. Porosity, following Benjamin and Laci (1925), is also a concept used in architecture to emphasise the sharing of space by people of different ages and social backgrounds and the interpenetration of the public and the private, the social and the economic, the affective and the bureaucratic, as facilitated by urban design and dramaturgy (Wolfrum et al., 2018). Finally, it returns as a leitmotif that characterises our chosen artistic medium, hair. Hair and fleece have proven effective in absorbing petroleum, animal and vegetable oils that pollute waters not only when there is a major oil spill, but also within everyday urban landscapes (United States EPA, 1999; Pagnucco and Phillips, 2018). Hence the idea of integrating hair-mats into works of urban art, using them as natural sponges and enhancing their artistic and ecological potential.

By positioning our artwork along and around water drains we want to bring attention to zones of the city that are usually hidden from view; third landscapes (Clément, 2004) whose potential is obscured by the prevailing concept of the hygienic city which keeps

bodily functions and the city's metabolism beyond sight by displacing them to the subterranean and the countryside. This vertical approach to the city (Graham, 2016) marks drains and waterways as zones of porosity, passages between interior and exterior. Moreover, by employing artisanal techniques traditionally associated with women like sewing, embroidery and crochet to craft new ecological technologies for urban living, we recycle not only materials but also knowledges and practices which, just like the elements of the third landscape, have been obscured by prevailing Euro-patriarchal conceptions of art. In so doing, we respond to Judy Chicago's call for "feminising the landscape", articulated through her series of ephemeral installations.

References

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