

# Hugo López-Castrillo

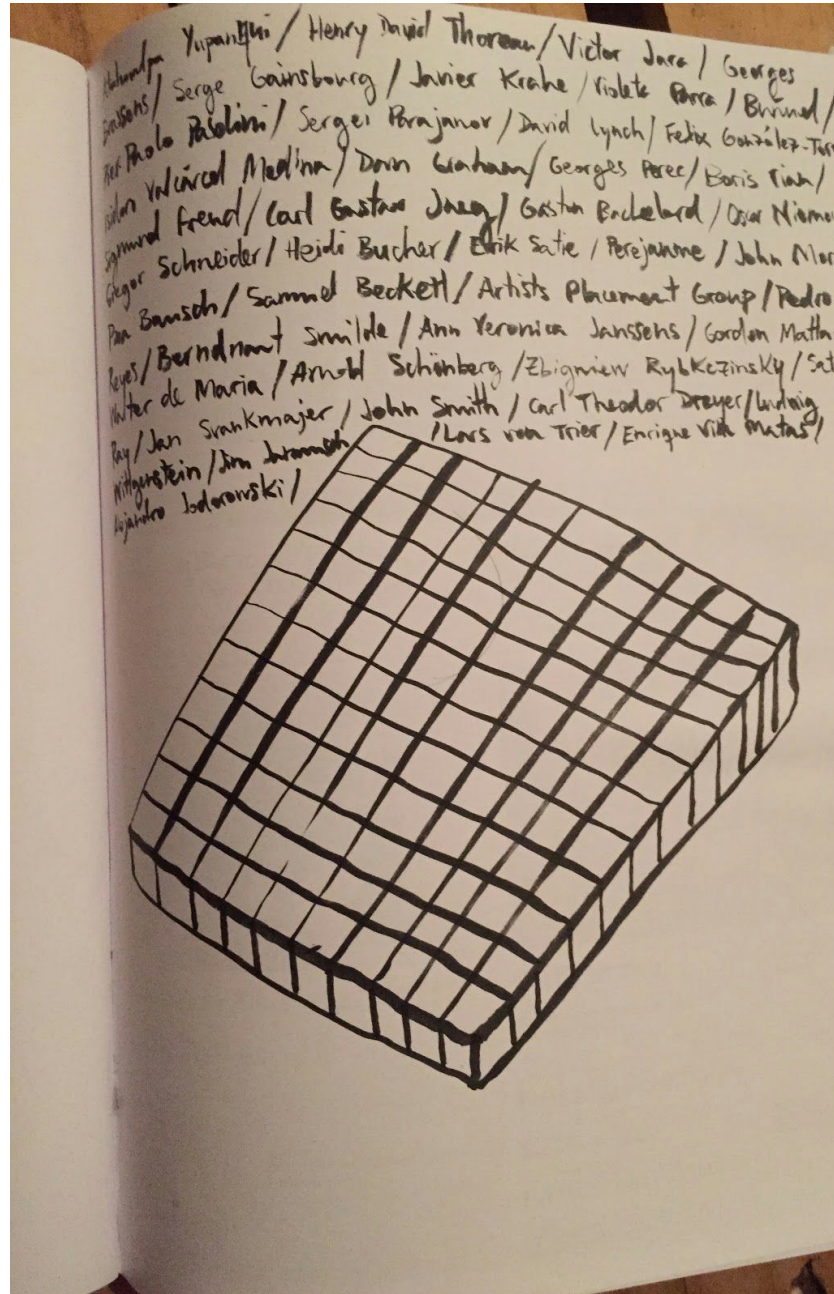
# (RE)CIVILIZATION

Hugo López-Castrillo is a Spanish artist, editor and translator living and working in London. When he was about eleven years old he traveled with his family to Malta, to spend time and learn English together. They would dedicate three hours to English lessons in the morning and then they could spend the rest of the day driving around the island.

“My father was already proficient in English, so during the lessons he would go out and draw the landscape and architecture he found on his way. After this trip, I found some of his father’s drawings framed and hung on the walls at home. Then he realized that my father had a past and practice related to art. I started imitating his father’s paintings and drawings, drew buildings, and loved technical drawings of perspective. I realized I wasn’t really able to draw people from life so I started to copy from photographs, trying to blend in the perfection of technical drawing. Out of dedication, he sped up his progress and he started making himself questions about medium and meaning. He was somehow betrothing to the critical position of wondering what lies behind art and what the difficulties of making are.”

**Image:** An idea in his note-sketchbook. “Everyone that inspires me would be represented by single bricks that would form a hard carpet together where to sit on and upon my own referential ground.”

“The last year at high school, I was deeply inspired by my Chemistry teacher, she made interesting to everyone a subject I had not felt the least attracted by. I decided to study Chemistry at University, but quickly realized that professors were not as enthusiastic as my beloved teacher. So I quit after three months. I became friends with a girl who studied History of Arts and often sneaked into her lessons. I took way more notes during



these lessons because they were so appealing to me. This pushed me in the direction of art. I was 18 when I grasped that his dedication in life needed not to involve only single subject –a life-honed profession, so to be–, for the bleak sake of earning his security in life. But that he could actually drive himself through art to tackle the ‘presets’; a ‘normal’ life scared him, because he would ultimately dedicate his efforts to make a set pattern living that surely wouldn’t fulfill him completely. I then realized I should open his still profane, yet inquirer nature to Fine Arts at an academy, leaving far behind any practical-professional reasonings. So I immersed myself in this 5 year studies and met people with similar interests, besides whom I found out that artists are at the margins of society, in the way that they’re not after a comfortable ‘successful living’ in the terms that modern life demands from us to keep rolling. All my assumptions became true, and the moment I entered Fine Arts I found a standpoint from which to make a statement about the conditions of today. Only through a very philosophical enquiry to myself I discovered that art is a powerful tool for anchoring and getting to know more about the human condition. Art is about questioning and giving answers to a deficiently-nurtured mind and soul (I’m talking about the spirit here), it’s a place where the lame ambitions of comfort and ‘successful living’ –buying a house, buying a car, having the best holiday where everyone else also goes– are transcended.”

“That said, it is no surprise that conceptual art opened wide my inspiration. We live in an information society and conceptual art is basically a rearrangement of information and language at its purest. Its advent set proof of the times we live in. Conceptual art was born as a reaction against the commodification of information and language –and its unparalleled and magnificent prodigal son: publicity–.”

“Looking back at the drawings I made as a kid I don’t quite consider them as art –I was just copying my father–, so it rather was the door for entering the much vaster field of art. You have to learn ‘how to look’, fail, and search for a medium. I didn’t find an ultimate medium. There was no medium that fulfilled all needs of anchoring, questioning or making. According to one idea and your intention a different technique may apply. In the History of Art there are a lot of artists who were very skilled at one technique –good examples are famous long-career painters. But there certainly is something about the way you make, there is something that changes dramatically when you aim at ‘making a living’, or at success and recognition. If you make a living on one side, and make art on the other, different motivations occur.”

“Art is intimately related to activism. Activism has a lot to do with questioning and breaking the pattern. Trying to find other (new) possibilities. In the 3rd year of my studies (in Cuenca, Spain) we organized a fake institutional campaign with some other students. There was no public transport from the old town to the hospital. The old town is at the top of a cliff and a lot of elders live there. The hospital is quite far away, they needed to take two busses, or a taxi or even walk to the hospital. The art academy was literally by the hospital. And the cultural hub was in the old town. So when students wanted to see some exhibition they had to walk up the cliff because there was no such bus route, so we made up this idea to solve this transport problem. In the name of the local authorities, we published and advertised a fake campaign that

a bus line would open to cover the service between the hospital and the old town. We had to research a lot and design the campaign very well, using marketing strategies and managing information in a creative way in order to make it believable and 'look like real'. That process was very enriching, it opened up new ways of approaching problems creatively. The plan did work, on a Friday afternoon, just when public servants had gone for a bank holiday weekend, they released the news together with fake opinions from citizens that were happy or critical with the announcement. Then, along those three days we also did a series of field interviews to local residents presenting ourselves as journalists of the local tv in order to gather their opinions and raise awareness of the (false-flag) initiative taken by the local authorities. By the end of the weekend a lot of people talked about it in Cuenca. And by Tuesday, there was a front page coverage of the whole event in La Tribuna newspaper, with a double-page article inside, stating that it was fake of course, but very critical with the need of the local authorities to consider such an idea to include it in their plans. The article was called 'El bus fantasma' (The Ghost Bus). A few months later we got to know that some meetings had actually been held, and we had the hope that they will lead to a slow bureaucratic process to make bus No. 9 come true. It is very rewarding to look back and realise that our simple but well organised campaign had triggered such a chain of reactions! Unfortunately, it all lead nowhere in the end, for politics happen at the real margins of general interests. But! The year after that, there was a very funny demonstration that some students (people we didn't know) organised and which many locals followed throughout town. It was an illegal demonstration that blocked traffic from the roundabout at University up until the train station. It consisted of a bus 8m long made in cardboard which was carried on foot by people from the inside, and protesters could join by the back door (there was no door actually). You cannot imagine how cool it was that among the many people marching throughout the way, some old people waiting for the bus at the hospital said 'damn! let's join these youngsters in the protest, after all it probably takes us less time to walk down with them than if we count on a real bus to come. And it's surely going to be fun'. Nothing happened after that, there is still no Bus No.9 today... But we proved our point that activism and art share a common strategical ground with a great power to bring changes about."

"Nowadays, [however] I'm not a very productive artist (materially). I don't have a huge 'body of works', besides, I have a huge body of notes and concepts. I want to form and solidify this ocean of ideas. In order to build a body of those facts I need to make them real. I'm too busy rereading my life. Finding out my past and finding out and settling my own story (and history). The notebooks are full of very primary sketches that could lead to more mature learning about myself and the subjects I'm interested in. It's intimately related to the fact that I didn't choose a medium until now. So now I'm focused on revisiting some ideas. Taking notes helps crystallizing passing thoughts. For a while I considered not even taking notes, and comply to my memory. But then you realise taking notes helps the crystalising memory and organising chaos."

"During the past five years I have most notably worked from an artist-editorial collective together with peer artists and philosophers. As a group we are committed to publishing books with a thorough essayistic perspective on the relations between art, politics and aesthetics. Artistic strategies are being used in politics and political strategies in art. I'm also involved in

various collectives. I'm not a classic studio artist that loves being sealed in his own studio. I'm very convinced that only through collective making we can reach a better understanding and more healthy creation and art-living. The subjects we work on are mainly related to political actions, using artistic processes as well as pedagogy of art. That helps to inject the wealth of the artistic experience in the over-capitalized and commodified world we live in –the spiritual dimension of all this is obvious.”

“I want to point out the importance of aiming at an educational approach to art and the therapeutical value it has. I cannot quite stress the need of getting rid of the ‘black magic’ and opacity around art which is so instituted in our society. We are rather used to the old familiar story that artists are completely unplugged from the universe; that art is only for an acquainted and bourgeois elite to be entertained and to relate with each other. That’s true, but it is rather true that there is a lack of education on the appreciation of art from other than the mere appearance. There is a lot more to it. Those two tendencies mislead the point that art, more than a distinctive commodity or a cool thing, channels the search for powerful truths and new possibles. The more this fashion is held from opaque condescendence on the one hand and naive joy from the other, the stronger it gets. The only way to revert this is by elucidating processes and myths behind artistic creation, that is, clearing out the way for an educational approach to art, so that the psychological, philosophical and political values driven by it can unfold and provide tools for constructive reference and, ultimately, a means for fulfilling spiritual emancipation-integration.”

“I get inspiration by many writers and artists. I would speak of different ones depending on the subject of the conversation we had, but if I am to name just a few today, I could mention American-Cuban artist Félix González-Torres —and his understanding of his own finitude, being brave to face his own disappearance and use it to appease his spirit—, or Mexican artist Pedro Reyes —whose cathartic musical instruments made with dismantled weapons from a Mexican disarmament, restoring their symbolic value, struck me when I saw them playing—, or so many others... I’ve just finished reading a beautifully intense book by Spanish writer and journalist Francisco Umbral. He wrote a kind of diary for one year and, despite the unexpected and appalling death of his 4 year-old kid, he kept on with his plan and got to recreate his own life back, to a point where he finds in writing the way of communicating with his own selves (as a kid, as a teenager, as a grown up and as the old man he is) and, ultimately, to the dead boy. Sad but incredibly energising.”

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