

CIFOblog

Keeping up with Iván Puig

Posted FEB 02, 2011 by NATALIA

This week the CIFO Art Community is featuring the profile of Mexican artist [Iván Puig](#). In 2010 Iván was a recipient of a CIFO Grant for his project SEFT-1 (Sonda de exploración Ferroviaria Tripulada/ Manned Railway Exploration Probe). This multi-disciplinary project focuses on the many journeys Iván is embarking upon inside of a custom made vehicle equipped to maneuver on a parts of Mexico's unused rail system. The exploration seeks to record—via photography, video, audio and text—the communities, landscape and infrastructure that remains around these railroads.



We invited Guillermo Santamarina and Ivan to discuss the project through a brief Q&A:

Guillermo Santamarina: The SEFT-1 (Manned Exploratory Railway Probe) comments on the idea of progress in a way that is both parallel and paradoxical. On the one hand we have the mode of transportation par excellence at the dawn of the twentieth century, the symbol of technological progress, rapid communication and the consolidation of a revolutionary political order, while at the same time, pointing to its impotence in Mexico's present, by invading its tracks and installing a switch which, rather than restoring service, looks at scenes it was unable to alter with a critical eye. What do you think of that?

Iván Puig: The SEFT-1 project explores the ways the ideology of progress has shaped its own historical era. The potential failure of the modern project, its image of the future, and the dismantling of the meta-narrative that preaches the positive relationship between scientific advancement and social wellbeing. The project takes scenes in which progress has left a clear mark, and compares it to its current status, in the hopes that the discrepancy will cause people to question it.

GS: I must also admit that the Probe is like a device that makes fun of technology's supposed efficiency...

IP: We approach the idea of technology from a critical perspective, which of course includes humor; it's a conglomeration of devices from various eras that highlight the two poles of society's experience of technology: use and disposal.

GS: Would you agree with the description of the Probe as an alien spacecraft exploring the terrain it will probably affect?

MAGNANMETZ GALLERY

IP: We call it a spaceship in the sense that space means the three dimensions. It is a time machine positioned in three moments in history in which the country experienced major shifts. The impact this strange device can cause as it passes by paraphrases the impact of the train's earlier passing: surprise.

The act of exploration certainly carries with it the stigma of colonization, because historically, exploration has immediately preceded invasion. Therefore, we think it is essential to avoid the paradigm in which the object of study is a separate entity. And instead establish a direct relationship, which is why we plan to hold sessions in public places in towns the ship passes through and present the results of what was found on earlier runs, shuttling stories and questions between people and places.

GS: Might it also be a tool for escapism? An escape valve for nostalgia?

IP: The project is not coming from a place of nostalgia, although for many people, the railway is a symbol for life itself.

GS: Behind the romantic outing that invites exploration, might the project also be a sort of political statement, a demand that the appropriate action be taken to modernize and engage the vast expanse of Mexican territory currently abandoned to fate?

IP: Of course we have a political perspective, a strong intent to cause people to reflect, contribute to critical thinking. We aren't making any specific demands, except for the potential art may have to play a role in the transformation.

If we look at the history of the railway in Mexico, we can see not only the local power structures and economic struggles, but also the various forms of hegemony in Latin America and its relationship with global interests.

For more information on Ivan's whereabouts as a "Rail-naut" visit Ivan's profile, or the project page at <http://www.seft1.net/>