

The Highlights - Pedro's Story: An Unsuccessful Transatlantic Traveller

As we had many times before, our families gathered in Buenos Aires for Christmas. It was hot (unbearably hot), there was a lot of family (unbearably a lot), but then of course there was a lot of bookshops and a lot of ice cream.

After many failed attempts, in which our trips ended in places with air-conditioning or family gatherings with medialunas, we finally crossed the city to Parque de la Memoria, a park by the river with a memorial for the disappeared during the last Argentinean dictatorship and a series of commissioned artworks. I don't know if I liked it; I don't know if "like" is a suitable word for a place such as that one.

Before we entered we had a choripan with chimichurri and a Quilmes. We were feeling a bit strange. I don't know if it was from the heat, the choripan, or the near future (or the near past). There was a Ford Falcon parked outside, which for me was the most interesting artwork in the park, unfortunately without being one.

We walked around, looking at the sculptures and the monument. I thought about the impossible task for an artist to "represent" memory and horror. We saw all the names carved in the memorial, listed according to the year of disappearance. We were not searching for anyone special. For a second I thought about Ezequiel, but I let it go, and my mind moved towards Marguerite Duras and *Hiroshima mon amour* and the idea that translation is impossible, but necessary.

Then we decided to rest. We walked toward a concrete structure overlooking the river and lay down there. On the way we passed by a dead, dried-up toad. I looked at it, did it look at me? (I have a tendency to collect things; stones, snails, corks, rusted bottle caps, seeds -- mostly things I find walking in different city streets). The toad was lying there dried by the sun and totally flat. The possible interpretations of a dead, dried-up toad in this particular park I leave for the reader.

We were lying on the concrete, almost comfortable, talking about the number of pregnant women on the memorial list, when a family passed by us and my girlfriend said: You want it, don't you? I have a plastic bag. I ran back for the toad, before the kids killed it again playing soccer.

Pobre Pedro. I don't really know why, but it was a Pedro, and I named him (or her): Pedro.

Pedro was meant to participate in a solo exhibition that I was having in Stockholm in early February, with the title *Even heroes grow old*. I thought that a dried toad made a lot of sense for that particular exhibition.

The toad stayed in our friend's freezer in Buenos Aires in a plastic bag that we politely asked her not to open. Then we took it to São Paulo, to our own freezer. Mistakenly, I thought it would be easy to make it completely dry, by exposing it to the tropical sun, but the São Paulo weather didn't cooperate. It rained constantly, so Pedro grew, not old but fat from the humidity, and started to decompose. I asked a veterinarian friend of mine, and she told me that I only had one option: One day in the freezer followed by one in the day sun, then back in the freezer then back in sun, and so on ... for two weeks. Every time I took Pedro out, the dogs went crazy; they could smell him (or her) from even inside the Tupperware, even from two floors below. Unfortunately, the sun never came out. So Pedro crossed the Atlantic in the Tupperware inside my suitcase. (I was a bit afraid of the customs, not to mention the smell.)

In Malmö, Pedro first inhabited my mother's freezer and later my friends freezer where we were staying. I asked friends, colleagues, and family for advice on how to extract all that water Pedro had absorbed. (I needed him/her to make it through the three months duration of the exhibition, in a heated gallery in Sweden, as it was already in the list of works).

The exhibition contained (or would contain, or would possibly contain):

As in Pizarro, 2010

A pink wallpaper based on the rubrica of Francisco Pizarro.

Pedro, 2012

A dead toad found in Parque de la Memoria in Buenos Aires.

Contratiempos, 2010

A slide projection loop documenting images of the South American map in the cracks of the marquee in Parque Ibirapuera, São Paulo.

Untitled (Self portrait), 2011

A napkin from the restaurant Hispano in Buenos Aires and a cake package from bakery Euroville in São Paulo.

Perdidamente Paris, 2010

A single projection of the standard marble "metre" displayed at 36 rue de Vaugirard in Paris; projection size 1 meter.

Still untitled, 2012

A white candle placed on a metal surface taken from Parque de la Memoria, sitting underneath a dangling light bulb.

Untitled, 2011

A necklace in red satin and metal ring sizer.

During a family lunch, my brother, a biologist, and his biologist girlfriend recommended that Pedro be submerged (drowned yet again) in pure ethanol. His girlfriend offered to steal some from the laboratory where she is a researcher. I felt tempted, but I didn't want to risk losing her job, especially now that she is pregnant. Not Pedro, not I, and not an exhibition were worth unemployment or an angry boss.

A dear friend of mine said that another way to dehydrate a toad would be to put it in the oven, leaving the door open and set to a very low heat for a long time. A third option was salt, but no one seemed certain that this would work with an amphibian. In the end, we (Carla, Pedro, and I) traveled to Stockholm by train, to yet another freezer.

I was getting a bit desperate, but the oven was out of the question, as it was a borrowed house (the house of my sister's boyfriend's parents), and it didn't feel right to use their oven for such an operation. But they had a small heater that they used for drying mushrooms (are mushrooms that different from toads?), so every night when we got home I turned it on. I made a small stage for Pedro, to get him as close to the heater as possible. The whole action took place inside a small garden hut. I woke up periodically, taking excursions to the hut in order to check that everything was going well. This meant that I slept very poorly or watched bad late night TV. And we had to turn the system off when we were away. Not Pedro, not I, and not an exhibition are worth burning down the house of my sister's in-laws.

In the end, the exhibition went on without Pedro, although he (or she) spent a few hours in the exhibition space (without leaving the Tupperware). Pedro's travels ended inside the garbage bin. I threw Pedro away on the opening day, after accepting that the process was not efficient enough and convincing myself that the exhibition worked well enough without the toad's presence.

The following day we left Stockholm back to Malmö, then to São Paulo. Crossing the Atlantic without Pedro.