

# Process as Practice: Reflections on a Lecture by Ana Ruiz Galindo

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by Alia Brookshire



Photo courtesy of Ana Paula Ruiz Galindo

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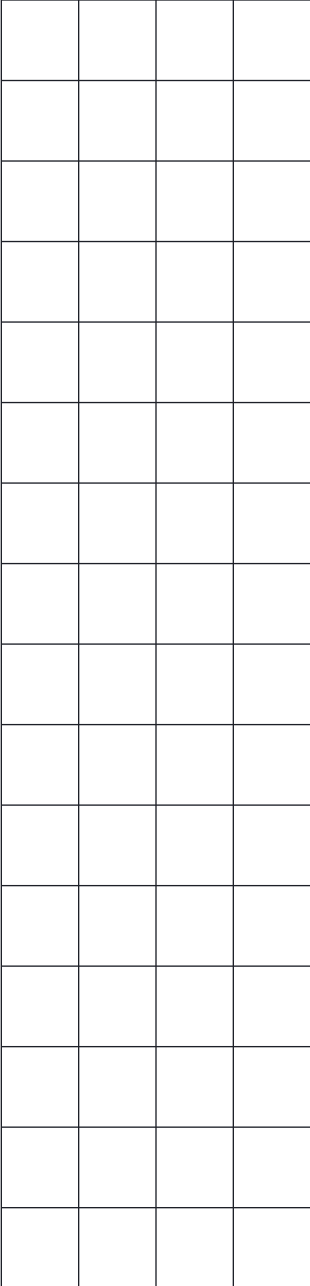


As designers, we not only design the final product of our work, but also how we work. My classmates and I have spent our final year in CCA's Master of Architecture program grappling with developing the methodology of our practices—a system of techniques and strategies that speak to overarching ideas about how we understand our work in a greater context. Pulling inspiration from a diverse range of sources—hometowns, the natural environment, and cultural history, to name a few—we set out to develop architectural forms and working processes that reflect these interests. While embarking on these considerations as a design student, I always appreciate getting insight into how established designers and architects develop their academic interests into a cohesive working practice.



Ana Paula Ruiz Galindo delivering her lecture at CCA  
Photo courtesy of Keith Krumwaide

This was my experience during designer Ana Paula Ruiz Galindo's lecture on Thursday, March 14th, presented as this year's annual Sandra Vivanco Memorial Lecture, co-presented by the Architecture Division and the Critical Ethnic Studies Program at CCA. In her presentation, titled "Relatable Objects and Assemblies," Ruiz Galindo gave the audience a process-oriented window into the design work of Pedro y Juana, her design practice located in Mexico City, which she runs with co-founder Mecky Reuss. She began her talk by stating that, beyond a conventional academic lecture, she hoped to use our time together to reveal the interests that inform her work, in a "non-mathematical, non-imperial" manner. Beyond the aesthetic joy of her work, this journey through the interests that inform Ruiz Galindo's work added a layer of appreciation for the playfulness, conceptual boldness, and cultural context that her work carries.



The first project she shared with us, *Pabellón Archivo*, was first grounded in a material understanding of clay. “Clay has always been here. It is earth, it belongs to all of us,” she stated. She then walked the audience through the Christian scriptures that describe Adam as born from earth, clay, and water, and the historical use of clay pots as effigies. Ruiz Galindo described this context as her guiding framework for the project. Located in Mexico City, *Pabellón Archivo* was the result of winning a 2012 call for public pavilion proposals from Archivo Diseño y Arquitectura. In *Pabellón Archivo*, Ruiz Galindo repeated and stacked the form of a common object—the turned pot—800 times to create a garden installation filled with local Mexican plants. The text from Pedro y Juana’s project description reads, “We chose to use pots as an object of design, to be recreated by us and used as an architecture material. Going back down to earth and being surrounded by earth, adding plants to it to create a living pavilion, that will grow and mold, and when the time comes to tear it down, you can just do it as they did in the old times, break it into little pieces back to the ground.” I was struck by the conceptual clarity of the project, as well as how the project’s material focus connected to both the region’s soil ecology and cultural history, linking clay’s earthen origins to concepts of collective, shared public space.

Throughout her presentation, Ruiz Galindo focused as much on the objects, architecture, and installations she has created, as she did on the guiding ideas that inform her process. *Pabellón Archivo* introduced a theme in her work of interrogating the role of the object, and considering how an object, or assembly of objects, can initiate conversations, questions, and dialogue. The project presented also set the stage for another ongoing theme—a conceptual exploration of the ways architecture replicates nature, and how an object can be used to construct a habitat. “Is it possible for an object to tell a story that goes beyond itself?” she asked.

Another project that stood out to me, and that similarly continued this line of inquiry, is *From the Tropics With Love*, a 2016 installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA), in which Ruiz Galindo designed a hanging indoor garden consisting of hundreds of intricately patterned “plant lamps.” These gold and white hanging planters illuminated the space, as well as the houseplants that they housed, with ornamental detailing that seemed reminiscent of Mexican papel picado. This installation, centrally located within the Museum, was an opportunity for Pedro y Juana to further explore architectural space-making in communal places—environments that Ruiz Galindo described as a “third space”: neither home nor work, private or commercial.



*From the Tropics with Love* by Pedro y Juana at the MCA Chicago  
Photo courtesy of Ana Paula Ruiz Galindo


As an interdisciplinary office, the work that Ruiz Galindo presented spanned from architecture to objects, including projects that had been presented in museums. Ruiz Galindo spoke about what it means to display work in a museum setting, particularly her perspective on the museums' limited capacity to truly preserve or represent culture. Among her exhibited work, this commentary might be most evident in *¡El horizonte es nuestro! (The Horizon is Ours!)*, a diorama displayed in LIGA Space for Architecture in Mexico City in 2019. Through an interactive, multi-sensory sculptural exhibition, Pedro y Juana explored the impossibility of replicating the ephemeral qualities of Mexico City; the heat of walking, the noise of traffic and voices, the smell of street food—all ephemeral experiences that could never be conveyed in their entirety through a museum display. Instead, Pedro y Juana used an assembly of objects to reveal this, such as a veil that attempts to represent Mexico City's afternoon smog, and a potato to deliver smells.

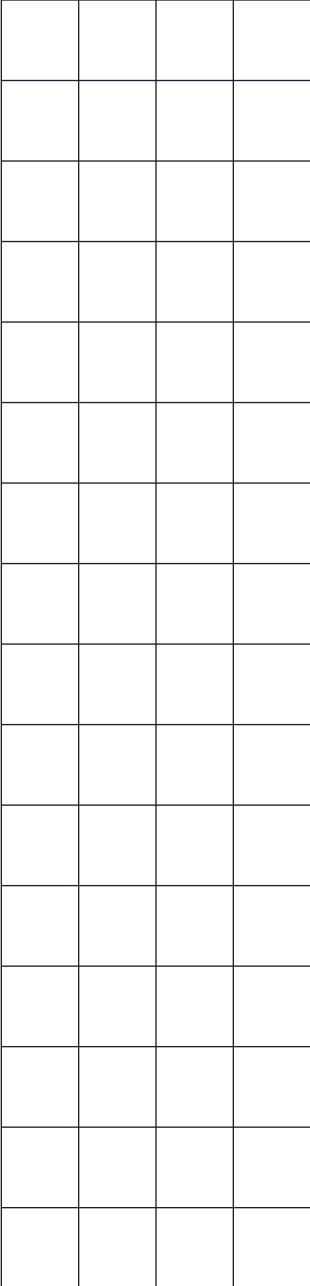
This project particularly resonated with me, as I had the opportunity to travel to Mexico last summer as part of a CCA summer study abroad course, "Material Cultures: Mexico City, Oaxaca, and Beyond." This travel studio, co-instructed by Lisa Findley and Adam Marcus, spent a week in Mexico City, visiting cathedrals, museums, archeological sites, and architecture firms across the city. Despite the amount of sketching, photography, and writing we did, conventional architectural tools couldn't have possibly captured the sensory delight of visiting Mexico City.

This first-hand experience of struggling to convey the urban richness of Mexico City myself made Ruiz Galindo's discussion of *¡El horizonte es nuestro!* feel all the more relevant. I was struck by how Mexico City operates spatially—from the urban scale of lush, plant-filled streets, to vibrant, brightly colored buildings—and its rich history of handcrafted clay, woven, and wooden objects. These are all themes that I see reflected in Ruiz Galindo's work, particularly in her unique balance between conceptual playfulness and social responsibility, as well as her work's cultural commentary through material and historic emphasis.

This is evident in her architectural-scale design work as well. One project, titled *T24*, is located in Colonia Juarez, the neighborhood of Mexico City that Ruiz Galindo and her partner have lived in since initially moving to the city. While looking for work in 2014, they decided to purchase the building and renovate it in order to engage with and give back to the community, hoping to subvert the stereotype of developers' as insensitive and profit-driven. After discovering an adjacent building was a designated historic site, they found themselves working with conflicting influences: strict historical preservation regulations, and the city's desire for increased density and environmental sustainability. The resulting design—a courtyard house inspired by the area's traditional



*Hórana Rama* by Pedro & Juana, presented as part of the Young Architects Program 2019 at MoMA PS1  
Photo courtesy of MoMA PS1. Photo: Rafael Gamo



typologies—left the ground floor facade untouched, instead pushing back upper levels so they remain out of view from the street. Additionally, in response to the neighborhood’s political climate, Pedro y Juana worked with the community to design a children’s playground that would help restore community amenities and agency to the area amidst concerns surrounding gentrification and development.

Beyond the aesthetic delight of seeing Ruiz Galindo’s work, the most influential aspect of hearing her speak was the clarity and passion with which she takes inspiration from history, culture, and the world around her, and translates these influences into a body of work that is playfully pushes back on societal expectations, yielding unexpected, delightful results. In architecture school, I often have experienced the false dichotomy that architects must choose between being socially engaged or conceptually audacious; between creating work that is either beautiful or functional. It’s hard to say that someone could do it all, but having more insight into Ruiz Galindo’s process makes it seem much more possible.

Alia Brookshire (MARCH 2024) received a BA from the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, with work focused on interdisciplinary design, cultural anthropology, and land use planning.