

The artisanal object landscapes by ektor garcia (*1985) are frozen moments within an ongoing process. Using a variety of materials and techniques, the artist creates temporary structures that can be reworked at any time. Set in juxtaposition, the crocheted textiles, copper wire connections, ceramic forms, and metal castings function like free-form poems that constantly generate fresh resonances. For each exhibition, garcia produces new constellations that resist the urge to establish categories and hierarchies. They are punk and queer. The sensual installations break with narrative forms that are intended to convey a certain story without obliviousness to history. Through the materials and symbols, multi-layered content traces can be picked up on without imposing themselves.

The artist's work involves intense physical labor. Countless loops, knots, and fingerprints are evidence of his daily work, in which chaos and logic, connection and detachment exist in parallel. garcia strives for the imperfect, the beauty of the handmade, unique with its flaws. Fragments of the installation in the vaulted cellar were produced partly in Mexico City, the artist's current place of residence, as well as in Zurich, Berlin, Paris, and Venice. In these places, for the past few weeks, garcia has knotted, knitted, modeled, and crocheted daily to produce work for the exhibition nudos de tiempo. Because of his nomadic practice, his art is invariably exposed to new influences. These do not, however, become fixed. Contributing to this openness is the fact that the objects are detached from craft traditions due to the sometimes unusual combinations of materials and techniques. For example, garcia crochets with copper wire, forms resistant objects such as chains from fragile terracotta, or transfers soft materials into bronze using the lost wax process. During the casting process, the original is dipped in wax melts. In order to extract the work fragment, the plaster mold must be destroyed, meaning that the casting can be carried out only once; the result is a unique piece with uncontrollable, surprising formations.

Some of the crochet works on display are reminiscent of the US fiber art movement of the 1960s, which addressed the division of the sexes by means of female-dominated domestic labor. garcia uses the emancipatory power of crochet but expands the feminist material vocabulary through disconcerting connections between material and technique. In the context of feminist movements, the butterfly can be read as a symbol of transformation and freedom. In the Cabaret Voltaire, butterflies made of cut leather, crocheted copper, yarn, or ceramics can be seen. garcia also associates the butterfly with other experiences. He made several visits to the Mariposa Monarca biosphere reserve near Mexico City, which serves as the winter quarters for the monarch butterfly. Countless butterflies fly up to 4,000 kilometers from Canada to Mexico in winter, and make the return journey in spring. These butterflies cross borders in a way that is not possible for many people wanting to enter the US from Mexico. On the other hand, the Spanish word for butterfly, this symbol of transnational freedom, is mariposa—a derogatory term used in Mexico for homosexual men. Here, garcia reclaims the word. His small black leather butterfly displayed on the floor recalls, in its abstracted form, the armor of the Toltec warriors of Tula, who wear the butterfly emblazoned across their chests as a protective shield.

These historical intersections of nature, cultural production, and society are reflected in garcia's use of materials. Ceramic and textile crafts are among the oldest and most important of cultural techniques. Textile products, for example, were used as communication systems by advanced civilizations. The Quipu, a knot script from the Inca Empire, served as a sophisticated counting system and as a simple form of correspondence from the 7th century onwards. Textiles have also been an important medium of communication in more recent history: for example, the Arpilleras, which gave expression to the oppression suffered during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, or the AIDS Memorial Quilt in the US, which commemorates the frequently socially ostracized victims. There are no obvious analogies to this in garcia's work. It remains unclear whether the patterns and shapes follow a specific tradition, spring from the artist's imagination, or come as arbitrary pattern templates sourced from the internet. However, knots, patchwork, material collages, and banners recall the coexistence of indigenous history, folk art, protest movements, and pop cultures.

All of garcia's objects are produced with naturally sourced fabrics and natural dyes. The brownish yarn's color comes from walnut shells. The crimson-red work on the floor comes from Central and South American cochineal insects, whose dyes were supplied to both European royalty and the Vatican to intensify the colors of precious textiles. garcia uses cactus fibers and the tips of water-chestnut seeds to attach barbs to a chain. This makes some objects reminiscent of tools for agriculture or hunting, and also bridles. These interpretations are supported by the lighting, which for brief moments is reminiscent of ethnographic displays but which in the end remains too scattered for that.

garcia always writes his name in lower case. In this way, he recalls US author bell hooks, and the idea that the content of a work should take precedence over its authorship. This negotiation of subject-object relationships and

the breaking of hierarchies runs through his entire body of work. His exhibitions occupy floors, walls, ceilings, and intermediate spaces in equal measure. In their fragmentarily evoked history, the objects are transnational, trans-cultural, and hierarchically vertical. In the tradition of US theorist Eve Sedgwick, a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, rivaling, imitating, withdrawing, attacking, distorting, and other relationships emerge in the juxtaposition.

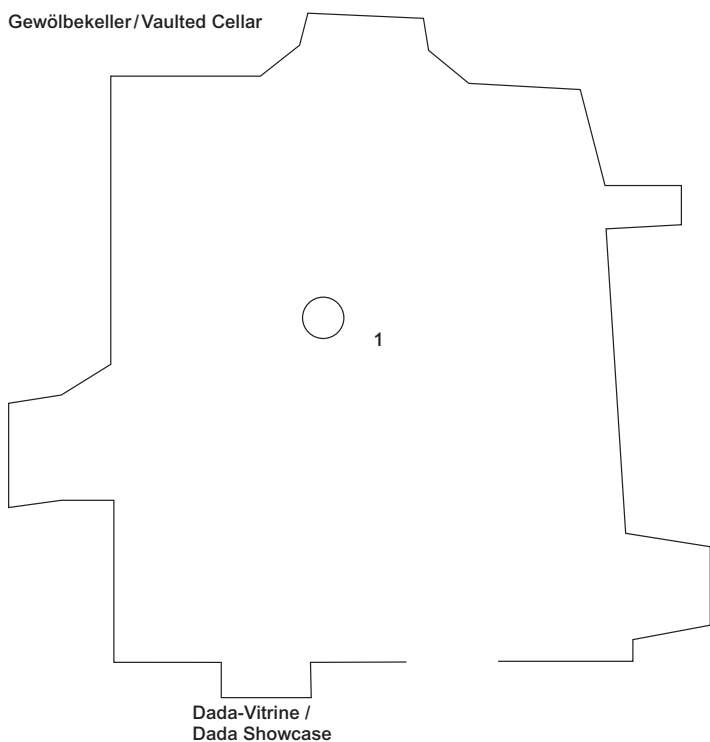
In garcia's work, a literary quality emerges in the production process as well as in each presentation. Like passages of poetry, the stitches of the crochet works and the individual fragments of an entire landscape of objects are strung together. Repetition, rhythm, and superimposition give rise to new meanings that can become knotted and unravel again at any time, as the exhibition title *nudos de tiempo* (knots of time) implies. Here, ektor garcia may be following the sculptor Barbara Chase-Riboud, who states in her book *Everytime a Knot Is Undone, a God Is Released* that each unraveling of a knot creates a new meaning.

It is precisely in this play with norms, and the simultaneity of openness and the search for meaning, that garcia's practice finds a connection with the Dada legacy. The Dadaists moved between art and non-art, planning and chance, sense and nonsense, chaos and order, process and manifestation in their desire to overcome conventions and find new forms of expression. To this end, they made use of materials that had not previously been assigned to art, and committed themselves to process, to coexistence, and to drawing on cultural products of non-European cultures. Despite their progressive stance at the time, there were blind spots in their actions. They appropriated "the Other" for their own purposes, and ignored the fact that their reference objects became available to them through colonization.

The show at Cabaret Voltaire is ektor garcia's first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland. It is curated by Fabian Flückiger and Salome Hohl in close collaboration with the artist.

ektor garcia earned a BFA at the Art Institute of Chicago and an MFA at Columbia University. He has had solo exhibitions at the Henry Art Gallery (Seattle), Empty Gallery (Hong Kong), Progetto (Lecce), the Sculpture Center (New York), and the Museum Folkwang (Essen). His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including the Hangzhou Triennial of Fiber Art (China), the New Museum (New York), El Museo del Barrio (New York), and Prospect New Orleans.

Gewölbekeller/Vaulted Cellar



Glossary of the individual exhibits

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ektor garcia
nudos de tiempo, 2022
mixed media installation
courtesy the artist

Erdgeschoss / Ground Floor