

Tezontle

PEANA

ABOUT

Tezontle founders Carlos H. Matos (b.1983, Mexico City) and Lucas Cantú (b.1982, Monterrey), who live and work in Mexico City, established their joint practice in 2015. Oscillating between the endeavours of an architecture firm and that of an art practice, Tezontle creations are grounded in an attunement to the ways in which the built environment reflects fragments of history, and thus are imbued with all sorts of myths, constructs and inventions. With intensive material experimentation, they have constructed a distinct imagery that refers to a bucolic utopia, at once modernist, pre-Hispanic and primitive. The artists' process includes curating found objects with self-made ones, generating innovative, formal and material narratives. Their method is deliberately independent of scale, postulating that when scale is rendered irrelevant, the sculptural becomes the architectural and vice versa.

The duo collaborated in the Architectural Association's experimental concrete workshop 'AAVS Las Pozas', which was founded by Matos in 2014. The project took place in the Huasteca Jungle across four summers until 2017, and served as a research platform that forged links between craft and culture in the town of Xilitla, SLP.

Tezontle has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions at Friedman Benda, New York, at the MARCO Museum in Monterrey, LIGA, CDMX, Museo Tamayo, CDMX, and an off-site exhibition by PEANA curated by José Esparza Chong, presented during CONDO Complex in CDMX. Public works include 'Tenaza' a monumental sculpture commissioned by the XIII Havana Biennial in Havana. They have participated in different residencies like La Casa Park in New York, Casa Wabi in Puerto Escondido and 'Tu casa es mi casa', Richard Neutra's VDL House in Los Angeles, amongst others.





LIVE AND WORK

CDMX, MX

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2021 Fair Shelter, LIGA; CDMX, MX.

2020 Frieze New York; KASMIN & PEANA; New York, USA

2017 Rise and Fall at Richard Neutra's VDL House; Los Angeles, USA.

2017 Piedras Vivas, PEANA; Monterrey, MX.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023 Everything Here is Volcanic, curated by Mario Ballesteros, Friedman Benda, New York, USA

2022 El Ensemble del Ocaso, Museo MARCO; Monterrey, MX.

2021 OTRXS MUNDXS, Museo Tamayo; CDMX, MX.

2020 Recover / Uncover, Masa Galería; CDMX, MX.

2019 Second life; Curated by José Esparza Chong Cuy presented at CONDO Complex CDMX 2019; PEANA Off-site; CDMX, MX.

2019 Historia Natural; Gate of Creation by Tadao Ando (CRGS); Monterrey, MX.

2019 Collective/Collectible, MASA; CDMX, MX.

2018 Prima Materia, PEANA Off-site; New York, USA.

2018 Murales Temporales, Karen Huber; CDMX, MX.

2018 Almost Solid Light, Kasmin; New York, USA.

MONUMENTAL AND PUBLIC ART PROJECTS

2023 Llamado a cuatro campanas, Luis Barragán's Casa Gilardi; CDMX, MX.

2022 Soundroom, Tezontle Studio; CDMX, MX.

2021 Terma El Papelillo; Puerto Escondido, MX.

2019 Tenaza; The Havana Biennial; Havana, CU.

RESIDENCIES

2020 Casa Wabi;; Oaxaca, MX.

2019 Residency Unlimited; New York, NY.

2018 Centro Experimental Chumilla Wilfredo Prieto Studio; Havana, CU.

2017 Fountainhead Residency; Miami, USA.

2017 Tu casa es mi casa, Richard Neutra's VDL House; Los Angeles, USA.

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

2023 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; San Francisco, USA.

Selected Projects

Everything Here is Volcanic

Friedman Benda; New York, USA. 2023

El Ensemble del Ocaso

MARCO; Monterrey, MX. 2022

Fair Shelter

LIGA; CDMX, MX. 2021

Terma “El Papelillo”

El Papelillo; Puerto Escondido, MX. 2020

Otrxs Mudxs

Museo Tamayo; CDMX, MX. 2020-2021

Agua 210

Second Life, PEANA Off-site; CDMX, MX. 2019

Tenaza

13th Havana Biennial; Havana, CU. 2019

Rise and Fall

Richard Neutra's VDL House; Los Angeles, USA. 2017

Piedras Vivas

PEANA; Monterrey, MX. 2017



Everything Here is Volcanic

Friedman Benda; New York, USA. 2023

Curated by Mario Ballesteros, the exhibition sparks from a statement by the radical Swiss architect Hannes Meyer, who lived in Mexico for over a decade from 1938 to 1949. "Everything here (in Mexico) is volcanic", he wrote, bewitched by an unexpected yet somehow familiar mountainous land, entangled in deep sociopolitical change, in a letter to his friend and fellow architect Hans Schmidt. Meyer was referring to both the unpredictable geological conditions and the surrounding lava landscape, but also to the challenge of introducing an orthodox modernism in Mexico, a supercharged and superposed culture with deep roots and atemporal deviances, where an obsession with the past lingers in the drive for the future.

The exhibition's touchstone works include a peculiar take on a traditional vernacular Mexican kitchen by the art/architecture studio Tezontle. More precisely; we distinguish a comal stove created by the duo that praises the simplicity of the endless rural kitchens which they studied during their time living in Oaxaca in 2020. In this case, the vernacular appliance revolves around the ritual of preparing and eating a taco.

Presented in a spatial array structured around notions of encounter, ritual and dream, the exhibition slides and shifts and solidifies like magma overflowing from a mutant material culture.





El Ensamble del Ocaso

Museo MARCO, Monterrey, MX. 2022

The work that Tezontle presents in this exhibition, entitled Call to Four Bells, operates interactively, detonating a sequential burst after being activated by pressing the buttons on its side. Sitting vertically against the horizon beyond the museum walls, this piece resounds timbrally like a call on the landscape near and far, alluding not only to the difference in scales between natural and man-made structures, but also to the multitude of bell towers that exist in the colonial town of downtown Monterrey. Called Four Bells, it also links with previous Tezontle pieces (Undisclosed location: Machine for the Intermittent Hermit, 2020; Fair Shelter, 2021) through a shared narrative universe, in which each structure speculates on the inhabitants and its own users, outside of today's urbanized world.





Fair Shelter

LIGA, CDMX, MX. 2021

This immersive installation works around Tezontle's investigation titled – El Sinseñalismo ((life without signal), which explores the concepts of disconnectivity and deceleration and its relationship with life, art and architecture. Through this endeavor Tezontle seeks to suggest a reconnection with simplicity and essence.

Fair Shelter, is a living space for a fictional explorer: in which a 'signal-less' life can be sustained. A diorama of sorts, this space seeks to display this character's life by means of a series of sculptures in the form of objects and artifacts that represent and symbolize the daily routine of the user. Elements that recall, through their interactions with the most basic forms of life, a way of relating and reconnecting with nature, with the essential, while questioning our contemporary way of living – behavioral patterns, customs, and uses we take for granted. By creating an ephemeral space, the installation also explores themes of temporality in architecture, calling into question the very notion of permanence and property.





Terma “El Papelillo”

El Papelillo; Puerto Escondido, MX. 2020

Tezontle spent the early months of the 2020 quarantine lockdown living and working on the coast of Oaxaca, Mexico. During that time, they built “El Papelillo”: a sculptural sauna/temazcal named after a local red tree that continuously sheds its skin just as humans use sweat lodges to purify and renew body, mind and spirit.





OTRXS MUNDXS

MUSEO TAMAYO, CDMX, MX. 2020-2021

OTRXS MUNDXS is a group exhibition that reviews and articulates the work of a heterogeneous and multicultural group of more than forty artists who work individually and collectively in CDMX. Through four thematic nuclei (I. Capitalism and domination, II. Seriality, identity and obliteration, III. Entropy, speculation and visualization and IV. Body and materiality), this exhibition presents recent work and special commissions that reveal urgent, representative discourses of an artistic community that internalize the paradigms and failures of late capitalism. OTRXS MUNDXS focuses on highlighting otherness: the participations result in artistic microcosms that question pre-established and hegemonic conceptions, or that solidify alternative visions about what it means to make art from or from CDMX.

In response to the museum's invitation, Tezontle transformed its central atrium into an installation titled "Undisclosed Location: Machine for the Intermittent Hermit", a territory in which a living space and other domestic objects become a monument to either a distant past or a futuristic ruin. Inspired by the ruins of colonial hermitages in the surrounding areas of CDMX, a seven meter tall habitable space, tools and domestic artifacts suggests the existence of a timeless archetype. The intermittent hermit becomes an invisible but real presence, embodying the artists' reflections and concerns, and inviting the viewer to meditate on the possibility of an alternative way of living, removed from the city and its anxieties.



Agua 210

At Second Life, PEANA Off-site; CDMX, MX. 2019

In 2017, members of Tezontle occupied the housing of what was the Brauer residence (1955-2018) and transformed it into their studio. During the 10 months of occupation, they rescued photographs, footage, and fragments of the same architecture, from which they developed a series of works titled Agua 210.

This project was exhibited for the first time in Second Life, an exhibition that presented itself as a case study that looked into the legal framework of heritage and legacy curated by José Esparza Chong Cuy. Presented at the iconic Mobius House of architect Ernesto Gómez Gallardo, built from 1974-1978 and which is now for sale, this curatorial exercise brought forth questions concerning the politics of preservation of significant contributions towards the built environment in a crucial moment of “limbo,” where there are no laws in place to protect their ongoing existence. The exhibition was also an opportunity to visit the house and studio of the Mexican modernist architect Ernesto Gómez Gallardo, which was open to the public for the first time.

On September 28th, 2019 an open panel took place to discuss built heritage. Participants: Mario Ballesteros, Ana Pérez Escoto, Dolores Martínez Orralde, Carlos H. Matos, and Pedro Reyes. Moderated by José Esparza Chong Cuy.





AGUTAB
2101



Tenaza

13th Havana Biennial; Havana, CU. 2019

On June 29th, Tezontle completed 'Tenaza', a site-specific project commissioned for the 2019 Havana Biennial.

Standing 6 Meters tall, it takes formal elements from Eclecticism and Cuban Art Deco to create a piece inspired by the life of the porticos of the mansions of this tropical city. After 4 months of construction and more than 40 cubic meters of concrete, Tenaza is now permanently located and open to the public right below the iconic Hermanos Almejeiras Hospital in Havana's Malecon, between the historic center and the uptown Vedado neighborhood.

Tezontle was selected by the curators of the Wilfredo Lam Contemporary Art Center in Cuba to be part of the selection of artists who would exhibit at the Havana Biennial. Because of the constructive and conceptual character of Tezontle's proposal, the organizers suggested the piece reside permanently in the historic city, which has seen few additions and changes in many decades.

'Tenaza' generates a new destination within the iconic Malecon of Havana. Like a forgotten infrastructural element, a piece of historical ruin or an abstract monument, it intrigues and invites the viewer to inhabit it. The stairs leading up to the interior of it allow the curious passerby to explore the structure from the outside in, discovering a place where they can sit and rest. Only a few days after its completion, it was constantly being used as a gathering point by locals of all ages.

Inside the monumental structure there are approximately 10 cubic meters of improvised aggregate – mostly rubble from the many collapsed buildings in the neighboring area of Habana Vieja. It was a hard challenge to source enough materials to complete the piece in such a short time and scarce context. The limited availability of materials outside the controlled monopoly of the government and the black market, pushed Tezontle to find improvised ways to add volume to the piece.

This piece is testament to the perseverance of Lucas Cantú, Carlos H. Matos, and all the people that made it possible – the construction workers, the arts commission who supported the project throughout the process, and specially Dr. Fernando Martinera, a Cuban scientist that had been developing an ecological concrete for more than 20 years between Switzerland and Cuba, and who allowed Tezontle to make Tenaza the very first large-scale structure in the world built with this new technology. Called LC3, this new cement reduces carbon emissions by 40% by replacing the clinker component with processed clay giving the monument its characteristic earthy color.





Rise and Fall

Richard Neutra's VDL House; Los Angeles, USA. 2017

Through their intervention at Richard Neutra's VDL house in LA, Tezontle appropriated this fragile and humble residence by converting it into a protective bunker based on a narrative given to the duo by Los Angeles novelist Aris Janigian. Exploring the ideals of 'integración plástica' Tezontle barricades the glass pavilion by reviving Carlos Merida's murals for Mario Pani's Multifamiliar Juarez, that collapsed on the 1985 earthquake in CDMX.

This installation was part of 'Tu casa es mi casa' a program that brought together two modernist houses in Los Angeles and CDMX via the exchange of narrative texts. The exhibition asked three LA-based authors to write a narrative piece about the Neutra VDL House in the form of a letter to a Mexican artist or architect, who responded with a site-specific installation at the Neutra VDL House. This exhibition was curated by Mario Ballesteros, Andrea Dietz, Sarah Lorenzen, and Mimi Zeiger.





Piedras Vivas

PEANA; Monterrey, MX. 2017.

In their debut solo exhibition, Piedras Vivas, CDMX-based collaborative duo Tezontle offer works that function between found object and sculpture, cast and form, archaeology and invention. Revealing traces of their fabrication, the works in the exhibition point to the active and composite nature of national and cultural narratives, history being always as much an aggregate of fiction as that of reality.

Enacting a quotidian archaeology, Tezontle collect objects in and around CDMX, which then find themselves variously arranged on their studio's worktable. These smaller, found objects share space with larger-scale sculptures produced via a manual and labor intensive casting process.

Casting allows Tezontle to think monolithically, through the simultaneously whole and composite, drawing connections between both disparate aesthetic disciplines and cultural generations. The result is geological artifacts untethered to a sole temporality.

Looking to Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican artifacts and mid-twentieth century Mexican architecture, Tezontle combine these historical reference points in the production of a hybridized culture, one in which excavated and imagined past alike hold sway. Populated by monolithic, geometrical forms equally suited to both ancient and modern aesthetic landscapes, this mixed culture is distinctly Mexican, married by shared terrain. Tezontle themselves borrow their moniker from a reddish volcanic rock native to Central Mexico, first used by the Mexica civilization to construct dwellings and monuments, and later by Spanish colonists who built their own settlements with the rubble of Tenochtitlan. Buildings erected in the twentieth century bore a mixture of tezontle and concrete—that most characteristically modern of materials—as a newly modernized Mexico looked to the Pre-Hispanic past in order to envision a national future.

In Piedras Vivas, artworks disclose their tools and methods of fabrication, intended sculptures displayed alongside empty molds and synthetic materials their organic referents. Like a puzzle, the viewer is led to make connections between positive and negative space, nature and facsimile, reconstructing the duo's process as though exhibition space was archaeological site. *Risco*, for example, is a monolithic slab comprised of concrete mixed with an aggregate of imitation tezontle fabricated by the artists. On a shelf nearby, the actual stone sits. Another work, *Crater*, sees a ruddy, ovoid form in relationship with its mold, a hollow bearing the stains and colors of previous castings. Placed within the gallery, this unintended artwork becomes a sculpture in its own right. Additional molds, used to produce other, absented sculptures, are positioned on a plywood work table, recalling its correlate in the duo's studio. Leaving behind dents and impressions like ghosts, the molds evoke history through suggestion and void.

A series of pebbles, both found and fabricated, also play between simulacrum and referent, though now more directly engaging issues of scale. The found pebbles are presented on a concrete shelf, some held tightly together with an industrial rubber band. Displayed in this way, the objects come to resemble magical talismans or ancient artifacts, or perhaps the sort of Mesoamerican souvenirs of dubious origin readily found and purchased in local street markets. Alongside these objects are sculptures cast in pigmented concrete, which echo the pebble forms in a larger scale. These *Piedras* are installed resting upon and held upright by their mother molds, which take on the role of plinths, extending their support outside the studio and into the space and time of exhibition.

Mapping an archaeological landscape of their own design, Tezontle yield a past that sits alongside our present, filling with fantasy gaps lost to memory. If history is the mold through which we fashion our collective future, Tezontle's work leads us to consider that its aggregates are a mixed bag, and a culture's monuments those which it resolves to make for itself.





PEANA

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