

Lucas Cantú

PEANA

Lucas Cantú (b. 1982, Monterrey). Lives and works in Mexico City. Trained as an architect, he uses sculpture, installation and experimental architecture to develop projects that are firmly grounded in expansive material exploration and construction processes. Through his works, Cantú conducts research into his self-developed concept *Sinseñalismo* (life without signal), questioning the interrelation between human experience and the outdoors. These projects arise from a formal and personal language through which Cantú generates utopian and dystopian scenarios.

Cantú was a tutor at the AA Beton Machine satellite school. The program took place at Edward James' surrealist garden in Las Pozas, Xilitla S.P., and served as a platform to investigate the empirical techniques of concrete, as well as to draw connections between the site and the layered history of monumental sculpture in Mexico. Cantú, together with Matos Carlos H. Matos, formed *Tezontle* in 2016, a collaborative project which produces research-lead work based on an array of aesthetic and historical references. With intensive material experimentation, they have constructed a distinct imagery which refers to a bucolic utopia, at once modernist, pre-Hispanic and primitive.

Through his solo practice, Cantú has participated in several exhibitions and projects such as *A Stubborn* and *a Hermit Walk Into a Bar*, Casa Nancarrow; Mexico City, MX; *Tea Ahorita* at Studio IMA, Mexico City, MX; *Retrato de un Artista*, PEANA, Mexico City, MX; and *Por debajo del árbol*, PRAXIS, Mexico City, MX. His works as part of *Tezontle* have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in places such as *Friedman Benda* in New York, US; *Museo MARCO* in Monterrey, MX; *LIGA* in Mexico City, MX; *Museo Tamayo* in Mexico City, MX; *Kasmin Gallery*, New York, NY and *Richard Neutra's VDL House* in Los Angeles, CA. Public works include '*Tenaza*' a monumental sculpture commissioned by the XIII Havana Biennial in Havana, CU; and



LIVES AND WORKS

CDMX, MX.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2025 Material Art Fair Vol. 11; CDMX, MX

2024 Salt & Pepper mallet, DECODE Group show: SAL & PIMIENTA, MARCO;
MTY, MX

A Stubborn and a Hermit Walk into a Bar, Casa Nancarrow; CDMX, MX

Casa Ideal, curated by Enrique Giner, Proyectos Multipropósito; CDMX, MX.

2023 Tea Ahorita, Studio IMA; CDMX, MX.

Everything Here is Volcanic, Tezontle Studio, Curated by Mario Ballesteros,
Friendman Benda; New York, US.

2022 Soundroom, Tezontle Studio; CDMX, MX.

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

Untitled (awareness artifact for a small room), Soundplus; CDMX, MX.

Retrato de Un Artista / Portrait of an Artist, PEANA; CDMX, MX.

Por debajo del árbol, PRAXIS Studio of Architect Agustín Hernández,
PEANA Off-site; CDMX, MX.

El Ensemble del Ocaso, Tezontle Studio, Museo MARCO; Monterrey, MX.

2021 OTRXS MUNDXS, Tezontle Studio, curated by Humberto Moro, Museo
Tamayo; CDMX, MX.

Fair Shelter, Tezontle Studio; LIGA; CDMX, MX.

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

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

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

Collective/ Collectible, Tezontle Studio, MASA; CDMX, MX.

2018 Prima Materia, Tezontle Studio, PEANA Off-site; New York, US.

Murales Temporales, Tezontle Studio, Karen Huber; CDMX, MX.

Almost Solid Light, Tezontle Studio, Kasmin; New York, US.

MONUMENTAL AND PUBLIC ART PROJECTS

2023 Casa Monte; Puerto Escondido, MX.

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

2022 Soundroom, Tezontle Studio; CDMX, MX.

2021 Terma El Papelillo, Tezontle Studio, Puerto Escondido, MX.

2019 Tenaza, Tezontle Studio, The Havana Biennial; Havana, CU.

RESIDENCIES

2024 2024 Fundación Pro Cuatro Ciénegas; COAH, MX

2022 LACASAPARK; New York, US.

2020 Casa Wabi; Oaxaca, MX.

2019 Residency Unlimited; New York, US.

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

2017 Fountainhead Residency; Miami, USA.

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

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

2022 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Tezontle Studio; San Francisco, US.

Selected Projects

A Stubborn and a Hermit Walk Into a Bar

Casa Nancarrow; CDMX, MX. 2024

Infusion Game

Studio IMA, CDMX, MX. 2023

Retrato de un Artista / Portrait of an Artist

PEANA; CDMX, MX. 2022

El Ensemble del Ocaso

MARCO; Monterrey, MX. 2022

Por Debajo del Árbol

PRAXIS, PEANA Off-site; CDMX, MX. 2022

Fair Shelter

LIGA; CDMX, MX. 2021

Otrxs Mudxs

Museo Tamayo; CDMX, MX. 2020-2021

Terma “El Papelillo”

El Papelillo; Puerto Escondido, MX. 2020



A Stubborn and a Hermit Walk Into a Bar

Casa Nancarrow; CDMX, MX. 2024

For this show, 24 artists were invited to participate with works that engage in a dialogue with the humanistic ideals that led to the creation of the historic Casa-Estudio Nancarrow, designed by O’Gorman in the late 1940s. The exhibition’s artists coexist with the ghosts that inhabit the house, reminding us that one can surrender, one can give up, but artistic production remains as the last beam of hope for humanity.

The exhibition’s title, A Stubborn Man and a Hermit Walk into a Bar, refers to the personalities of both artists—the stubborn one (O’Gorman) insisting on modern architecture even after retiring from the profession, resuming it precisely with the Nancarrow house to continue his socialist ideas, and the hermit (Nancarrow) isolating himself from the world, finding in his compositions and musical experimentation the essence of humanity. Following the structure of a joke, the exhibition title is the first part where two personalities are juxtaposed, and what happens after that interaction is left to the audience’s interpretation upon viewing the exhibition.



Infusion Game

Studio IMA, CDMX, MX. 2023

The steeping artifact re-imagines the Gong-Fu Tea ceremony as an infusion game. Sharing a name and principles with the martial art Kung-Fu, each step requires focus, precision and awareness. Stored around the base of the sculpture there are eight canisters, each containing a different Tea hand picked by curator Su Wu. Commencing the game with the lighting of the fire and a roll of the dice, the guest allows luck to decide their tea. Each tea has a distinct steeping process and series of surprises, relating to the story of the leaves. Throughout the ritual, small moments invite us to slow down, centring our awareness on the details of the artefact, and the subtlety of the tea.





Installation View
Infusion Game,
Studio IMA, CDMX, MX. 2023.

Retrato de un Artista / Portrait of an Artist

PEANA, CDMX, MX. 2022

Retrato de Un Artista / Portrait of an Artist is the first exhibition in PEANA's new space in Mexico City with the participation of Adrián S. Bará, Ana Mazzei, ASMA, Carlos H. Matos, Manuela de Laborde in collaboration with Luis Orozco Madero, Manuela García, Lucas Cantú, Rodrigo Hernández and Ximena Garrido-Lecca. Each artist presents a different strategy that responds to the concept of the portrait, linked to the space and its architecture. By definition, Portrait, means to retract or to bring something from the past into the present - like a memory - in order to describe a person or a place. The exhibition seeks to break down the portrait format and to rethink it from a new standpoint.

An exercise in attention is present in Lucas Cantú's Llama Ahora / Call Now, an electromechanical bell at the entrance to the gallery. Its three buttons arranged in a triangular shape detonate different sound sequences. The translating instrument of this call, located inside, is a hybrid sculpture, installation and artifact, made of glass bells and an aluminum mechanism. On the one hand, it has a utilitarian purpose that announces one's arrival, but it also seeks that in the emission of sound and light, it is a call to register one's presence.

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Installation View
Retrato de un Artista / Portrait of an Artist,
PEANA, CDMX, MX. 2022.

El Ensemble 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.







Por Debajo del Árbol

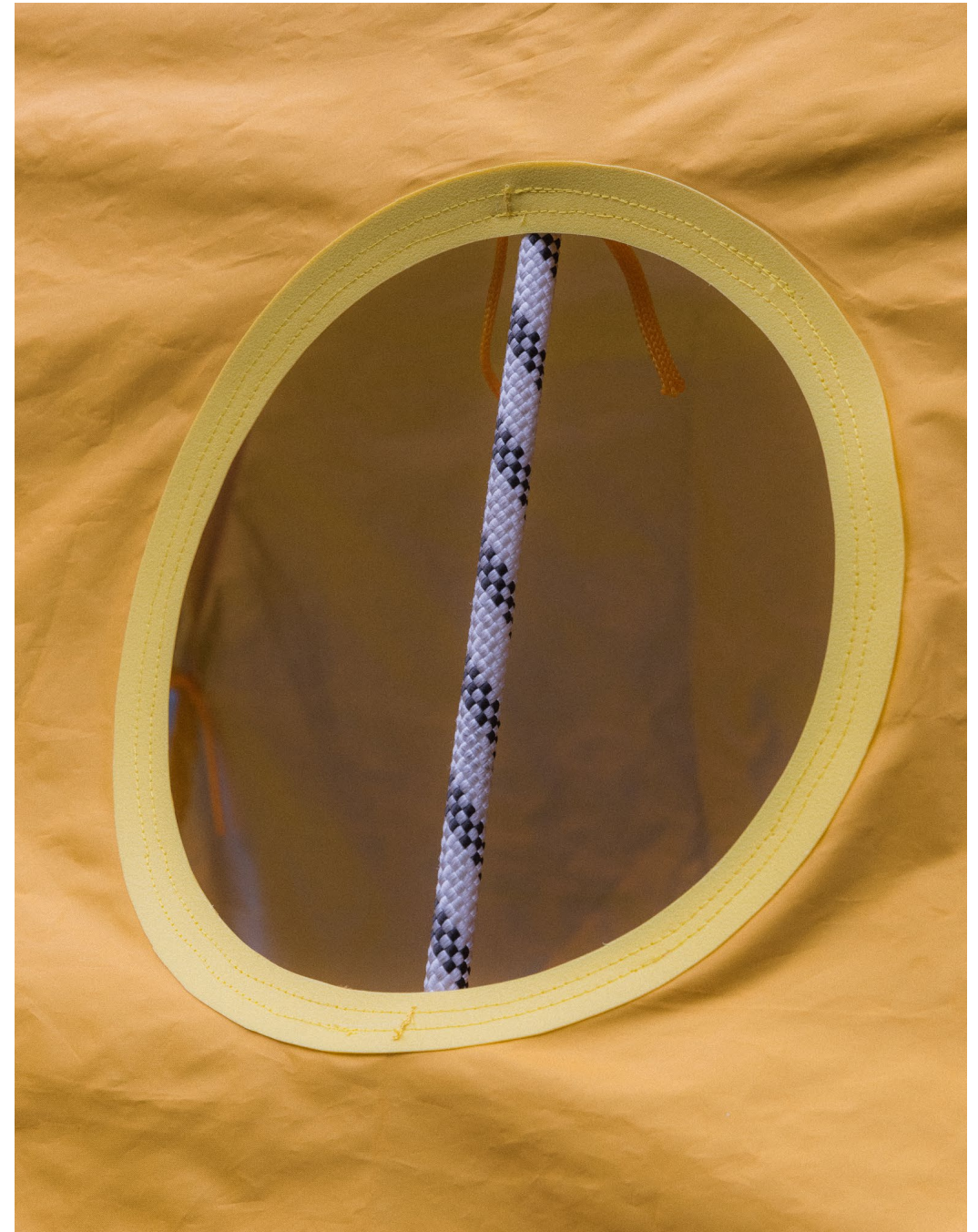
PRAXIS, PEANA OFF-SITE; CDMX, MX. 2022

PRAXIS Taller de Arquitectura Agustín Hernández opened its doors for the first time to the public with the exhibition Por debajo del árbol (What Lies Under the Tree); a project presented by PEANA and curated by Ana Pérez Escoto and Carlota Pérez-Jofre, bringing together contemporary works of fifteen artists in dialogue with Agustín Hernández's universe.

Our evolutionary nature has forced us to seek a psychological sense of security and protection -and to build spaces that allow it- in order to put aside our vigilant instinct and reach deep states of sleep. Built from a set of prisms and pyramids that seem impenetrable, Agustín Hernández's workshop, known as PRAXIS (1975), floats among the trees at a height of forty meters. With steel roots that go underground and replicating the principles of compression and tension of the branches of the ocotes, the Mexican architect built the perfect sanctuary to be able to "dream his research out loud". Given the opportunity to observe his private world, his discordant ideas become heartfelt confessions. Monumentality breaks down into vulnerabilities. What universes unfold behind these secret passageways? What creatures inhabit this unique tree house? How has the passage of time revealed certain flaws in the matrix? matrix? It is here that reality becomes dreamlike.

Space and Thought: New Perspectives on the Tree House (2022) is a phenomenological project by Lucas Cantú that seeks to dialogue and overlap with the architect's archive, as well as to question the possibilities of inhabiting the uninhabitable: camping in mid air, suspended from a concrete tree to visualize the world through a disconnected retreat.







Installation view
Espacio y Pensamiento: Nuevas perspectivas sobre la casa del árbol
Por Debajo del Árbol,
PRAXIS, PEANA OFF-SITE; CDMX, MX. 2022

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.





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.





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.





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.



PEANA

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