



After more than a decade showing his work in NYC, MARTÍ CORMAND has presented his drawn anthology of the conceptual art movement “Formalizing Their Concept” in Madrid. A group of iconic conceptual works from the 1960s and 1970s are rendered in graphite on paper with extraordinary precision. A very personal drawing technique described by him as mere surgery. The pencil is a scalpel and for this project in particular, conceptual art work is on the operating table.

Martí is one of the four Spanish artists of his generation with a piece at the MoMA, acquired in 2005. His work is a testimony to the degradation of certainty. For the past two years, he has been observing and rendering iconic works of the conceptual art movement. His favourite subject is the study of conviction. He was born in Barcelona and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

What made you decide to move to NY more than 10 years ago?

My first idea was to spend some time in Berlin; it was cheaper than Barcelona and with a big community of artists, and an exciting place to be. But a friend of a friend, his name is Sergi like you, came to my studio in Barcelona in 1998 with Josée Bienvenu, who just opened a gallery in Tribeca. She invited me to be in a group show and from there we started working together. I came to NY for few months in 2002 to finish my second solo show at Josée's gallery. During this time I met my wife and a few months in NY turned into 13 years and counting...

What are your memories of your studio in El Raval and your youth in Barcelona?

Barcelona was the place where everything started for me. As a child I had the privilege to be surrounded by culture, particularly by art as my great grandparents were painters and sculptors. My mother, Fina Rifà, is a fantastic illustrator as is my brother Bernat Cormand. After art school, I worked as an assistant for the painter Eduard Arranz-Bravo. He introduced me to the possibility of making art as a way of life. During that period my studio was in El Raval. I liked the mix of realities in the neighbourhood, people from everywhere trying to make a life for themselves. The last time I was on my old street, Nou de la Rambla, I saw that the neighbourhood had changed and become more touristic. The only place left was a cafe called "Alehop" with a wonderful couple still running it.

You are focused on the remakes of works from the 60's and 70's. Why is that?

Although I am not a conceptual artist, I am very interested in conceptual art from the 60s and 70s because the artists had clear convictions about what they wanted to say and how to say it. Because the idea was more important than the material used to create the work, they tended to use the quickest means and mediums to communicate. By drawing their art works slowly and with deliberation, I am formalizing their concepts, materializing the immaterial and giving formality to the ephemeral nature of their concepts.

How was the process to become determined to create the series "Formalizing Their Concept"?

I wanted to give a present to a friend, an artist, and I decided that a nice idea would be to make a drawing of one of his works, like a mirror of himself. I ended up not doing it and gave him something else but that was the seed that later grew into the tree that is this project.

What was the criteria to select the works that you have copied?

The artist Sol Lewitt distinguished between conceptual art with a lower case "c" (his own work) and conceptual art with a capital "C" to refer to what writer Lucy Lippard called "ultra-conceptual". She said "conceptual art for me means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious, and/or dematerialized". I select iconic conceptual art, the work with a capital "C", to focus on the process of recreating these works, so that the process itself becomes the idea. While doing research sometimes I discover less well-known conceptual art that is in alliance with previous work.

Who are the artists that inspired this series?

They are all artists I admire; Joseph Kosuth, Sherrie Levine, Cildo Meireles, Marcel Broothaers, Luís Camnitzer, Liliana Porter, Yoko Ono, Lawrence Weiner and others I discovered while doing research such as Eleanor Antin's *fantastic 100 Boots* project, Waltercio Caldas and his magic artist book "Velazquez", Anthony Caro, Horacio Zabala, and Christine Kozlov. Now I'm thinking to do something with Catalan conceptual artist Antoni Muntadas' work.

Why do you look back to the work of artists from that precise period of time?

When I look at their work I have the feeling of looking at the present. Many conceptual artists working today refer to the work made in the 60's and 70's and many institutions are mounting exhibitions on the subject like the one at the *Brooklyn Museum in 2012 Materializing Six Years: Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*, the show at *Hunter College last year Open Work in Latin America, New York & Beyond*, Luis Camnitzer's retrospective at El Museo del Barrio in 2011 and Cildo Meireles' retrospective at Reina Sofia in Madrid in 2013.

Your work is the opposite of what conceptual art is considered to be. You dedicate time and effort to be precise at capturing the light and the details of each object. Do you set up your own rules?

Yes, I do on the selection of work. I select the iconic ones and the less iconic works I've discovered. Then I draw them in different lighting conditions, sometimes showing different moments of the making of the work or sometimes, though not as often, changing mediums.

You are known for assuming the opposite attitude of the Conceptualists, focusing on time and attention to details. Let me know more about the process of copying the original work of Luis Camnitzer's *Coca-Cola Bottle Filled with Coca-Cola*, 1973.

This is one of my favourite pieces from Luis Camnitzer. I decided to materialize the process of making the piece; showing three stages to a finished drawing in three separate works as if time had stopped at three points during the making of the work.

I am also curious about Yoko Ono's Grapefruit, First Edition, 1964 piece. Why did you choose it?

Grapefruit is a well-known example of early conceptual art in the form of an artist's book. I like the shape of the book - it's like a brick or a building. When I finished the drawing of the book, I realized the pages couldn't be turned. Grapefruit was the beginning of the artist's book movement, which really expanded in the 70s when Lucy Lippard and Sol Lewitt and others opened Printed Matter, an artist bookstore in NY. My wife Celeste is an artist and very much into making artist books, so I have become aware of how much this movement has grown over the years. Digital technology has made self-publishing more possible and events like the annual artist book fair at MoMA's PS1 help bring this work to light. It was at this fair last year that I was able to handle an early edition of Grapefruit and see some of her original "event scores", instructions and language-based work, including "Let people copy or photograph your paintings. Destroy the originals."

Another theme in your recent work is the use and waste of containers and boxes, which I find extraordinary. You replicate the surface of a discarded cardboard box on newly minted cardboard. Which was the process to get inspired by this?

My studio is in Dumbo (Brooklyn), which is where corrugated cardboard was invented and manufactured. Today there are a lot of recycling businesses in the area where you'd see great stacks of used cardboard bundled up. So it seems I was surrounded by cardboard. Stacked up in piles cardboard is just waste but seen individually each piece has its own biography: cuts, marks, ripped corners, which intrigued me to make portraits of them.

When drawing for so many hours, do you need complete silence in your studio?

It depends on the nature of the work. Sometimes I need silence and sometimes I listen to the radio usually the news, interviews, music, etc. I also listen to videos on YouTube. It is incredible how much you can find on there these days, and it has to do with the process of getting lost. You start with a clear idea of what you want to listen to then one links to another until you end up in a place that you did not expect. So I may start the day listening to a program on the Kurdish women's resistance and end the day listening to another on the life of kangaroos in Australia.

You have been collaborating with Josée Bienvenu Gallery for many years now. How has this long collaboration with the gallery influenced your work?

Josée and I have been working together for many years and in our conversations we often discuss art in general beyond my work in particular. Through these talks we influence one another. I have relationships with other artists she represents that also contribute to our collaborations.

You've just shown your work in Madrid. How did this happen?

Excellent artist and good friend, Marco Maggi, introduced me to Galería Cayón and Galería Cayón introduced me to Galería CasadoSantapau.

How do you see the art world today? Whose work do you admire?

I see two art worlds - the 'art world' and the 'Art World', the later is the world where money is the destination. I live in the former, the 'art world' that is a multifaceted, fragmented reality of magazines, forums, blogs, fairs, galleries, museums, universities, festivals... That functions like a net, a dynamic and complex idea that is difficult to describe as one reality. I'm attracted to work that is far from my own and the way I function. I enjoy a range of art from Philip Guston to Fred Sandback, Vermeer to Tomma Abts and Brancusi to Sarah Sze, Ingres drawings to William Anastasi's and more artists who's names are not familiar.

You must be a very reflexive person...

I'm more intuitive than reflexive. I draw first a line and then I decide what to do with it. The key to me is to be surrounded by reflexive people, they are the wall where the ball I throw returns to me with new questions.

What is the ultimate goal for you as an artist?

Making art for me is about the journey, not the destination.

<http://dailymetal.eu/blog/mart-i-cormand--the-hyperrealist-surgeon/1183/>









