

David Martínez Suárez. *Inertia*

LABjoven_Experimenta 2012 Award

CONCEPT

Inertia [Inertia], the title of the winning project in LABjoven_Experimenta, speaks to the resistance that matter puts up to any alteration of its state of rest, and ties it in to the riots that took place in a number of European countries following the financial downturn. The source idea for the exhibition comes from the plot of *Streets of Fire*, the 1984 movie directed by Walter Hill, as well as elements and characters from the videogame saga *HALO*, initiated in 2001, transferred to 3-D.

The stereotypes presented in the film, a kind of urban western, ranging from the set design to the heroes, are used by David Martínez Suárez to fictionalize real images, where the characters come together with a certain goal, to do something in common and then go their separate ways again. The same exercise is repeated with the videogame industry and everything around it, inasmuch as a social and economic phenomenon staking claim to a place between fiction and reality. From *HALO* the artist has extracted elements which he then produces materially using digital technology. These include the game's hero, John-117, and the physical structures, borrowed from scenarios and other elements of the game which now take on a double function as both support and object. The various rearrangements draw inspiration from mistakes in the game, remitting us to the way in which videogames force us to play time and again until we reach our goal.

Inertia is the sixth winning project in LABjoven_Experimenta, a joint initiative of LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial and the Asturian Youth Institute [Instituto Asturiano de la Juventud], Regional Ministry of Presidency of Asturias, produced at Plataforma o. Production Centre at LABoral.

DATES: 11.10.2013-03.02.2014

VENUE: Exhibitions Hall

PRODUCTION: LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial and Asturian Youth Institute, Regional Ministry of Presidency of the Principality of Asturias

THE ARTIST

David Martínez Suárez (La Hueria, El Entrego, 1984) lives and works in Bilbao. A graduate in Fine Arts from the Universidad del País Vasco [University of the Basque Country] where he also completed a Master's, he was awarded a grant by the Bilbao Arte Foundation during 2008. In the same year he received a grant from Kunsthaus Bregenz for a two-month residency in Austria. Along with the artists Lorea Alfaro, Manu Uranga and Jon Otamendi he obtained a diffusion grant from the Basque Government for the *MLDJ* project, carried out from 2010-2011. He has featured in solo and group exhibitions in exhibition centres and museums, among which stand out *Izena Gero*, Museo Guggenheim, Bilbao, 2013; *Defensa* at Valey Centro Cultural in Castrillón (Asturias), 2012; *Respira hondo*, at the María Forcada Foundation, Tudela, Navarra, 2011; *The Back Room* at the Galería Parra & Romero, Madrid, 2009 at the; and *Entornos Próximos*, at Artium, Vitoria, 2008.

In his own words, artistic practice is approached through working with the real object, by understanding it conceptually from sculpture. "My work," he says, "is arranged from an interest in industrial contexts and its social relations, technology and the human body itself. They are fragments of communication, helping to organise ideas and lead in different directions to indicate where personal desire is gaining density. The incidents and circumstances that appear during the process interest me more than its possible meaning".

THE AWARD

The LABjoven_Experimenta Award, jointly called by LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial, Gijón and the Instituto Asturiano de la Juventud [Asturian Youth Institute], which is attached to the Regional Ministry of the Presidency of the Principality of Asturias reached its sixth edition in 2012. Is dedicated to experimental artistic projects (multimedia installations, actions, interventions and any other creative process) specifically conceived for its installation at LABoral. Aimed at Asturian artists or collectives, born or resident in the Principality of Asturias, or up to the second generation of descendants of Asturian emigrants, aged 35 or under, it provides €10,250 for the production of the selected proposal.

OTHER EDITIONS

- 2007. Pablo de Soto. *Situation Room*
- 2008. Fernando Gutiérrez. *Crisálidas*
- 2009. Alicia Jiménez. *En barbecho*
- 2010. Adrián Cuervo. *Dédalo España*
- 2011. Cristina Busto. *Generadores de sombras*

THE JURY

The jury which unanimously selected the winning proposal out of the 27 projects that were presented was formed by Andrés Albuerne Frutos, on behalf of the Asturian Youth Institute of the Regional Ministry of the Presidency, as president; Jaime Luis Martín, Director of Castrillón's Municipal Board of Culture, head of the Centro Valey [Valey cultural centre], editor of web page *Ajimez Arte* and art critic; Benjamin Weil, Activities Director of LABoral; Rocío Gracia, Head of Exhibitions and Publications at LABoral; Lydia Santamarina, Director of Museo Barjola, Gijón; Fernando Gutiérrez, artist and winner of this award its second edition; and Margarita Llamas, in representation of the Asturian Youth Institute of the Ministry of the Presidency, who acted as secretary.

Catalyst for Creativity in Asturias

By Carmen Sanjurjo González. Director of the Instituto Asturiano de la Mujer y Políticas de Juventud. Consejería de Presidencia of the Principality of Asturias

In its six years so far, the LABjoven_Experimenta Award has proportioned a wonderful opportunity for LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial and Instituto Asturiano de la Juventud to work together towards supporting a generation of young artists in Asturias who are working on the cutting-edge of art today.

For many of those who had previously taken part in Muestra de Artes Plásticas del Principado de Asturias, the annual exhibition at Sala Borrón, or who had won the Astragal Prize, the LABjoven_Experimenta Award, organised under the auspices of the Culturaquí Programme, has proven the culmination of their emergence as artists. This is true to the extent that, with the exception of Pablo de Soto, all the other winners—namely Fernando Gutiérrez, Alicia Jiménez, Adrián Cuervo and Cristina Busto—had previously given signs of their merits in the rest of the visual arts events included in the Culturaquí Programme.

And David Martínez Suárez (La Hueria, El Entrego, 1984) now follows in their footsteps. His work was selected in the last two Muestra de Artes Plásticas del Principado de Asturias and he has also had a one-person exhibition at Sala Borrón in Oviedo, once again corroborating the role of this programme in acting as a catalyst for creativity in Asturias. And now, LABoral Centro de Arte offers him a chance to explore new creative horizons and aim at new goals.

Inertia, the name of the winning project, is based on two elements. First of all, the film *Streets of Fire*, by Walter Hill (1984), of which the artist has made a reedited version by extracting the motifs he considered most interesting: the girl, the hero and the explosions, condensing them individually. And secondly, the videogame saga *Halo*, which he uses as a kind of trunk from which to rummage for contents which he then reuses for the material production of objects, like resin reproductions of the lead character as well as structures to divide the exhibition space.

Inertia starts out from these thematic contents and subjects them to a process, paying attention to the incidents and circumstances that arise during this development. He explores his interest in the videogame industry and its role as a social and economic phenomenon and how to build an intermediary point between fiction and reality.

Inertia

By David Martínez Suárez, Artist

“[...] And, ultimately, the appeal to the masses has always gone unanswered. They do not irradiate; on the contrary, they absorb all radiation from the outlying constellations of State, History, Culture, and Meaning. They are inertia, the strength of inertia, the strength of the neutral.”
In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities. Jean Baudrillard

The *Inertia* project has a twofold starting point. Firstly, *Streets of Fire*, the movie from 1984 by Walter Hill, and, secondly, the videogame saga *Halo* (2001-ongoing).

The 1980s film *Streets of Fire* which went on to gain a cult following provides an underlying plotline that runs through the project. A kind of updated contemporary urban Western, in it a marauding biker gang led by Raven Shaddock (Willem Dafoe) kidnap Ellen Aim (Diane Lane), the lead singer of a successful rock combo. Hopes of rescuing her lie with her ex-boyfriend, the ex-soldier Tom Cuddy (Michael Paré), and his sidekick McCoy (Amy Madigan), who are contracted by Ellen's manager and current boyfriend Billy Fish (Rick Moranis).

The movie fascinated me from the first time I saw it. In ways it contains a kind of synopsis of social elements with workers, bikers, lowlife, police, rockers, managers ... who build a series of stereotypes through the different characters. The space where the action takes place is undefined, and could basically be any real or indeed fictitious city. In fact, the movie was mostly shot in Chicago, although some scenes are from Los Angeles and others from sets at Universal Studios. In ways the places are reminiscent of the world of DC Comic superheroes, like Smallville and Metropolis from *Superman*; Gotham, *Batman's* city, or Central City from *Flash* and *The Spirit*. They all have recognisable elements from real cities but at the same time they are no one city in particular. The movie begins and ends with scenes set on a stage: “closed” contained spaces for scenes of singing, dancing and fighting. Even many of the outdoor scenes are shot in sets along a street. Here the characters gather for a certain purpose, to do something together and then go their own ways again.

In the project for LABoral, I began by completely re-editing the film, extracting the themes that struck me as most interesting: the girl, the hero and the explosions. These motifs are then individually condensed, all dialogues were removed and all the scenes where these particular motifs do not appear were discarded. The end result is an accumulation

of gestures, movements and situations. The narrative logic is maintained by the filmic structure, although the interrelation is broken down, and instead of a+b+c we now have a+a+a, b+b+b, c+c+c, a structure obsessively focusing on the gesture. One of the characters, McCoy, seems to me even more interesting now, with her fragmented appearances, and I have kept one line from her:

“Are we going to talk about it, or are we going to do it?”

McCoy (Amy Madigan) *Streets of Fire*. 1984

I am also interested in the videogame industry and everything that surrounds it, as a social and economic phenomenon, and in the idea of building an intermediary point between fiction and reality.

In 2008, when Lehman Brothers, Bear Sterns and Merrill Lynch were collapsing, sales of videogame hardware and software were beating new records. Some people even claimed that the videogame industry was recession-proof. Just as cinema and television were a built-in part of 20th century industrial consumerism, videogames today are the cornerstone of the audiovisual entertainment industry. Today, films are made into videogames and vice versa, just like music (*Guitar Hero*, *Rock Band*) and sports (FIFA, WRC), in which the gamer is presented with a mix of elements from fiction and reality.

On a production level, this industry has created the image of the ideal job, the idea of being paid to play. Although this may be true to some extent for the more creative sectors where the actual ideas are developed, for many others the opposite image—asphyxia—is true, the constant stress of workers trying to keep up with deadlines, dealing with the hierarchies of production and subcontracting. Furthermore, this industry generates a continuous search for natural recourses, like coltan, to maintain prices and production levels low. This idea was picked up by James Cameron’s film *Avatar* in which humanity exploits planets in search of a precious mineral called *unobtainium*, a “little grey rock that sells for \$20 million a kilo”, according to Parker Selfridge, played by Giovanni Ribisi.

The videogame saga *Halo*, the other starting point for this work, is a multi-billion dollar franchise created by Bungie in 2001 and currently owned by Microsoft Studios. The game revolves around an intergalactic war in the 25th century between humans and an alliance of various alien races known as The Covenant. The game mostly centres on the experiences of a super soldier called Master Chief John-117, and his artificial intelligence companion, Cortana. The first game in the saga—*Halo. Combat Evolved*—takes place in an alien ring world called *Halo* as the characters endeavour to discover its function and the secrets it hides.

Videogames can sometimes make us feel inadequate when you lose or “die”, yet nevertheless, this same mistake makes you think “how could I

have been so stupid to make that mistake?” And that makes you lose another game, a rematch but with the conditions imposed by the game. I have never been a gamer. I grew up without a video game console, though I sometimes played at a friend’s house, but when someone gave me a present of a copy of *Halo. Combat Evolved* for computer, I got hooked on it.

In my work, the game serves as a kind of trunk from which I can take elements that can be transformed from the digital to material production. Firstly, reproductions of John-117, the main character of the saga. Then using these figures I developed a strategy for recording a game. I took two themes: a couple of guys playing a videogame; and a series of panoramic views made with the reproductions of John-117. The video is shown on a double screen, the guys on the left and the figure on the right. The space of LABoral is divided by physical structures created using sets and elements from the game. These structures are built and organised with easily-manipulated materials like wood, steel and cement. Materials that contain constructive features and qualities and which undergo two operations: an internal one, in terms of the material organisation of form, and another one connected with its ability to act as surface, having the double function of support and object.

David Martínez Suárez: exploring new narrative forms

By Benjamin Weil, Artistic Director, LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial

David Martínez Suárez's new work – *Inertia*, is the sixth project produced by LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial, under the auspices of its collaboration with the Instituto Asturiano de la Juventud of the government of Asturias. Since 2007, the LABjoven_Experimenta grant has aimed at supporting ambitious projects by young asturian artists. LABoral has provided them with the expertise of its staff and access to its Plataforma o. Centro de Producción, while the Principado de Asturias has underwritten the financial support.

Inertia, a multi-dimensional narrative structure, is rooted in two directions David Martínez Suárez has been exploring in the past few years. The first is film making: the artist produced a series of documentary films related to the on-going social conflict in the mining area of Asturias that arose with the gradual closedown of the entire mining activity. In producing these, he revealed his keen interest in editing as a key element in the elaboration of his narrative. This enabled him to put together very compelling footage related to a situation he experienced first hand, as a native of that area. The second results from his further training as a visual artist, and his applying the same editing strategy when elaborating intricate installation work. Bringing together sculptural and photographic elements, he sometimes also incorporates material that adds a performative quality to his project.

Prior to the development of *Inertia*, David Martínez Suárez produced a series of tables on which he staged what seemed like scientific experiments. They did somehow also refer to the domestic, employing for instance such kitchen utensils as sauce pans, used to boil water and generate a cloud of steam, which in turn materialized an otherwise invisible laser beam. The cloud also echoed the industrial landscapes of his homeland, a reference that was also reinforced with photographs depicting smoke coming out of stacks.

In the same fashion, the narrative structure of *Inertia* is an assemblage of moving image and sculpture, which refers to both mainstream cinema and gaming. The artist has selected fragments from a 1980's Hollywood cult film –*Streets of Fire*– and mingled it with three-dimensional renderings of both characters and stage elements of the no less popular computer game series, *Halo*. Thus, he collapses those two worlds, and also addresses the difference in one's relation to time in the screening room, the game arcade and the exhibition room, each of which also imply a different kind of narrative experience.

Interestingly enough, both the plots of the film – the abduction of a famous pop singer by a bunch of rogue motorcyclists – and the one of the computer game, which refers to a future time where workers are sent out to space to exploit the resources of other planets, bear an eerie resemblance with the social conflict David Martínez Suárez once documented in his films. In a world where social identification is increasingly blurred by consumerism and the kind of negation of the social strata it tends to establish, the artist seems to have a keen interest in questioning this narrative trait. Perhaps, he points to the fact that, while the post industrial global capitalist world we inhabit tends to be based on the notion of a common interest and set of references, there still remains social categories: while the class structure of yesterday may no longer apply as a relevant grid to understand the dynamics of relationships between various social groups, there remains an antagonism between the ruling classes and the rest of the people.

The other truly compelling aspect of this new work resides in the way David Martínez Suárez mixes the various realms of a common narrative. Indeed, many products of fiction today function as a constellation of experiences: one thinks for instance how a feature film is augmented by such by-products as social networks, computer games, t-shirts, accessories, and figurines, among others. The artist appropriates this strategy to create his multi-dimensional structure, in which each element contextualizes the other and thus enriches the core narrative by creating multiple points of entry.

Inertia also describes specific state in a chemical reaction, when the various constituents are about to start reacting to each other: a time-freeze of sorts, or a state of suspension. It is at that stage that the viewer starts interacting with the piece, when she or he starts associating the various components of the narrative so as to create his or her own experience. In a way the artist hints at the fact an art object is inert until activated by the viewer. Participation is key to produce the “chemical reaction” one may call art.



Photo: Courtesy of the artist

David Martínez Suarez during the recording of the video part of the installation *Inertia*



Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Still of the del video



Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Reproductions of John-117, the main character of the saga *Halo*.



Photos: LABoral

The images show different moments of *Inertia* production and the artist working in his installation.

The Laboral Foundation

The LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial Foundation is a cultural body to serve the general interest, as well as the governing body of the art centre. The aims of the Foundation as described in Article 6.1 of the statutes are “to promote and disseminate art and industrial creation through the management of LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial.”

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Association of Friends of LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial

The Association of Friends of LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial in Gijón is a non-profit association with its own legal personality and full capacity to act in accordance with current legislation on associations. Its aims are to promote, stimulate and support any cultural initiatives, which, in the broadest terms, have a connection with the mission and activity of the Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial.

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WHAT IS LABORAL?

LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial is a space for artistic exchange. It was born with the aim of establishing an alliance between art, design, culture, industry and economic development, and aspires to become a space for interaction and dialogue between art, new technologies and industrial creation. Between its walls, it opens the way to the production, creation and research into the most recent artistic concepts. LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial is in the old Universidad Laboral as part of the set of projects developed by the Principality of Asturias for its City of Culture. Gijón, Asturias.

LOCATION

LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial is located in Gijon, Asturias, at around three kilometres from the city centre. Premises originally conceived for vocational training now house the over 14,400 functional square metres that are devoted to the exhibition, research, training and production of new art and creative industries.

Address

LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial
Los Prados, 121
33394 Gijón (Asturias)

Getting There

By car: A-8 motorway. Take bypass on arrival to Gijon. Salida (exit) km. 385 Viesques. Follow directions to Hospital Cabueñes. Take third exit at third roundabout.

The Centre has a public car park.

By bus from Gijón

The bus stop for the Centre is “Parada Universidad Laboral”. The bus lines available are the following:

Line 1 Cerillero- Hospital de Cabueñes

Line 2 Rocés- Hospital de Cabueñes

Line 4 Cerillero- Viesques- Hospital de Cabueñes

Line 18 Nuevo Gijón- Hospital de Cabueñes

By plane

Closest airport: Asturias (Castrillón). Around 40 km from the Centre.

A8 motorway, direction Gijón.

OPENING HOURS

Winter

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 am to 7 pm

Saturday and Sunday, 12 noon to 8 pm

Closed Monday and Tuesday

Summer (15.06 – 15.09)

10 am to 7 pm

Closed Monday and Tuesday

ADMISSION

General public

€2

Free

Friends of LABoral, <10 years old, Gijón Citizen Card, journalists, members from ICOM (International Council of Museums)

Free access

Every Wednesday, May 18th (International Museum Day), weekends

No

RESOURCES

Plataforma O_LABoral Production Centre. Platform o is a multi-purpose space. It is a centre for production, artistic research, innovation and education. It is a place for implementing ideas and trying out prototypes, with workspaces for experimentation and production with audio, video, light, electronics, processing, movement capture, computer vision and videogames. The intended audience is the local artistic and creative community as well as artists, creators or foreign researchers in residence participating in the exhibitions at LABoral.

fabLAB Asturias. Laboratory equipped with digital fabrication machinery providing consultancy and production tools for individual or collective creation, courses and training workshops.

platO . Studio set for experimentation and research into expanded performative practices and new audio-visual forms.

Audiovisual Laboratories. Audio and digital video platform, with all the equipment necessary for recording, editing, production and postproduction.

Cucareliquia@LABoral. Reliquiae España S.L, the company managing the Cucareliquia brand, undertakes a business residency at LABoral in the art centre's old former shop during which it will create accessories and objects whose value chain combines design, new technologies and craftsmanship. Cucareliquia@LABoral has a welcome area, a work zone and a commercial space. In the latter area, there are its own brand products along with other ones which the company collaborates with. This space will also host activities connected to digital fabrication, which will make it possible for FabLAB Asturias users and the public to develop personalised objects utilising the resources for artisanal production.

Media Library/Archive. A place for the investigation, consultation and dissemination of today's art and creative industries. It features the Archive of Asturian Artists, documenting the work of creators born from the 1950s onwards.

Chill-Out. A place for meeting, leisure, active participation and resting.