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FRAME

With technology as a tool, gt2P hopes to retain and revive Chile's artisanal traditions

Chilean design collective gt2P explains why the interplay of craft and technology is central to their practice

By Adrian Madlener
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Cover image: Inspired by the branches of a tree, Gt2p developed digital design tools that function like DNA and 'establish geometric continuity among three or more elements'. Suple comprises two families, Bounding Form and Connecting Form (pictured).

'There's a difference between territory and landscape,' says Guillermo Parada. 'When you get to know a territory in person, it then becomes a landscape.' The cofounder of Chilean design collective Gt2p (great things to people) is referring to a verse from 'The Imaginary Man', a poem in which Nicanor Parra suggests that one is able to transform

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his or her surroundings based on a feeling. It's no secret that the late poet was describing his native Chile. The unusually shaped South American country, which runs an impressive 4,000 km from north to south, encompasses an ample diversity of terrain, natural resources and cultural traditions. For Parada, the towering Andes mountain range not only forms a natural barrier that separates Chile from the rest of the world but also fosters a sense of self-reliance and internal connectivity.

Imaginary Geographies, one of Gt2p's latest projects, pays homage to Chile's distinct geocultural condition. Pairing sounds from the Andes with Parra's poem, the collective came up with audio compositions that were translated into parametric sequences of straight and curved lines. These algorithmic models were used to shape different wooden surfaces. On display as part of Manufactured Landscapes, the collective's 2018 solo show at New York's Friedman Benda Gallery, was the result: a series of textured tables, benches and cabinets that evoke Chilean geography. 'Some of the pieces have a precise digital expression,' says Parada. 'Others are rough and look handmade.' By calibrating a CNC machine to different carving specifications, he and his team were able to achieve the desired variations.



Guillermo Parada (middle right), Tamara Pérez (left) and Sebastián Rozas (right) founded Gt2p in 2009. Víctor Imperiale (middle left) became a partner in 2013.

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The interplay of craft and technology is central to Gt2p's practice. The collective was founded in 2009 by Parada, Tamara Pérez, and Sebastián Rozas, all of whom trained as architects, with a focus on parametric design and digital fabrication. At the end of 2013, staff member Victor Imperiale became Gt2p's fourth partner. Early designs like Dysgraphia revealed the collective's need to break the mould and experiment with predetermined limitations. Working with, rather than against, bugs in the 3D-printing process, they made a series of vessels. No two were exactly alike, but all were based on the same parameters and conditions. 'Often, we create a standardized process that produces nonstandardized products,' says Parada. 'Instead of just focusing on static results, we like to keep the door open for new possibilities.'

Like many of Gt2p's ongoing projects, Less CPP (catenary pottery printer) demonstrated that the studio's methodology doesn't have to be digital. The installation, constructed with bog-standard tools, featured various textiles suspended within a geometric wooden framework. Pouring slip into the hollow of a cloth enabled the fabrication of moulded ceramics. The Less CPP wall light has just been acquired by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. 'We've been talking to a studio in Switzerland that works exclusively with CAD drawings, which can be fabricated anywhere in the world,' says Parada. 'In Chile, there is no market or industry for this method. You have to learn how to make things to survive as a designer.' His country does have a wide variety of natural materials, though, as well as a vast array of artisanal traditions. 'We mix established techniques with new 3D-printing technologies and call it paracrafting,' he explains. 'Advanced technologies should be introduced carefully, as tools that can help reinvigorate our age-old traditions, rather than replacing them with processes that are now homogeneous throughout the world.'



The different melting points of volcanic rock and ceramics form the basis of Gt2p's Less CPP lights.

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First developed with the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, Gt2p's *Losing my America* project shed light on the complexity he describes by juxtaposing iconic artisanal products sourced in Chile, Mexico and Brazil with digitally manipulated hybrid versions of the same objects. This critical statement reveals that new technologies are essential to ensuring the survival and autonomy of artisanal traditions. It's a balancing act. 'Some Chileans worry that new technologies will destroy our heritage,' says Parada, 'but it's this kind of bubble thinking that's keeping craftspeople poor. Kids are no longer interested in going into the family business or learning the techniques passed down to them by their grandparents. So much knowledge is being lost. When we put out a call for a two-week 3D-printing course, it was mostly young people who responded. Many of them are applying their new expertise to traditional practices and to the search for a viable future for the things they're making.'

The collective is currently working with government organizations to set up the *Made in Chile* initiative. 'We want to place art centres in artisanal communities and to introduce new business models that will help them thrive.' Parada envisions a closer relationship between designers and artisans, perhaps one that even includes outside influences. 'Who knows?' he says, 'Ten years from now, the Quinchamali community might decide to hire Nendo to reinterpret their traditional pottery techniques.'



To produce *Less CPP*, Gt2p developed what it calls a 'catenary pottery printer'; its wooden framework supports draped fabrics that filter ceramic slip for the fabrication of moulded forms.

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A metal rack in Gt2p's Santiago workspace holds prototypes of designs like those for Remolten, a series of furniture and objects that exploits igneous rock sourced from active volcanoes in the Andes.

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Gt2p is at the frontier of experimentation, challenging preconceptions and developing new frameworks for others to adopt. The approach is democratic and collaborative in nature, but the collective is still criticized for producing work that is sold only in a high-end gallery context. Although Parada admits that Friedman Benda's main goal is to sell, he also defends the gallery, calling it a research and communication platform that allows Gt2p and others to realize innovative work with global consequences. 'Friedman Benda sold Joris Laarman's first 3D-printed metal prototypes, and now he's using that skill set to build a bridge in Amsterdam. Our relationship with Friedman Benda is comparable to a partnership. We work with – not for – the gallery.'

His words are expressed in Remolten, a series of furniture and objects that has garnered international attention. The material used – igneous rock – is sourced from active volcanoes in the Andes. 'The next step is to see how this natural composite might work on a larger scale and for a wider range of applications, such as façade cladding or even the construction of shelters,' says Parada. 'This material has the potential to revive the Chilean ceramics industry, because it doesn't entail radical changes to the existing infrastructure.' It could be said that by finding a way to use what's available – rather than dismissing the status quo – Gt2p lives up to Parra's belief that we can transform our surroundings based on a feeling.