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True Living of Art & Design

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Losing My America

gt2P (Great Things to People)

Interview by Christian Larsen



1 — Teresa Olmedo + gt2P, *The Ovenera*, Polychrome earthenware, handmade purified clay, baked and hand-painted, 3d Scanned, progressive polygonal reduction piece, 3d printing, plaster Moulds, Slip casting, painting
2 — Losing My America at Mad Museum during New Territories, Laboratories for Design, Craft and Art in Latin America, 2014 – 2015



✕ **Christian Larsen:** “Losing my America” feels like a manifesto project. One that is scaled towards all kinds of collaborations between various modes of production, from the artisan working locally with local materials, to the designer working in mass across the globe. Tell me how you arrived at this idea?

Guillermo Parada: It was an evolution of our studio. It came from the very beginning when we realized that we live in Chile, after an exhibition we did in Milano. We realized that our value is in the mix between our contemporary knowledge related to technology, design, the market, and so on, with the things we have here in Chile. One of those things are artisanal communities, for example, and local materials, and many other things that we hadn't seen before. So during that research period of looking inside our country we realized that many of these traditional techniques were disappearing because of the market, because they are not well paid, or because they are not in the right channels to sell, or simply because the artisans are dying. Because they are too old and the new generations don't want to keep their knowledge, their traditions in making things. So in “Losing My America” we wanted to say to the world that that there is huge potential. That there is a big diversity of techniques, of material. A landscape that creates or gives these

ways to make. Basically they could be very important development engines.

So why do they have to deliver Coca-Cola if they know how to make something super beautiful? They can make a living from it if we connect them, if we integrate them in the contemporary market for example. That was the idea with that project. And that is why we make a direct commission to the artisans that was to create pieces in half and half. One piece totally made by them. And the second part of the piece totally intervened with digital technologies. We wanted to say that no one way is better than the other. We wanted to say that we are different. That we have diversity, but we are getting homogeneous. But at the same time each piece becomes a practical research because we realized which new technologies work better with each community. We realized that the value or the relevance of the artisans are not in their icons, the pieces they generate. Instead, the value is in the community in which the technique can develop.

CL: Labour and skill are important. The human value is more important in a sense than the product, the icon, the object itself.

GP: Exactly. There is a very conservative way to see art or craft in general. That in craft communities you have to preserve everything. You have to preserve the icons. You have to preserve the way they

make. You have to preserve everything. But you also preserve thing like the poverty circle... the community related to a technique is the important thing we have to preserve.

CL: The product has to be the same as it always has ever been. And if you intervene, you have somehow anthropologically destroyed the authenticity of the original.

GP: So that view, in our point of view, is the vision that has destroyed every artisanal/craft community.

CL: An ideology that remains in the past.

GP: Exactly. The conservative way I think is not the way. So we think in the way that we can integrate them with the world. We realised in making every piece that we can collaborate with them in the future with different kinds of technology. To discover which technologies work better for them. For example, imagine that the people who replied to our emails to the artisans were their kids, their grandsons.

CL: The ones who have iPhones and internet.

GP: Exactly. To teach them to use a 3D printer, it takes two weeks at least. And they understand very well how they can connect for example with the same ceramics community.



3 — Juan Carlos Orellana, Hand Hammered Copper, Rauli (Chilean native wood)



4 — Juan Carlos Orellana + gt2P, Olla, Copper, Rauli (Chilean native wood), 3D Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, CNC carving of moulds, compression of copper and hand hammered copper

5 — Victorina Gallegos + gt2P, Clay, cow dung, 3D Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, silicone mould + clay moulding by pressure on silicone mould, painted red clay, polished with stones and chicken fat, slow burning + direct burning covered with cow dung, dyed and cooled on horse dung; gt2P, Red Ceramic Slip-casted + 3D Scan + progressive polygonal reduction piece + 3D printer, plaster mould from 3D models, slip casting
6 — Victorina Gallegos + gt2P, Clay, cow dung, 3D Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, silicone mould + clay moulding by pressure on silicone mould, painted red clay, polished with stones and chicken fat, slow burning + direct burning covered with cow dung, dyed and cooled on horse dung

CL: Let me back up for a second. I want to go back to your point of research. When you were traveling around Chile and you were encountering these people and what they make for the first time. Opening up a new world view for you in your very own country. Who were the first craftsmen or artisans that you encountered that inspired this?
GP: You mean which ones give us the light for example?

CL: Yeah. Which ones gave you that eureka moment? “OH! I want to work with these guys. What they make is amazing.”
GP: First it was super nerdy our research. Office research at the beginning. We contacted the government and they gave us a list of the people who won the Sello de Excellencia (Seal of Excellence) from the government. We did the first filter with that list. We guessed that if they won the award they are hungry to grow.

CL: To grow and to connect to an outside world.
GP: Exactly. Because you have to apply for that prize.

CL: So the list that comes from the Chilean government is not something that is based on government funded and initiated research into the crafts of the state.

It was something that is generated by the makers themselves who know about the prize and they apply for it. So it’s grassroots up, not State down.
GP: Yes. So as a first filter, it was super nice, because we encountered people who were interested to work. Motivated people. The second filter was asking them if they are interested in us intervening in their iconic pieces or they process. Ninety percent said yes.

CL: Give me examples of those who said yes.
GP: Victorina Gallegos makes raku ceramics in a community is called Kinchamali. Another example is Juan Carlos Orellana, the guy who made the hand-hammered copper 3D model. He told us that he is interested in making only two or three pieces because he gets bored very quickly if he makes a big series of the same thing. But there are some other makers that love serialisation like Vicson. His ceramic is glazed white on the inside, terracotta on the outside. He’s one of the makers who could transform into a company. Then there’s Sergio Garcia. He’s not rough. He makes super detailed things. The guy who makes the ocarina. Then there’s Juanita Munoz who makes the chupaya, the parametric hat.

CL: Yes. I love that one.
GP: I think every one of them give us a light and hope. Actually we are working on a new project with Juan Yarur. We are making a partnership with some artisans here creating a brand called Adriatico. We tried to make it through the government but the government didn’t want it. I don’t know why. So we found a way to make it private. It’s not necessarily completely artisans, but there is a lot. Because it’s a negotiation with Juan, and Juan is more interested in more luxury, but craft is the new luxury.

CL: Let’s backtrack though before we get to the dissemination of the project let’s stay on the evolution of it and it’s making. So you contacted the artisans. You went on site and worked with them to understand the process. How they work. These differences between them. One artisan enjoys serialisation. Another artisan absolutely resists it and wants one-offs almost every time. Given their own proclivities you then tailor your proposal to each, I’m supposing. Does that work? The sort of dance between you as the designer bringing a contemporary technological angle and then the craftsperson who has their own set of skills and techniques. How did you negotiate that so that each of you have an equal representation? That it isn’t one dominating the other?

TL # 32

GP: Yes, I understand. We never negotiate to be honest. It was so natural working with them. The right decision was the filter we applied first to choose any artisans. So I think with that we avoided the negotiation part that you mentioned. Because they are makers. We are makers, and we are doing something new.

CL: Right. Together.
GP: Together. Actually if you see all the publications, there always appears credit to the artisans. Their names, where they come from. They are also authors of this project. So maybe the ones who had to adapt were us to them. We had to prepare special ways to approach the project tailored to each person. This worked organically. We never said, “no you can’t use this because I want a piece like this.” Since we like the parametric way of working and thinking, we tried to use all the information that we could collect from them. We tried to use that information for design. It’s part of the process.

CL: In a sense the key to making sure that you have an equitable relationship and a product that is truly a collaboration rather than a domination is that you remained open in spirit the entire time. Open to experimentation and to an unforeseen result, but that you trusted each other.
GP: Rather than a super specific commission, we had many variables all the time. The commission to each artisan was to do something that looks like their own work and looks digitised. That was all there was to the brief. The rest was pure collaboration, pure experimentation. Then we realised what were the best processes and techniques to use with each one.

CL: It’s an interesting choice, to insist on the end product having an aspect that aesthetically communicates digitisation or serialisation or mass production. Something that’s technologically advanced. That kind of faceting that we see on most of these products. The product is half traditional and half digital. Those two languages, you built into the project a visible way to communicate equality between the contributions of the makers. The object itself would be half and half. Given that, let’s take one example. Perhaps your favourite artisan that you worked with or the product that you felt the most successful as a final result. Let’s take that as a case study and let’s break it down. So how did the process work?
GP: I understand your question but I don’t know if there is a favourite because there



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7-8 — Teresa Olmedo + gt2P, *The Ovenera*, Polychrome earthenware. Handmade purified clay, baked and hand-painted, 3D Scan and print, plaster moulds, slip casting, painting



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9 — Florentino Lopez + Ariel Rojo Design Studio + gt2P, *Catrina 1.2*, Hand modelled clay, 3d scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, FDM 3d printing, attached glass and ceramic colour



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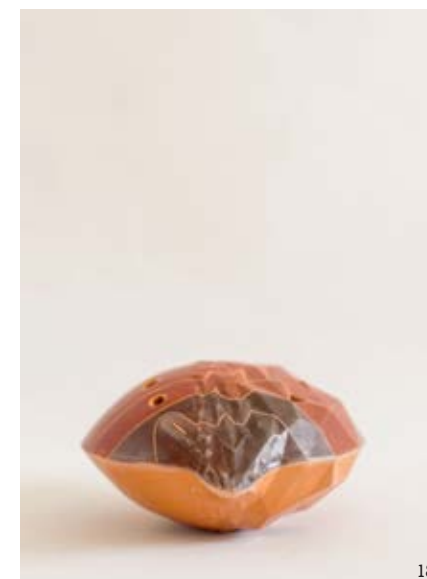
10 — Juanita Muñoz + gt2P, *Sombrero de Huaso 5th Generation*, Thatch, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, 3d robot carving moulded by heat of an iron
11 — Florentino Lopez and Ariel Rojo Design Studio + gt2P, *Catrina 1.2*, Handmade modelled clay, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, FDM 3d printing, attached glass and ceramic coloured; Ines Carter + gt2P, *Krina*, hand knitted horsehair, 3D Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, 3D Hand Welded Model + Rebuilt model in triangles using hand knitted horsehair
12 — Vanderlino De Souza + Estudio Guto Requena + gt2P, *Nossa Senhora Des-Aparecida*, Hand Woodcarving. Gouges and sharp tools are used for turning each piece, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, ABS Stereo lithography 3d printing + copper shower as finishing
13 — Ines Carter + gt2P, *Krina*, , 3D Scan + Progressive Polygonal Reduction Piece + 3D Hand Welded Model + Rebuilt model in triangles using hand knit horsehair, *Losing my America* Exhibition at Cappellini Showroom during Salone 2014.
14 — Néstor Miranda + gt2P, *Rauli* (Chilean native wood), 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, CNC carving + handmade wood carving+ Varnishing with olive oil
15 — Angelica Coyopol and Angelica Moreno + Ariel Rojo Design Studio + gt2P, *Talavera*, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, 3d printing, plaster moulds, slip casting, paint

16 — Néstor Miranda + gt2P, *Rauli* (Chilean native wood), 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, CNC carving, handmade wood carving, *Losing my America* Exhibition at Cappellini Showroom during Salone 2014



17.

TL # 32



17 — Sergio García and Marco Donoso + gt2P, Clay, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, plaster moulds, paint; Manuel González + gt2P, Guaco, Clay, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, 3d printing, plaster moulds, hand painted and polished
18-19 — Sergio García and Marco Donoso + gt2P (Chile), Clay, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece, plaster moulds, painting and burning

is no one result better than another. The project doesn't want to say, "With this one we are going to be very rich or it's going to be the best in sales." We just wanted to say that we have diversity and we are getting homogeneous. Everyone uses digitalization. We wanted to research and use every piece as a practical research to see what new technologies we can use. In that sense all of them are super successful projects because we reached our goal, that was to discover which technologies suit each artisan best in collaboration with them.

CL: OK. So this is interesting. Let's pick a few and then tell me how you had to tailor the technologies for each one.

GP: Victorina Gallegos from Kinchamali. We realized that in making the earthenware, there are different functions within the community. There is one guy who collects the clay. There's the guy who prepares the cow dung to make the raku process. There's another that creates the firing process. And there are the modelers. The form makers are the ones that are most related to the creation of the piece. But there is a big chain behind them.

CL: The lone craftsperson working all by herself in a little hut somewhere is not necessarily the truth. There might be multiple people in various stages of the process that produce.

GP: That is beautiful. That is when we realised that the technique creates a community. Going back to this example.

When the clay is prepared they start making the piece not on a pottery wheel but a hand-moulded form, to model a bottle for example. Then they have to dry the piece very close to the kiln but not directly in it. Then they burnish the surface with a stone, a beautiful process. Then they create all their decorations with flowers. That's when you realize that they are artisans. They develop their own tools to make things. You become an artisan when you develop your own tools. You are conscious that you can do better things. When you create your own tools it is because you make it conscientiously. Then there is the process of firing in the kiln and then making the raku to get the blackness in the piece. So we realized that we can intervene in the modelling process. If they use their hands, maybe we can make open silicone moulds so that they can press against the mould and with that they can get the exact triangular forms. So we took one of their traditional pieces and used a 3D scanner to digitize the piece, then build the piece in a 3D printer. From that we made a silicone mould for the digitized part so the maker can open the mould and press the clay against it. Then she joins the digitized part to the original one.

CL: You made the mould for the other part. How did she feel about using your tools, your mould?

GP: It's just like when she uses her thumb and the rest of her fingers to press the form. So in this process she just uses the fingers not the thumb. It was like we

made a big thumb. It's beautiful because the joint is totally her decision. She knows better than us how to make the piece feel like it's one.

CL: Your intervention in this particular case was in the form making itself, but I saw examples where the applied decoration also changed: that painted geometric faceting on the surface.

GP: We asked her, "How do you imagine the flowers on the piece?" She started marking all the borders of the triangles. She followed the geometry. She tried to build a flower in relation to the form itself. That is pure process. There are things that you are discovering in the making. No preconceptions. And the tool they used for applying the decoration is a needle from a record player.

CL: It is truly a tool they made themselves.

GP: We also intervened in how they filter the clay. They used to use cloth. Tamara told her about a mesh that is used for the garden. But she didn't know about this mesh because she is not used to going to the city.

CL: Can you tell me about the straw hat?

GP: To make that form they use a hot press with vapour or water. As our budget was limited, we were thinking what material could work as a mould press? They press the flat straw against a wood form. So we used wood. It was super cheap for us because it was quick using the CNC router machine to make the hat form.



CL: Your intervention then was the wooden hat form itself.
GP: Another thing we did with the hat makers was a project with the Campana Brothers. The technique of producing the straw mat itself is crazy beautiful because you can't imagine how many chords they make every day. It's so difficult and hard, but they look happy doing this work.

CL: This brings me to another point that I think is really interesting about your project. About the human value of this work. That there's joy in labour. That it's not dehumanized through the machine. But it's the machine as just another tool that is aiding human expression. This is something that goes back to William Morris

and John Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts movement in England. To get the right balance between man and machine has been a holy grail ever since the mid-19th century: How can you reconcile mass production, standardization, the removal of the human element in order to achieve a mass result? A cheaper price. On the flip side, there is customization, this joy in labour, handwork, which is expensive because it takes time. The Arts and Crafts movement with makers like W. A. S. Benson and Christopher Dresser, they were trying to find a sweet spot between handmade craft and machine mass production. if you can somehow find the right combination where both are respected, you'll get a product in enough mass and at a cheap enough

price so that it can impact a real market. But you also respect the human labour and expression that goes into the object. I feel like this project of yours is as close as I've seen to anything reaching that sweet spot. You found a way to amplify the joy in their labour, their community. The only part that isn't clear yet is how they're compensated. None of these projects, correct me if I'm wrong, have actually gone into a scaled production or have been distributed to market. They exist only as prototypes.
GP: We didn't want to find the sweet spot. That vision requires that everything has to be mass produced. I don't like the idea that everything has to be produced in "enough mass." There are some artisans that can do that, but there are others that

20 — Angelica Coyopol and Angelica Moreno + Ariel Rojo Design Studio + gt2P, Talavera, 3d Scan progressive polygonal reduction piece, 3d printing, plaster moulds, slip casting, paint, Losing my America Exhibition at Cappellini Showroom during Salone Milan 2014
21 — Paola Valencia + gt2P, Gorro ornamental, Wool, 3d Scan, progressive polygonal reduction piece + laser Cutting Nylon Stripes, folding by hand, knitted and woven by hand, Losing My America at Mad Museum during New Territories, Laboratories for Design, Craft and Art in Latin America, 2014 – 2015

TL # 32

don't want to do that. The generalization of that sweet spot for me is not valid.

CL: It's not the top priority.
GP: It's not the top priority and I don't believe that there is just one sweet spot. There is no one holy grail. There are many. And I think it has to do more with an equation that you can develop to connect the dots. If this guy can produce a certain quantity, let's go through this channel of distribution. Every artisan has their own way to sell, their own way to create. In Santiago, there is a craft fair where you find multiples of these guys selling in the same place. But what happens when someone asks for a little black pot and the artisan asks for two or three dollars. Next to this stand is a very fine maker in copper that asks for a similar piece 1000 dollars. These are distortions in the price. People believe that because they are craftsmen, they have to charge less than a branded thing. This is why I feel it is a stupid effort to find the holy grail. Just one. It doesn't make sense I think. Because there is so much diversity. Let's apply it to Losing My America. If we find the Holy Grail for Vicson maybe it's mass production, but if we go with Sergio Orellana, probably it would be a gallery.

CL: One Size Does Not Fit All.
GP: Exactly. As many ways as there are to make, there are as many ways to distribute these things.

CL: What one person makes is good for a gallery in Chelsea. What another person makes may be good for IKEA. Each has its system of production and value and consumption and a price attached.
GP: But that is the formula they invented. But not everyone has to follow it.

CL: Everybody can invent their own way. In a sense what you're saying is very post-industrial and post-modern, or digital, let's say. Diversity and difference and acknowledging multiple paths is something that has arisen in our day. Crumbling the modernist socialist value of mass production, which is basically what MoMA champions, and instead, we're complicating the narrative.
GP: Modern or mass production says let's create standard machines to create standard objects. Nowadays we can create standard machines to create non-standard things.

CL: That is a point about diversity and difference right? We're learning how to

integrate the hand and the machine in a new way. Again.

GP: Do you remember Less CPP, the catenary pottery printer?

CL: How can I forget!
GP: We invented this tool to explain to people—even to the artisans—in a very easy way what is parametric design, with no computers involved.

CL: You explained it as a way to achieve digital results with analogue means, in places that don't have widespread digital production.
GP: In the countryside many people don't know about computers.

CL: So Losing My America products exist only as prototypes. Do you have any intention of following through with the promise of each one? The project started as a seed in Chile, but you wanted to expand it to all of the Americas and you found collaborators like Guto Requena in Brazil and Ariel Rojo in Mexico. Will you scale it in terms of dissemination?
GP: We spent around three or four years trying to realize a project with the Chilean government called Made by Chile. We tried to make creative centres in the communities, in order to amplify their business model, the arts and business model, and create innovations inside their communities. In order to empower them. I imagine in the future they can hire the designers. Like the Italians at mid-century, when they create now classic furniture and start hiring their own sons. The old tradition of craftsmanship remains in those big Italian

companies. We are trying to fuel gasoline into these centres to make the community engine work.

CL: Any results?
GP: The first results were some invitations to the Campana Brothers to work with Juanita Munoz specifically. And we have some prototypes. But now our funds are zero. Now we are working in a private way, with a brand called Adriatico. Our business partner wants to create a design brand. We told him that it has to have an author, a producer, and a community. With each product, we have to know at least these three things. It's a very different approach than working with our gallery Friedman Benda for example. Very different market, scale of products, and approach. I should mention Tamara Pérez Sandoval was the lead member of gt2P on this project, working alongside the rest of the team, which also includes Sebastian Rozas, Victor Imperiale, and Guillermo Parada. We spent too much time trying to raise funds. We made the mistake to stop making things. We made just a few things while focusing on the larger project. We realized that we have to first start making things, then the big project could be run in parallel. We thought with our recognition outside our country, we could raise enough funds to realize the larger project, but we were super naive. But things happen. Life gives you different lessons. We will return to the way we know how to make things. ✧

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21.