

SUGAR COATED

An interview with LIZI SÁNCHEZ

RAJESH PUNJ

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The packing, the wrapping, the material matter of the accumulated objects of our desire is as much about their persuasive appearance, as it is the soft-centered indulgence inside. And for London based Peruvian born artist Lizi Sánchez it is the detailed decisions that the conglomerates make on behalf of the consumer, by the colour-coding of perfumes, confectionaries, anti-aging creams and after-shaves - that have us experience the world differently. Besides the attractiveness of the ripened coloured boxes and ribbon tape, what interests the artist is of how such global judgments come to influence the make-up of our lives much more substantially. By which our understanding of 'who we are?' and 'how we live?' are determined as much by ourselves as they are influenced by the pattern of products we readily identify with.

As a beacon of our attention Sánchez sees colour as a carefully crafted construct that is determined as much by its intrinsic value, as it is by the companies that see colour as currency. And for the artist as she explains "it is nice the feeling that when somebody comes now they say 'wow, those colours are so amazing, they are so beautiful.' And I can say 'yes they are' because there has been a whole team behind those colours, trying to think of how to draw your attention and excite you. So I am glad you are feeling it, because someone else has decided that. I like the idea that there are a lot of decisions with the choice of that particular colour that are transferred to the gallery space. But also when you see abstract painting, maybe not people in the art world, but the public in general, they come and they value colour alot. They value a straight line alot. Real artists know how to choose the perfect colour, and be able to put one next to the other. So when you are bringing that from somewhere else it draws a level of detachment from the work, but also a new kind of curiosity at the same time. When I original made sculptures they were all about colour, but they were becoming too literal so I started changing my process."

As a consequence of her interest in manufactured colours, what is engaging for the artist is of how our private lives, our choice of satchel and running shoes, are determined by public institutions that profit from the rudimentary decisions we make on a daily basis. As all of the elements - colour, shape, form, material, light, location, are as she argues not just exclusive to art but as integral to all of the creative and consumer industries that determine the architecture of our lives. Whereby one's red tote bag is likely to be the same red that colours the underside of a Christian Louboutin shoe, or is the alarm coloured cover of a new Paris perfume; as Louboutin himself explains, "even if you don't like colours, you will end up having something red. For everyone who doesn't like colour, red is a symbol of a lot of culture. It has a different signification but never a bad one."

Equally the value of colour manifest in the objects of our lives is as a consequence of its allure, as French poet and essayist (Charles) Baudelaire arguing when he suggested "colour thinks for itself,

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Lizi Sánchez, 'In a world that laughs' installation view, 2015, Photography by Andy Keate, courtesy Domobaal



All of them had pom-poms, fabrics, ribbons and plastic pearls, and they were all influenced by kitsch architecture - things you will find in Peru. But whilst doing that I also did a residency in China, which encouraged me to combine my interest in the kitsch with the modern; in an attempt to see if the kitsch and the modern could intersect and be more or less the same thing.

independently of the objects it clothes.” As his understanding of colour was as an entity in and of itself, before it is applied as the modern skin for everything we know of the world today. And by transposing manmade colours onto her work, and playfully removing the objects from their outer packaging, Sánchez’s work intended to focus on the elements that interest her the most. Recalling how “the previous works I showed at Goldsmiths were kitsch models, but they all looked like they were produced to display something else. The past sculptures I did were always waiting for something to be added to them, but ironically there was nothing I needed to add, because they were so over-the-top. So the whole display space became the sculpture. I was looking at display and strategies of display, and of what you could and couldn’t do with your work. And I am at a point now whereby more and more interested in the work and the way it is seen. Which means I don’t know exactly which way the works will go? I want to being much more to a work, than someone whose work is determined by an idea and of its completion.”

Tellingly for Sánchez “artists are always situated in-between, in-between the workers and the intellects; art bridges the manual

labourer with and the intellectual. I am always interested in the artist’s double-identity. In terms also of luxury of the gallery as a luxurious space, which is what a lot of my work is about; brands and commodity. I have collected small carriers of perfumes, whereby I get little testers, which is another thing I have been trying to do, of using less and less of my own colours, in order I remove the painterly decisions entirely. So I have not been painting with my own colours for a while now. The colours I have taken from a brand of chocolate, and I applied them to do some of my works.” And with works like OOM acrylic on aluminum foil 2016, and I (from the series Empaquetados), plywood and painted aluminum foil 2014, Sánchez manipulates the hard and fast rules of branding to create equaling enticing objects as a series of works that are less commercially precise, and more about the sensation of being appealed to.

Interview

Rajesh Punj: *By way of introduction it would be interesting for you to explain the relationship between your wall works and sculptural constructs.*

Lizi Sánchez: Where to start, I studied in Peru, painting, where I

was trained as a traditional painter. But after I left university I started - and I am going back in time - a business that was in games and presents for companies, and also table-wear. And I was making a few things with different materials, including wood, MDF, with tissue paper and vanish. Creating various types of games. That was when I started to work in a more design and three-dimensional way, and when I concentrated on all of that I stopped painting all together. And then I moved to Britain, to Bristol, and I started working there again, painting, but completely different to the previous painting I was doing at university, much more graphic.

And then I applied for a Masters degree at Goldsmiths (London), and when I did the MA at Goldsmiths, I was perceived as a sculptor, and people insisted on calling me a sculptor because I was using all these materials to create three-dimensional works. Where I come

from in Peru sculpture is quite traditional, so although I used clay and wax, it was part of what I did as a painter. So I never considered myself as a sculptor. Though in London it possibly pushed me to work with cardboard, fabrics and other materials.

RP: *And I guess that is the nature of Goldsmiths and the Fine Art department, of being able to move freely between departments and disciplines.*

LS: Yes exactly, you are able to move around.

RP: *Even though you were initially labeled a sculptor, art school encouraged you the intention to be a painter, sculptor, and print-maker.*

LS: Exactly, so without noticing it I started working with wool and wallpaper, by applying wool onto the wall. All of which meant I was replacing painting and the

two-dimensional for the three-dimensional. And it was when I realised that what really excites me were materials, that things became much more interesting. Things that have some kind of body, but not necessarily of their standing on the floor, working and operating as a sculpture; purely because I like the nature of different materials and different textures. So I did my degree and graduated with a ‘sculpture’ show. For which all of my pieces were sculptures, and completely different to what I am doing now.

RP: *So at Goldsmiths your works were ‘free standing’; of what we consider in-the-round.*

LS: Yes, they really were freestanding objects in space. All of them had pom-poms, fabrics, ribbons and plastic pearls, and they were all influenced by kitsch architecture - things you will find in Peru. But whilst doing that I also did a residency in China,



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Lizi Sánchez, *Blu2*
Acrylic on aluminium and metal trestles,
90 x 100 x 300cm, 2016
Photography Pablo Hare, courtesy Garúa

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Lizi Sánchez, *X, el espantapajaros*
Rubber cut out 150 x 150cm, 2016
Photography by Pablo Hare, courtesy Garúa

which encouraged me to combine my interest in the kitsch with the modern; in an attempt to see if the kitsch and the modern could intersect and be more or less the same thing.

RP: *You were at Goldsmiths the same moment I was there. You left in 2007, and I in 2006.*

LS: Yes.

RP: *Curating never really immersed itself with Fine Art.*

LS: It didn't really, as it should have.

RP: *There was no sense of an overlap between the two disciplines.*

LS: That should have been the case, but it didn't happen. So this was my work at Goldsmiths, very different to what I studied in Peru. And now that I work from my studio, working on my own. I have been making sculptures for a long time - objects, objects, objects.

RP: *And did the scale of the works change at all? Were they big becoming bigger?*

LS: No they have never been very big. They have always been ruled by my studio and the space I have. (Of my work) you could refer to their size as 'domestic'. There are of a practical scale, and the materials I choose are always very practical as well. I can recall initially it was the excitement of going out Christmas shopping, when I bought lots of decorative baubles and pearls, that led to my making a body of work with ribbons and plastic, painting them and using car paints as well. The work I am making now evolves from that interest in the kitsch.

And all the time I was in London I was disconnected from Peru, I never went back to do a show there, and then I realised I wanted to have a connection with the country, and that it would be worth having. So I applied for some funding here and I secured a solo show there. But I couldn't take too many works with me. I had to think of what I could

use in Peru? And it came from working from these materials - ribbons, plastic, and then I started trying things on aluminum. I find different materials, and I found the aluminum foil that I am using now. And when I found the foil and I started working with it, it produced something I really liked. Because as a material it is a combination of painterly, and something that has body; also it leaves a trace. And this is what I am working with now, and a material I took to Peru. I was starting to work with something and thinking of what to take with me, and with aluminum foil I could roll it up, and if it absorbed any cracks or wrinkles it became part of the work. So it was the excitement of finding a new material that I could do a few things with, and see where it took me.

RP: *So it is a durable material that retains its own history.*

LS: Exactly that is one of the things that I really like about it, that it retains a history, of things that you don't know, and of all the traces of your own marks. And thereafter if someone handles it and puts it in a gallery space, or you store it and someone else handles it again, all those traces of transaction will be left on the paper; and I really like that idea. So the painting's I did for Peru and the works I did were more about that.

RP: *And did you manage to produce works there as well?*

LS: No actually I took everything with me. What happened was that before the show in Peru, I had an exhibition at Standpoint (Gallery) in London, and with that show the original idea was that they approached me to work with a famous artist or someone that I admired, in order we collaborate. And I didn't quite understand the premise, and I thought they wanted that I work with the work of someone I admired.

I contacted Louise Lawler and I asked her for some of her pictures, and I got two of her photographs

When I went there for the show and I met all the other painters in the show, it was interesting because a painter has a very painterly conversation, which I would never have, and I have no interest in having. So I realise I am a worker, an artist.

It is tricky because when I make them, or when my work is working as a sculpture, they are concerned with colour and form; things that are as equally relevant to painting as well. But when I take them from the floor and apply them to the wall, they are still preoccupied with sculptural materiality.

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Lizi Sánchez, Park, 2017

Acrylic on aluminium and rubber cut out.

Each aluminium panel of 76 x 113cm.

Rubber cut out 150 x 150cm approximately

Photography, courtesy the artist





Lizi Sánchez, *IIIII*
Acrylic on aluminium, 230 x 270 cm
(dimensions variable), 2014
Photography, courtesy the artist
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and created a wall, whereby the wall that I had built was mine and the photographs on the wall were taken by her. Again I don't know how to qualify what I did, a display object? Because at the time I was very interested in display objects, and her photographs were really pleasing to the eye. I can recall the images were of the work of Agnes Martin with a (Alexander) Calder, photographed by Louise Lawler; and for my part I was placing the work on my wall. So in the end it all worked very well, and when I went to Peru I redid the wall. But there I was talking much more about abstraction, specifically Latin American abstraction. So rather than use Louise Lawler's picture, I used a painting by the famous (French born) Peruvian abstract painter Regina Aprijaskis, but one of those painter's who has since gone under the radar, and is being rediscovered now. The whole

show was a comment on abstraction. The materials were there, and I had the aluminum foil there but as a support for the other works. But at that moment I wasn't so aware as I am now of what I was doing, and of the implication of using those materials.

RP: Going back to Goldsmiths, and of your having been labeled a 'sculptor' over a 'painter', were you happier as an 'artist', because of your work being as much sculpture as of a painterly process?

LS: Yes, but I don't question it that much. I am definitely not a painter, all though right now I do have a painting in a show in Liverpool, for the John Moores painting prize. And when I went there for the show and I met all the other painters in the show, it was interesting because a painter has a very painterly

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Lizi Sánchez, *This Side of Paradise*
Acrylic on Aluminium Foil
200 x 200 x 10cm, 2014
Photography, courtesy the artist

conversation, which I would never have, and I have no interest in having. So I realise I am a worker, an artist.

RP: So for you the works are not paintings, as much as two-dimensional objects.

LS: Not in that sense.

RP: Closer to wall pieces.

LS: Yes.

RP: I ask because it is interesting to understand how you define them?

LS: It is tricky because when I make them, or when my work is working as a sculpture, they are concerned with colour and form; things that are as equally relevant to painting as well. But when I take them from the floor and apply them to the wall, they are still preoccupied with sculptural materiality.

RP: I guess by definition a painting has its limitations, or its boundaries as such.

LS: Yes the frame creates a world from within which everything else exists. But for me the greater questions are raised outside of that space, yet are sometimes dictated to by the space. So the show I did in Peru was about my looking at different materials, of something I could transport, and of how I could do this and that.

RP: And when determining the placement of each of the works, do you always wish to curate them into the space, or do you like to involve a curator?

LS: No normally I decide that.

RP: I can really see that when I look at the location of your works, because obviously that is very much part of their identity, and of how you wish for your audience to



simultaneously see and understand your works; as painterly objects applied to the floor, or sculptural constructs for the wall.

LS: I think yes. It is all very specific.

RP: Whereby the space becomes incredibly important.

LS: It is interesting because again some things have changed, space is very important and what they do in the space matters, and even though they don't necessarily... they don't need to be shown like this, they could be shown in a different way. But what I would like, if a work is shown in a different way, is that it still does certain things; and those things have a character.

RP: So they are open to interpretation as objects. There is no definitive way for them to be seen, and equally there is no defining solution to how we understand them.

LS: To make it a little clearer, I have these 'egg' works that use certain materials, and the egg comes from a children's story by collagist (Kurt) Schwitters and graphic designer (Theo) Van Doesburg. The story which is called Die Scheuche 'The Scarecrow' is based on letters. I am a big fan of Schwitters and it is beautiful book. It is a story about a scarecrow that represents the old regime, and how he is kicked out by the other animals on the farm and the farmers, and they take all his beautiful things - like his scarf, his hat, his cane, his coat.

RP: So it has a political edge to it.

LS: Yes it was a political story for children, because at the time a lot of the artists were working on short stories, and they were using the short story as an innovative platform for political statements; and it was also a space where they were allowed to do many more things. So my eggs are from Schwitters 'scarecrow', which didn't need to be with the other pieces of the show, and it is not that the reference to Schwitters is necessarily part of the workX,

el espantapajaros 2016; but (the lettering) is something that needs to be animated or dead.

I left the work with a gallery in Peru and they said 'do you mind if someone buys it as it is shown?' 'would you mind if they put it on the wall?' I did mind if they put it on the wall just flat, because that's not the work, but I didn't mind as much if you do other things with it. I have one at home and it's falling from a chair. So as long as it retains its qualities I don't mind how they appear.

RP: So the letters have a life of their own.

LS: With this work yes. It is something I want to apply to other things now, but this one very definitely, as Schwitters had done.

RP: That itself becomes very interesting, the notion that a work beyond its completion has several possibilities, and the idea that a work does not necessarily stop evolving, as the exhibiting space becomes a new location for change. Whereby you allow for your works to be managed and manipulated outside of the studio.

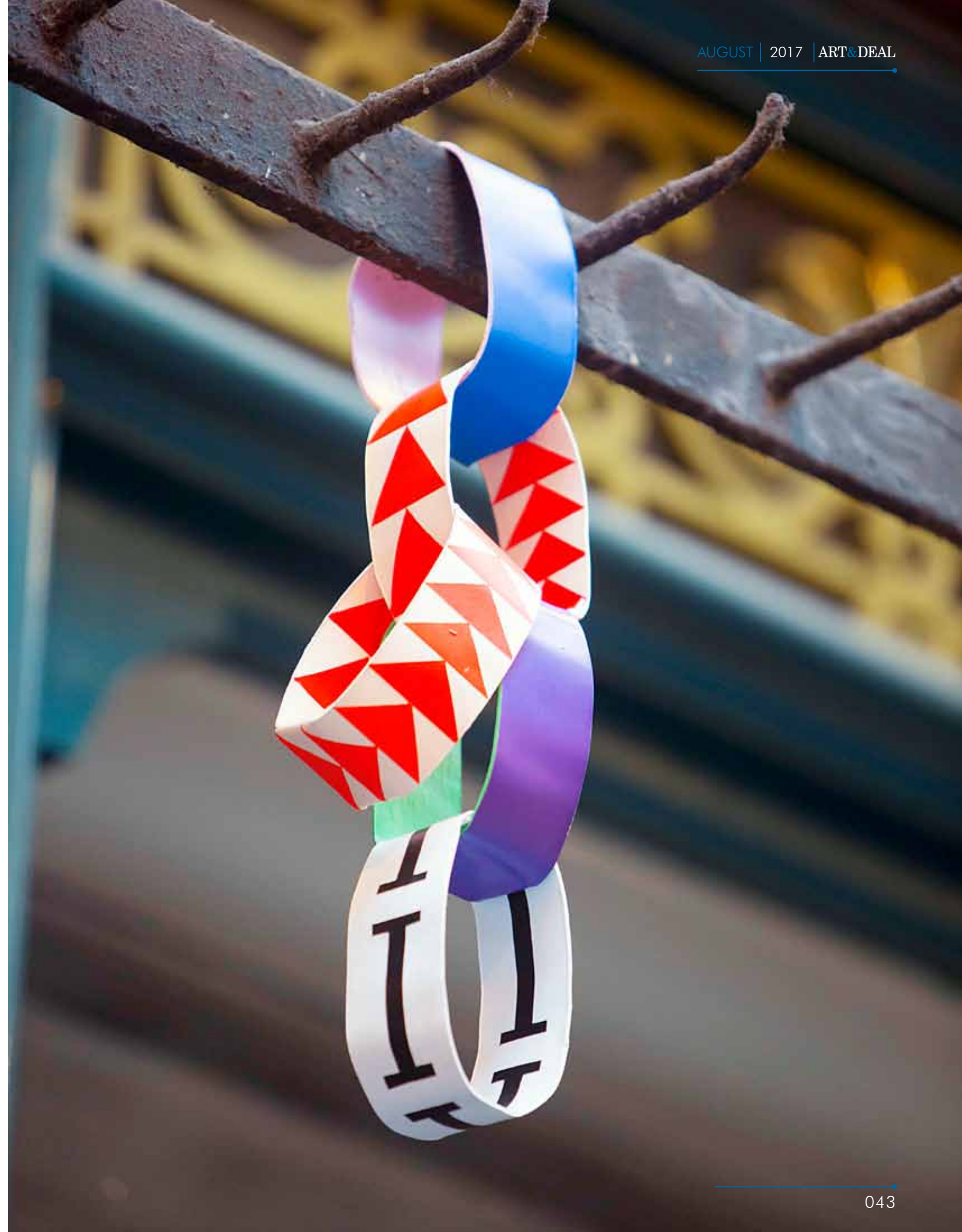
LS: Yes, and it is the same with the aluminum pieces. Because it is something that has been developing and it has something to do with the materials that I am working with. So if I have the work Blu 2016 on trestles, I still allow for the gallery to do something different. I don't see the whole thing as the work. That is the work and it is displayed in that way, and obviously this is how we see the work now, but the work can easily be deconstructed. I am also doing another show, and wonder why I always need to do new work for different shows? I want to introduce things from other shows, applying them to the next show, and consider the idea of exhibiting them in a different way.

RP: And are you doing that more now, of showing works as part of altering configurations?

I don't know if I consciously do it, but I definitely start with many more works for an exhibition, and then take them out until I arrive at the basis for a show. A lot of things I do (in terms of display) are experiments, and that's the other thing I am not the kind of artist who has a fixed idea of what they want, and takes it to its full conclusion. It happens while I work, and I am very interested in thinking while working.

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Lizi Sánchez, Cadeneta
Painted lead, each loop 31x5cm, 2016
Photography by Nick Turpin,
courtesy Domobaal





to, and equally challenge the space that you are in.

LS: Yes I am responding to the space, now much more than before. Possibly in the past I would respond to the college space, because at Goldsmiths I didn't have a gallery, and I was responding less consciously to the environment my works were in then. So probably I always did it but it was less conscious, now that I have things coming up, I have different spaces to respond to.

RP: *And in terms of doing that is it that you need to be in a space for a length of time in order to locate a work/s, to be able to transfer and transform your works over to a new space?*

LS: That is the ideal, but that is not always the case. Sometimes I just work with photographs of the space and measurements. And I work a lot with photo-shop because I have no clue of architectural programs. With a computer I can throw things at the space, and then move them around. They start off as very crowded spaces, and then I start cleaning things up.

RP: *And when you locate works is it as important for you to have as much empty space, as you have works within that space? In other words do you seek a balance between your works and the space that acts as their temporary environment?*

LS: Yes.

RP: *When you draw a body of works together, do you work with a number of them and consciously withdraw pieces?*

LS: I don't know if I consciously do it, but I definitely start with many more works for an exhibition, and then take them out until I arrive at the basis for a show. A lot of things I do (in terms of display) are experiments, and that's the other thing I am not the kind of artist who has a fixed idea of what they want, and takes it to its full conclusion.

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RP: *So what is interesting for you is that where others might see the exhibition as the conclusion of a body of works, for you it becomes an extended opportunity to experiment.*

LS: Yes.

RP: *So you are showing works and then considering how you might show them again, as works within works.*

LS: Yes I like that idea. The work working gives you new ideas.

RP: *But does that then not work against what is more prevalent, of a culture of completion? Or is that not how we should look upon your work?*

LS: Yes because I am not thinking that it isn't complete, because it is complete when it is in a show, that's complete.

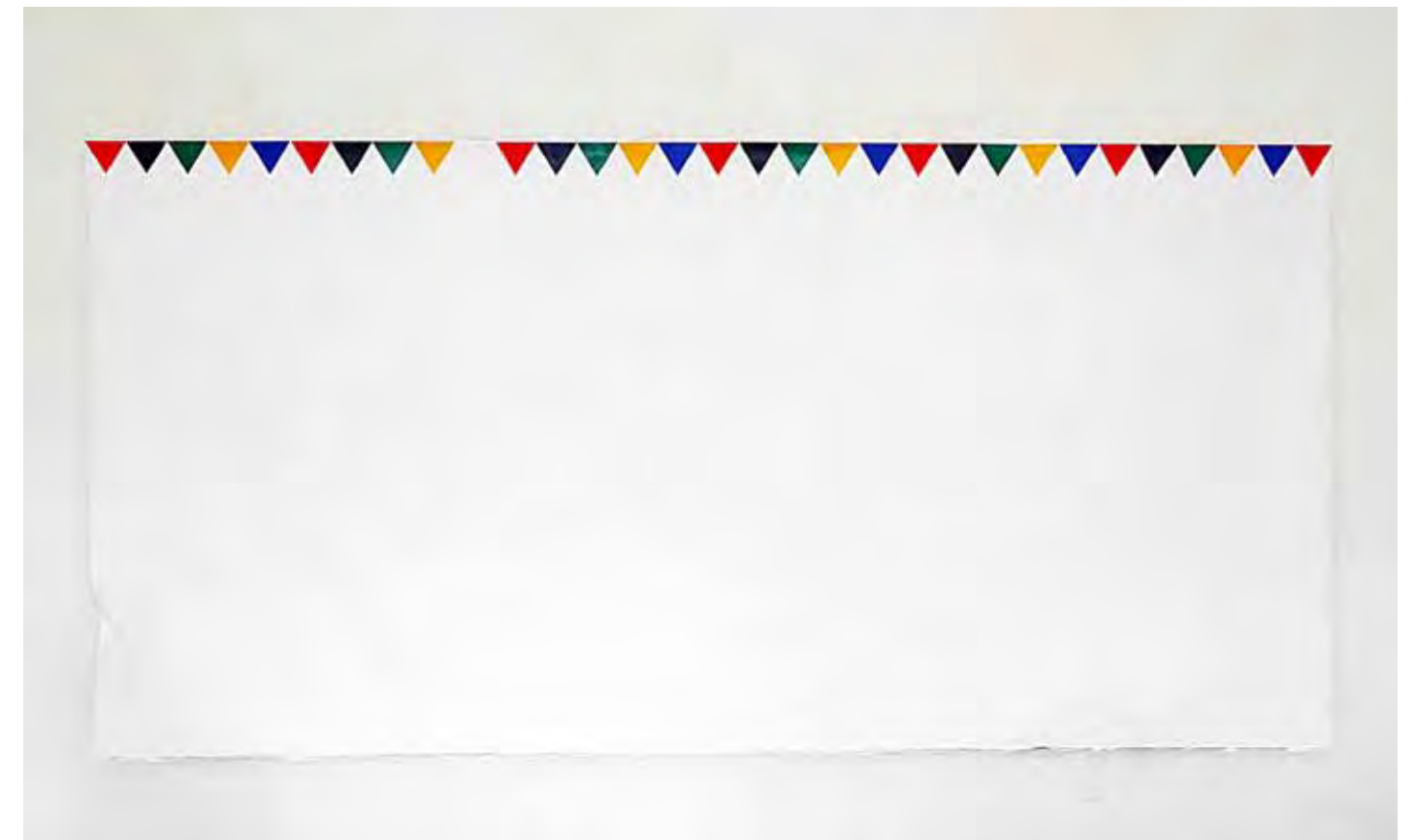
RP: *I am interested in exploring this point, because of how so many artists are driven by a desire for the 'complete' as they see it, and of their intention to arrive at something that thereafter is in a fixed state. As a counter that you appear to see works as objects that can exist in several states.*

LS: I think things develop with time, and I think I am much more interested in that now. It goes back to what we talked about previously. I don't know with certain works what it is, whether it is a painting or a sculpture?

RP: *Are you being asked that though, when you come to exhibit?*

LS: No I am not being asked that question. What they asked me in Peru, which is interesting of contemporary art, of cheap labour, and where people are used to having things done for them - was 'who put your works together for you?' So I don't think they necessarily see the works as either sculptures or paintings, they see them more like

Lizi Sánchez, Happy Valley
Acrylic on aluminium, 76×125cm, 2015
Photography, courtesy the artist
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Lizi Sánchez, Every day
Acrylic on wood ply,
each: 15(h)×14.5×10cm 2015, an ongoing
series of unique sculptures,
presented on a folding trestle.
Photography by Andy Keate,
courtesy Domobaal

an entire installation, in a country where an artist has an idea and then someone else is employed to produce it. I found that happening a lot in Peru. A lot of art is based on a set of ideas that are given over to someone else, which I have some problems with. I understand the history of where that comes from, but the 'readymade' nowadays has problems that didn't exist thirty or forty years ago. Not even a readymade, everything becomes about the idea. People think that you lie to yourself, and see ideas as very interesting, but it is likely the same ideas have been used many many times before, because there are so many artists now working in a similar way. For me there has to be some kind of process to what we do, otherwise the manufacturing of work can become incredibly dull.

RP: *I think there is a conceptual conundrum, of the artwork being entirely about the idea.*

LS: I can understand that, when it started it was a break from existing methods of working - wow it's about the idea.

RP: *Well ironically Goldsmiths championed that as a house-style in the 1980's and into the 1990's.*

LS: Yes.

RP: *But I guess for you the idea of an idea that is formulated and finalised by another person/s, goes against your approach of constantly intervening upon everything.*

LS: Exactly, exactly, and then your idea, maybe it's a good idea but not brilliant, how do you measure a good idea, and of how brilliant it is? For me with my limitations, it is as good as I can produce it, and of how I develop the idea through the making of the work.

RP: *So your hand is very important in the production of a work.*

LS: For me it is very important to see the hand, but not only the hand it is the process of being in the studio working. It is that process of

thinking and doing that hopefully comes across in the work. If I ask someone else to paint for me it becomes (a very detached process). A lot of artists are doing the same and I don't see how it is different, it just becomes commonplace. For example I showed Blu 2016 and the accompanying trestles I wanted for this piece, they were taken from a workshop from a poorer part of Peru. Which have traces of the fences and other industrial objects that have been painted over them again and again. So they have all the touches of the workmanship of someone else. I really wanted to bring that into the space, and into a piece that was very clean and precise. But I also don't want to claim the trestles as part of the work, because they have been there so many times in the background for artists in Peru. And I didn't want to sell you this for however many thousands of pounds, and tell you this is my work. They for me are the 'props' that allow the work to exist in and of its self.

RP: *What is interesting in context from what you say is that where an audience in Peru might well ignore them entirely, an audience here is likely to read the trestles as integral to the work.*

LS: What interests me is that I could show you a picture and say that is the work, but what happens if I say 'this is the work'? - Because the aluminum banner can be shown on a ladder or by other elevated means, and I can show the work in many other different places. So it is the work or it's not the work entirely.

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Lizi Sánchez,
I (from the series Empaquetados)
Plywood and painted aluminium,
28 x35 x 5 cm, 2014
Photography, courtesy the artist

