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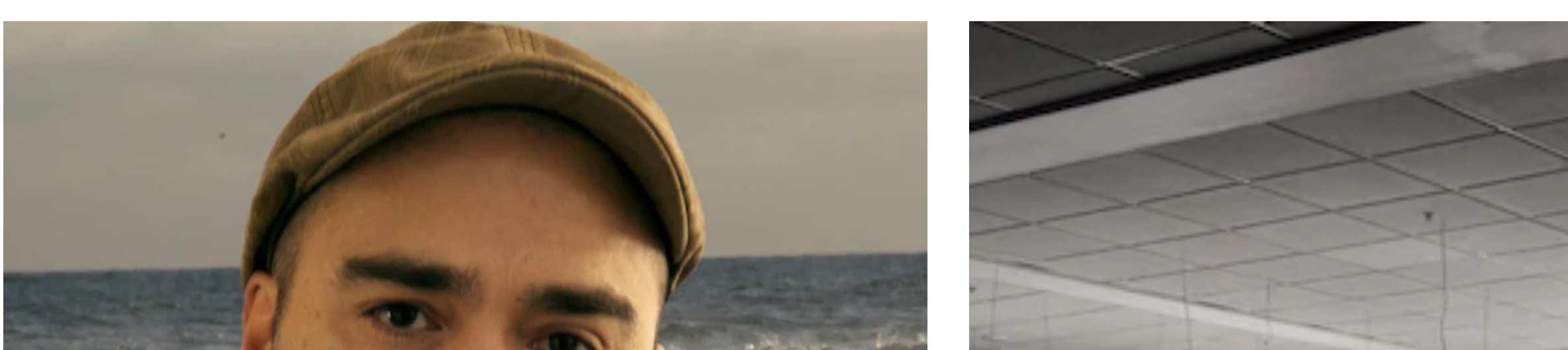
Podcast

¡El Arte no Calla! – Episode 1: Protest and Social Creativity in Chile with Máximo Corvalán–Pincheira

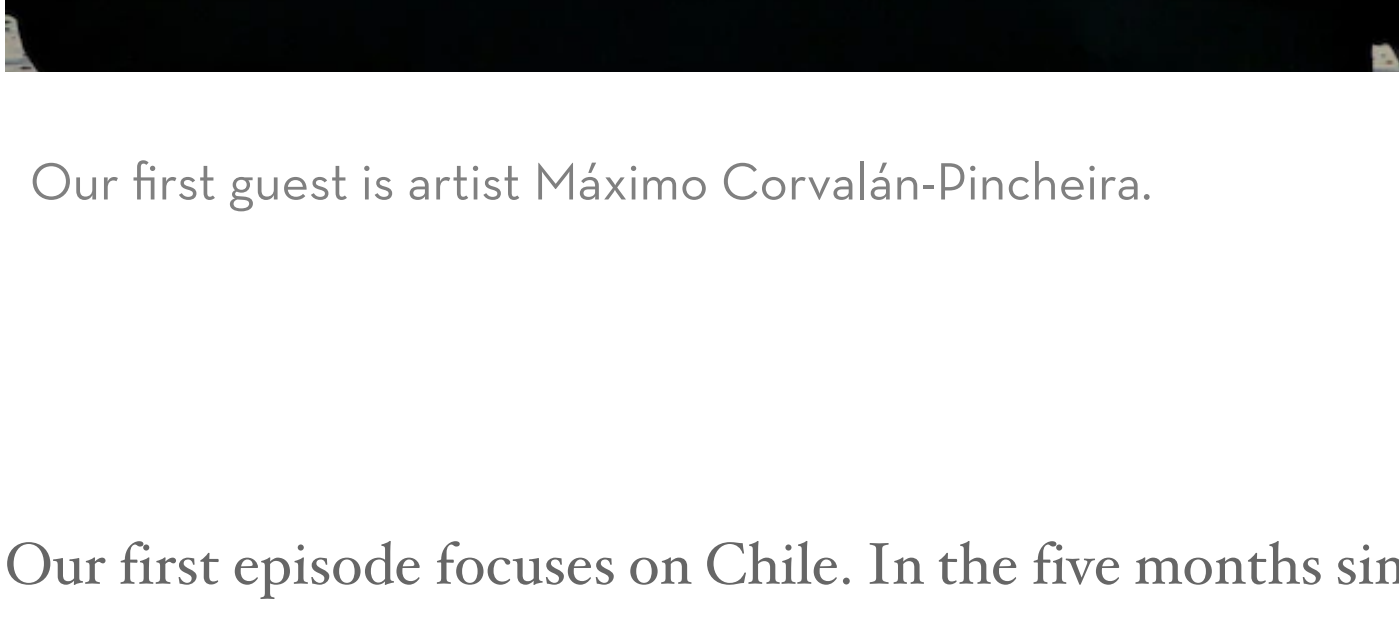
"**El Arte no Calla!**," a new monthly Spanish-language podcast of the Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), explores art, freedom of expression, and human rights in Latin America. In each episode, ARC's Latin America Representative Alessandro Zagato will invite a different guest to help analyze the varying states of artistic freedom in Latin America and the violations that artists and activists are suffering in the region.

In our first episode, we talk with artist Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira about the current situation in Chile, a country that has experienced a massive and unexpected social upheaval in the last five months. In particular, we discuss the role of social creativity and activist art in a context of intense state repression and censorship.

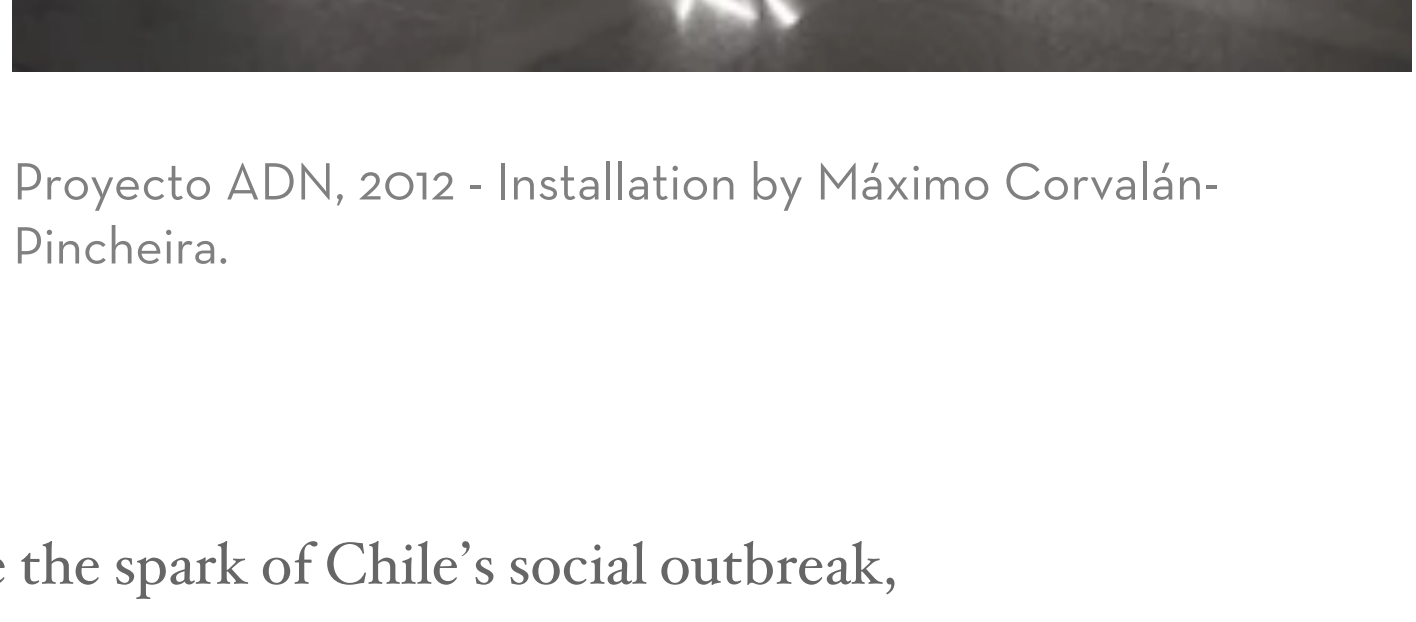
You can listen to episode one, "Protesta y Creatividad Social en Chile con Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira," **below** and read on for a full English transcript.



Episode 1: Protest and Social Creativity in Chile with Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira



Our first guest is artist Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira.



Proyecto ADN, 2012 - Installation by Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira.

Our first episode focuses on Chile. In the five months since the spark of Chile's social outbreak, millions of people have taken to the streets demanding structural changes and democratization in a country shaped by deep inequalities. The government has met this situation with **extreme violence** and the imposition of curfew, military policing, and the promulgation of a new **Internal Security Law**. The repression of social protest has been egregious, with the carabineros, the Chilean national police force, using rubber and metal pellets, chemicals, and other harmful tactics that have produced over forty deaths, hundreds of physical injuries (including more than 300 eye injuries), several rape cases, and other brutality. In this context, engaged artists and cultural production have played an important symbolic role and, as a result, have been directly attacked. For example, the Alameda Cine-Arts Center (ACC) and the Violeta Parra Museum (VPM), two important historical cultural institutions in Santiago, were **targeted by fire attacks**. While the VPM just suffered damage to several installations, the ACC was completely destroyed. Perhaps the most disturbing iteration yet has been the supposed **rape and assassination** of street artist Daniela Carrasco (known as "La Mimo") by carabineros. Her body was found hanging in a public park. Though officials ruled it a suicide, there has been immense outcry calling for an investigation into foul play by the Carabineros, with whom she was last seen alive.

Today, there is high uncertainty about the future of Chile. In April, with the arrival of the so-called "**constitutional plebiscite**," citizens will decide whether to maintain or dismiss the current constitution which was written in the dictatorship.

I sat down with **Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira** on March 3 to discuss these topics. Máximo is an artist who comes from a family of exiles and has lived in La Havana, Mexico City, and Santiago de Chile. His artwork and installations respond to the contradictions of contemporary consumer society, while also referring to historical processes such as immigration or social uprisings. In recent times, he has insisted on mixing the concepts of "precariousness" and "spectacle," generating a formal dialogue between the organic and the abstract.

ALESSANDRO ZAGATO: Welcome Máximo, and thanks for accepting our invitation. Could you tell us how the situation in Chile is at the moment?

MÁXIMO CORVALÁN-PINCHEIRA: Yesterday [March 2, 2020], the President spoke and the situation does not seem to be moving towards normalcy. Indeed, he threatened that he could call for another state of exception, depending on how social unrest will evolve over the coming weeks. This movement has never stopped, even during the February holidays. There is a lot of expectation and uncertainty about how the situation will evolve, but the months of March and April will give us a clue about what is going to come.

What takes place on October 18 [the day when social unrest sparked] in Chile is unique, and it can only happen to a president like **Piñera** who really embodies abuse and inequality - he is the symbol of injustice and scam. After October 19, the people could no longer bear the abuse. The claim "it is not 30 pesos it's 30 years," was read initially as a consumer request, but Piñera managed to turn it into a systemic demand. Today Chileans are not protesting against something specific - it's against everything. They want to change the system, and that corresponds to a constitutional change. The most massive demonstrations we had were of about two million people, more than the protests of the yellow vests in France - of 300 thousand people - where there is a larger population than in Chile. Two million people out of an 18 million population, this number is pretty astonishing.

AZ: Interestingly, this is happening in a context that neo-liberal ideology used to describe as a sort of wellbeing oasis within a troubled region like South America. What type of social creativity is being produced within and alongside the movement?

MC: It must be recognized that artists before were operating within the field of contemporary art, we were shaped by it. Widespread creativity and the production of powerful art and performative actions come rather from anonymous people, in a much more street-like modality. The field of visual arts, this specific "medium," has impressed me. Indeed, when I meet some of its members, I'm always surprised by the distance they maintain with what is happening. As if it didn't touch them. What I identify as powerfully emerging in the demonstrations is the amount of graphic works constantly appearing on the walls. Obviously, the work done by *Las Testis*, which comes from the theater, is a performance that ended up transcending the Chilean context. Well, there are many interesting acts taking place on the streets, but their authorship is not as important as the expression itself, which is about rage and distress.

I have done several actions without authorship and without personal interest other than working collectively. In this sense, this way of working awakens you. We cannot hide that we were following a very individualistic and neoliberal logic in our work - and this new situation shapes you as an artist and makes you work and think from another place, another perspective.

“Chileans are not protesting against something specific – it’s against everything. They want to change the system, and that corresponds to a constitutional change.”

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AZ: In Chile, I have been participating in "Cabildos" [popular assemblies] and one participant once said that "as Chilean people, we have to de-construct ourselves" - that there needs to be a change in subjectivity. Indeed, breaking with neoliberalism is not just an economic type of process, it is a transformation of the way we live, relate to each other, and work. Large sectors of the population are now breaking with individualism, and this is expressed through anonymous collective creativity. Some streets of Santiago look like gigantic art exhibitions - an explosion of creativity that is very interesting and very beautiful. How do you interpret the fact that there are currently people erasing those expressions during the night? This is censorship and an attack on creativity. Is this the symptom of a willingness to return to normalcy?

MC: For me this is a failed act to begin with. It is obviously perpetrated by far-right groups, which are more and more armed and present on the streets, and protected by the police. It is a failed act reflecting the typical myopia of the right in relation to artistic expression. For me, being erased is part of the game. The streets are vital; this is part of what happens. And what happens is that they put a new canvas so that intervene with now much more experience and with more techniques learned in the process, can intervene again. Indeed, currently, those walls are being intervened and improved. It is a failed act that enhances creativity. This is a collective act of creative healing by the citizenry that deposits there all its rage and pains, embodying them in visual artworks.

More brutal and suspicious is the burning of the Cine Arte Alameda and the Violeta Parra Museum. It must be considered - and we should not be naïve here - that some of the hooded people taking to the streets may be infiltrated.

AZ: What are the most important symbols and concepts that have been produced by the movement in four months? I find it quite surprising that the movement does not have a historical figure representing it. One like Zapata in Mexico for example. Are there any historical political references?

MC: One of the most important is the **Matapacos dog**. It has become a symbol that replaces the imaginary related to Che Guevara - uniformed Che, Che with a hat, Che with badges, etc. Now we have Matapacos wearing a T-shirt, a hat, and badges. He is a street dog that got together with people protesting, and every time the police intervened, he threw himself on them - he represents that. This absence of a historical figure, this symbolic particularity, is a phenomenon difficult to identify and explain. Recently I have heard Gabriel Salazar speaking, for example - he has a national history prize in Chile. He speaks of the mestizo [a person of Spanish and Indigenous descent] as a serious problem, greater than the Mapuche. There has been a non-representation of the mestizo, who has no identity or mandate. He has always been in the promise of moving from a situation of "subalternity" to one of privilege, which has never been fulfilled. It seems to me that the explanation goes in that direction. It has to do with the number of abuses that have occurred for 400 years, nobody talks about the mestizo condition.

AZ: It is an identity issue. Many young people go through a process of re-indigenization. They return to their Mapuche roots, for example. I know several mestizo artists who returned to the native culture, and from that particular space, they get inspiration and create. It is not a coincidence that the Mapuche flag has been such an important visual element for movement.

MC: There is a greater recognition of the Mapuche flag than of the one we were given [the Chilean flag]. Now the right-wing displays the Chilean flag, whereas the people use the blackened Chilean flag, or the Mapuche one. Indeed, for a long time they have had to endure and resist state violence. Today there is an empathy with the Mapuche people because for many years, even before democracy, they were victims of state violence. However, this violence was normalized in people's perception. Suddenly this same violence targets the urban population, and somehow empathy occurs. The case of the murder of **Camilo Catrillanca** is very important here. His figure becomes a symbol of and against abuse, farce, and manipulation of evidence.

AZ: It is a very strong symbol and speaks of a demand for decolonization of sectors of Chilean society demanding a statehood that includes forms of life that come from the indigenous people, who were resisting for centuries, and who had to deal with state repression long before the social outbreak.

What forms of organization have been growing at the popular level and what defense mechanisms of human rights and freedom of expression exist? Also, could you say something about censorship at the mainstream media level?

MC: The first main form of organization are the Cabildos, assemblies where many people are working for the first time as a community in their own neighborhoods - this level has been advancing and developing at different levels. For instance, I belong to a group of artists who do regular assemblies, where we plan interventions and analyze the situation. The music festival of Viña del Mar is interesting because politicians denounced the fact that it has become politicized, but in the past, it has always represented a logic of "bread and circus" - now the problem has been reversed. Finally, the festival embodied the voice of a movement, as highlighted by the participation of a committed artist like Mon Laferte. The president is showing weakness. Indeed he would have censored the festival, but artists exposed him by saying what everyone knows. It is part of the game, despite all the censorship mechanisms put in place. The problem is so transversal that even the audience of the festival ends up expressing the vision of the movement. It is, therefore, an unstoppable tendency. A tide, finally. The censorship by the media is brutal, while the Violeta Parra Museum was burning everyone talked about the Viña del Mar festival.

AZ: Common people are taking advantage of every situation of visibility, like the festival, football events, and so on, to express their dissent and do it in a creative way. There is an unstoppable energy in popular subjectivity, which comes from the violence that people had to endure. The dead and mutilated victims cannot be erased from popular consciousness.

“This is a collective act of creative healing by the citizenry that deposits there all its rage and pains, embodying them in visual artworks.”

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MC: Every time he speaks, the president seems to want to add more fire to the situation. I don't know if he does not listen to his advisers or if he listens to them too much. When people are jumping over the subway fence, you can take it as a simple form of protest. But he is absolutely ineffective in managing the situation. This excessive violence has to do with his ineptitude. He turns the conflict into a police problem, whereas the conflict is a political problem. All responsibility goes to the Chilean police, and this is why this continuous clash between protesters and the police occurs because the police have been given a responsibility that they cannot resolve. The president shows a stunning loss of contact with reality, when he says, "I have also been to the demonstrations, we are all very unhappy, I am also angry." He has lost touch with reality - but he does not touch his privileges. Indeed he failed to make any changes whatsoever that one could say, "He is understanding." That attitude produces an unstoppable and growing rage. He is also threatening all the time, but he finds the comparison with Pinochet unfair.

AZ: This fracture manifests itself in a direct conflict with the police. It is typical of a state that has freed itself from the public, from the common, and by doing so it has lost connection with the people. On one side you have the government and on the other one the population with its demand for change. It is also a conflict without mediation because it seems to me that the political parties - the opposition for example - have in no way managed to limit state violence.

MC: It's that the political parties are part of the same problem. They are what we call the "political caste." And this is something that makes people angry.

AZ: Now what is going to happen? Do you have any plans or projects?

MC: Before the outbreak started, I had already won a scholarship in Sweden. I have been working for a long time on two streams: one has to do with identity, the other with migration. I am going to Sweden to work on a problem that overlaps these two themes. You must know about an exiled Chilean grandfather whose daughter marries a Swede and joins ISIS, they go fighting, they die, and their six children are left in a refugee camp. The grandpa makes that public - people are usually embarrassed about these types of situations and children are abandoned. The grandfather fights to have those kids back, but Sweden does not want to receive them because they say that they are terrorists. However the Chilean family says that they will receive them, and Sweden finally says yes. In this story - which I am investigating - identity, migration, and memory issues are mixed. Next semester I'll go to the Vancouver Biennial in Canada where I'll be also working with migration.

At the end of the year, I received an invitation to the Memory Park in Argentina, where I am going to work with a topic related to my family. I am the son of a person who was disappeared by the Pinochet dictatorship, and my father's body was recognized by nuclear DNA analysis. This is very interesting because this is a technology that develops after 9/11. In 2001, after the attacks, there were no whole bodies left, so forensic medicine advanced in the technology of identification of human bone fragments. I see many paradoxes and ironies in this story. Indeed, the United States helps to finance a coup [in Chile] and consequently to disappear people, and on the other hand, the fall of the Towers helps to find missing detainees from the dictatorship - it's a sort of tautological history. It is a method that is used beyond Chile. For example, the 43 disappeared from Ayotzinapa [Mexico] are searched in this way. All the cases of missing people in the south as a result of the Condor Operation are being searched with this method.

This work is going to be shown in the Memory Park of Buenos Aires, which works with the "Grandmothers of May" - the children of detained women who committed suicide or were killed, were adopted by generals, and whose grandmothers are still looking for them. Now, through DNA tests, many grandsons were reunited and linked with their families. This is a very beautiful and painful meeting at the same time, which has to do with the type of work I am developing.

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