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Deconstructing Exhibitions: *Build what we hate. Destroy what we love.*

Of the exhibitions provided for this assignment, *Build what we hate. Destroy what we love* particularly caught my eye due to its installation and its topic. The exhibition deals with the diaspora of Venezuelan migrants by bringing parts of their journey to us both directly and indirectly. Instead of directly documenting the journey of these migrants, the exhibition seeks to provide a different perspective by focusing on the objects carried and left behind by the Venezuelan migrants. This is particularly evident in Cassandra Mayela's pieces. Her pieces are large textile works made of fabric donated to her by Venezuelan migrants, and they hang prominently in the center of the exhibition hall. Their place in the center of the exhibition immediately draws your eyes to them, and the way that they take up space forces you to walk around them demanding your attention. Mayela's pieces also help to bring attention to the rest of the artworks, physically funneling people towards the walls on which they sit. I believe that this exhibition does a good job of highlighting the Venezuelan diaspora through non-traditional, documentary means, instead utilizing space and 3-D works to draw attention to the material aspects of the diaspora and, in a way, having the viewer engage in their journey through the exhibition.

A reason I enjoy contemporary art is due to the ways it tends to challenge how we view and create art. Mayela's work somewhat does this in the way she works with donated materials to create fairly mundane objects such as her piece *Chaleco*, a vest. *Chaleco* is a conceptual piece.

While there is artistry to be seen in the design and craftsmanship of the piece, *Chaleco* is more concerned with telling a united, perhaps interwoven, story of the Venezuelan migrants through its dismantling and reunion of multiple fabrics coming from multiple people. Her work, specifically, reminds me of Helio Oiticica's *Tropicalia* which expertly utilizes its space and uses the mundane to bring an immersive experience to the viewer. Juan Diego Pérez la Cruz takes it a step further in his work *Legunas Mentales*. Video works already have a unique, and often difficult, place within exhibitions and galleries. They require prolonged attention from their viewer and often require them to be viewed from start to finish. Cruz changes this dynamic by having his video pieces be mostly static images. The dynamic of viewing a static image on a screen instead of seeing the physical photograph is already unique, but the more interesting aspect is how the photograph within the video is moved and manipulated every couple of minutes. The viewer gains a basic understanding of the work within a short time frame and is further engaged should they witness what else the video has to offer. It's through contemporary pieces such as these that I continue to contemplate the way in which we can interact with art and the intentionality that artists place into every aspect of their work.

Much of what I enjoy from this exhibition comes from its layout and design. The space is long and cramped, an aspect that the artists capitalize on. Again, I look at Mazula's work as it sits at the forefront of the exhibition. To reiterate, her textile work hangs centrally from the ceiling taking up much of the hall's space. The pieces face you as soon as you enter the hall and are likely the first thing you see when entering. Should you want to see the artworks at the back of the exhibition, you'll have to travel around Mazula's pieces. In all aspects, her pieces demand your attention which you could say lends to the exhibition's goal of highlighting the Venezuelan diaspora. In line with this, one could say that the fact that you have to travel around the textile

works, having to divert your path due to obstacles out of your control, physically places the viewer in a similar, albeit subdued, thematic situation that the Venezuelans face. All in all, I feel that Mazula and the exhibition effectively use the space of the exhibition to emphasize their message.

As much as I enjoyed viewing the exhibition, I do have some questions regarding specific choices made for the exhibition. Firstly, did Mazula intend for her pieces to be spatially placed the way they were or was that the curator's idea? How the artist envisions their work be portrayed may be different from how a curator sees it. I wonder whether Mazula foresaw her textile works as being "barriers" which facilitate viewer movement, much like I described earlier, as this brings a different dynamic to how her pieces are viewed and interacted with. Secondly, where did the idea of *Objects of Embodied Memories* come from? This exhibition could have easily been a museum-like experience where the Venezuelan diaspora is clearly and explicitly displayed. Instead, the exhibition takes a conceptual route utilizing art as its medium, objects as the voices. With people and faces being such a strong emotional connector for people, the choice to instead focus on objects and how their stories tie in with the people that possessed them is very intriguing.