

Studio Visit: artist profiling their work

KAYLE BRANDON AND HEATH BUNTING

Bristol-based, they have created the ongoing web project irational.org; their work has been exhibited at Tate Modern, CCA Glasgow and last year at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York

KAYLE BRANDON: Hi everyone.

HEATH BUNTING: So we're going to show twelve projects in thirty minutes? OK, the first project we're going to show is a Border Crossing Guide, this is, serves as an introduction to the next project Botanical Guide so I guess I should talk about his a little bit. So this is a project I started maybe about three or four years ago in response to feeling intimidated by men with guns and also feeling burdened by paperwork and other possessions I decided it would be good to learn how to cross borders without being detected or detained. And since my kind of area of operation at the time was Europe I decided to test all the borders within the European Union so this was before the latest batch of recruits.

KAYLE BRANDON: OK, so we crossed a lot of borders in Europe. I suppose they're kind of relics now in some ways. Some of them were very physically demanding and in a way made us kind of cross our own personal, physical borders within that experience. We wanted to create a guide that was very simple for people to use; from tourists to people needing to cross borders for other reasons. We tried to travel very lightweight. So we would have to be prepared, often quite a lot of planning, working how much food we would need. Sometimes the walks would be three days long, sometimes they would just be five hours and often there would just be a walk across a car park into the next bit of car park and you would be in the next country. Which crossing would you like to show?

((Interruption))

KAYLE BRANDON: So the crossings were on lots of different types of terrain, water crossings, underground crossings and mountain crossings. This ended up being a water crossing across a frozen ice lake in the countryside. So just there where that clump of trees is, is Denmark and just here where we were was Germany. So we decided to take a stick with us because we were very scared that the ice would break and cause a few problems.

HEATH BUNTING: So at the time there were 26 borders and I think we crossed 22 or 23 of them and they we're very varied as Kayle suggested, not just in terms of terrain but in terms of security. Some of them you could just walk across without any problem and some were totally impassable, for instance the France/UK crossing. So this is the French/UK border, it's not even the outer border, this is like the second or third ring, security ring beyond that you'd have patrols of dogs, security cameras, electric fences, to get to this fence you'd have to evade the French riot police and further security as well so this border was quite unfriendly. I managed to penetrate this border on both sides of, in the UK and France but with quite a lot research into fence climbing. Do you want to show fence climbing now?

KAYLE BRANDON: Yeah, OK.

HEATH BUNTING: So far it seems that there's quite a lot of interest in urban environment, not so much of nature here so I think we're going to concentrate a bit more on some of our urban. Often the, the method by which we work now is we have a central project that will run for three or four years which is quite formal and rigorous and then we kind of have fun along the way. This was a kind of branch from the border crossing project.

So I was interested in learning how to climb fences for obvious reasons and so we organised a fence climbing workshop in Bristol which we then subsequently

exported and franchised to Berlin but my main interest apart from being able to physically climb fences was to treat them as other forms of urban furniture to be explored, to change people's perception of a fence instead of a barrier as more of a sports object or something to be climbed because it's there. So you can imagine security guards reactions to us just climbing the fences and not wishing to get over the other side for instance.

So I was here earlier on and a lot of the questions or comments kind of wanted me to say that the world hasn't really changed that much over the past 10 or 20 years but I think peoples interests in transgressing has changed so you can go out and do these things and you won't get arrested for terrorism. The police may come along and say we think you are terrorists but they would have done that 10 years ago and they would have said we think you're a traveller or something. So there's still the same kind of level of control but you can just go and do these things you don't need an adventure playground, you don't need permission, you don't need an architect's drawing for these things. The whole world is out there for you to play, you can play right now if you want if you want you know.

KAYLE BRANDON: Also is it necessary to have allocated space for specific activities? From listening to Clare talking about this possibility of having a tree-climbing site, trees are everywhere and actually there is an international tree climbing day which people from all over the world participate in. So I think it is an important question to ask whether it's necessary for her, these types of allocated spaces or whether we can allow ourselves to experiment with what we have in the spaces that we live in.

HEATH BUNTING: Which do you prefer? This is the first year that we took part in, but obviously international tree climbing day has been around a long time. Again you will be confronted by authority when you do things like this whether they are people advising you for your own interest in terms of safety not to climb trees or for the safety of the trees. Because it's an organised event somehow it's seen as more damaging than just a bunch of kids climbing trees. So this year we were a bit worried because the park keepers were ready for us and wanted to stop us climbing trees. This isn't used using a photo retouch device. So back to our border crossing ...

KAYLE BRANDON: So one of the things that came out of Border Crossing was a Botanical Guide to Border Crossing. It came out of the experience we were having while we were crossing borders and the things that we became interested in, we wanted to provide a guide to people to use so it's pocket sized, easy to carry, very simple in description. We're not experts at border crossing or botany so, and so it's a guide to assist anybody who wants to become acquainted or wants to do border crossing or wants to look at wild plants for just purely out of interest or to use or to understand certain areas of terrain.

The botanical guide encompasses a wide range of plants and a wide range of terrain, it kind of begins in a city where you can find lots of dandelion and kind of goes on into more kind of rugged mountain terrains as the story unfolds. And I was kind interested in how these two languages kind of collided with each other and formed relations with each other, creating a kind of, a sort of understanding that I can really access to the situation just from my sort of verbal understanding of it. I think it sort of took the project on as the two languages mingled with each other.

HEATH BUNTING: So it offers advice, observations of plants but also advice about borders within the same text. And we have a pile of these here so if anybody wants to swap anything we're prepared to exchange.

((Pause))

So this leads on from the Border Crossing and the Botanic Guide. When we returned back to Bristol we became obviously interested in food and our local environment and started to take note of all the free food sources around our city and then formulated this idea that maybe we could use those. So we decided it would be good to map the free food resources in Bristol and the areas that, and analysed the areas in which they occurred and then set about maybe creating more of these areas and planting in these areas.

So we use our server as not only a space for exhibition and distribution but also a production so you might come to our site and it's seems completely unfinished. I know there's nothing there but that's our studio you know, it's a bit messy sometimes. So we've constructed this software and as you can see there's all these plants, our house is just here null, null but null, null means there's no organism at that site of interest but it's a potential place to plant something. So there's a few null, null's around here and the rest of the map but most of the other things are things that already existed so we're mapping those and identifying new places.

Some of the most interesting places I've found are border zones, they're not national borders but they're places of, like this one for instance, that are somehow protected by the junction between two controlled spaces; so people will stay away from them or they're not really sure whether they have the authority to cut down things there.

This is one of my favourite zones; I intend to plant maybe a line of mulberry trees along here, maybe about ten in the next few weeks really. One of the things that I do daily is to take cuttings from existing plants, plants that are either wild or have been cultivated in the city, take cuttings which is very easy to do and then you just go and plant them somewhere else. So on average I plant about three trees a day, as you can see this is a very good place to plant a row of fruit trees, there's already a tree here. If you plant them just by these posts they've got a good chance of survivability because within a city there's so many competing agencies you can plant a tree in one place and it'll be chopped down by somebody else a few weeks later.

This is another site which is, we've had problems in our city with Network Rail I think it's called now and they just decide, OK trees are bad, so we will cut down every tree on a railway embankment in the country and...

KAYLE BRANDON: I think it's because they're having problems with the leaves falling in the autumn.

HEATH BUNTING: You must have heard of that, problems with leaves. So they came to our area which you know, inner city, we appreciate our trees, there's also the city now is becoming a nature reserve and which is going to raise issues of citizenship for other organisms other than humans. You know when the countryside is just an industrial wasteland and the city is actually a free zone we're going to have to have a lot more responsibility for each other in terms of humans and animals and plants, so this is one zone. This is a border zone between probably the former Network Rail and British Rail, so this is the British Rail fence, this is probably Network Rail fence so there's a legal discrepancy here, this land is free, so it's no

good, you can't build a house on it, but you can plant a row of trees that will last maybe 100 years and obviously accessible to the public. So as well as planting things we intend to produce a range of products.

KAYLE BRANDON: OK, well we've just been producing like cordials from elderflower and japonica jam and horseradish sauce. So these products are nothing new, people have been doing them for a long time, the fact that we're just trying to bring it into the urban environment and the city is maybe a little bit more of a step into turning the city more into a place of production from local foods and wild sources.

HEATH BUNTING: One product I want to bring to market quite soon is office dried fruit, so if you imagine you can harvest like feral or wild foods within the city and you combine it with a waste product like a lot of the foods you have are, the ingredients contain chemical waste because it's the best way to dispose of chemical waste is to get people to, incorporate them into their bodies. I'm not joking and also a by-product, you know we do things with computers and they generate a lot of heat so I thought it'd be really good to do like dried fruit. Let me see I think this must have been the 'before' picture. We work at the cube cinema. So this is a prototype that I intend to make like a filled air drying box, so we can take the urban fruit, urban whatever and put them in a box and within like 24 hours you've got a preserve that you can then distribute. So this is 24 hours later, you can see there's obviously a bit of a problem at the moment with all the human skin and other dust, it's nasty isn't it? This computer's running Linux by the way so we have a very strong open source feeling.

((Pause))

So this is it 24 hours later and anyway so we'll be able to swap them or sell them to you or give them to you probably next year when we've got everything developed.

KAYLE BRANDON: Maybe get it at Fresh and Wild.

HEATH BUNTING: So the next project I'd like to show is something that I did and so it's not collaboration with Kayle and this was done few years ago, so it might look a bit dated now, and in fact in this country redundant because the threat of GMO release into our natural environment has subsided due to popular direct action.

So I'd like to present this project in response or reaction to the idea that art can maybe act as publicisers for ideas or at best produce models. I think artists can produce things that have a real effect and are at the leading edge of technology and all those things. So this was super weed, this was a GMO designed to interfere with the profitability of crops. An organism can be either a crop or a weed depending on its financial use or convenience to growers and I decided to target a canola which is called rapeseed in this country but it's mostly used in margarines, it's not commonly known as far as I'm aware. And I wanted to produce a kit to transfer the responsibility to the user and away from myself that people could assemble that would produce a range of super weeds that could be then inserted into a GMs canola crop and this super weed would, you would not be able to kill it with weed killer. So that there would be all these weeds in the field, the farmer wouldn't be bale to get them out very easily and the profitability, you only need to have an increase of 5% weeds in a crop and the profitability is lost. So this was the kit, so I took on a performative role here as a kind of persistent eco warrior, the kit was

distributed by post freely on request, I distributed at least a thousand of these world wide and I think that's all there is to that one.

With these projects you know you always anticipate things going in a certain way but they never do and I was quite pleased that this kit was taken up by Monsanto's competitor because obviously they have an interest in Monsanto failing and they tested the kit and proved that it was functional. So this project's been on slow burn for the last year or two but N55 recently contacted me to supply them with these kits and they're weaponising them at the moment and they have a rocket which they're using which can fly 10 km horizontally so they're using that I think tactically but the point of this project was a strategic weapon. That it's best not to use it but that it would be, if everybody had these things, it's like nuclear weapons, you know you remember how all those work, you don't use them and then they're good. We're out of time I think.

KAYLE BRANDON: Maybe we should make an announcement. OK, so this weekend we have a training and preparation series of workshops which are called Nothing Could Surprise Us and basically they're to enable persons who are interested in preparing for personal global disaster to begin to educate themselves and become equipped. So we have a Prepare for Death workshop on Friday, prepare for your own death and maybe actually realise that, or try to realise that you are going to die sort of thing. And then there's a Climbing Workshop at this very good climbing estate in Bristol just to kind of exercise the body and keep nimble. So it's a wide range of workshops basically just to sort of begin to self-educate in preparedness and there's also a Falling Over workshop for people who find that they need to recover from falling or would like to induce falling to influence situations etc.

HEATH BUNTING: Fishing as well. Do you want to talk about this Grow World thing?

KAYLE BRANDON: I could do. The Grow World Pocket Ecologies is by an art group called Foam and they're coming over from Brussels to make these things called seed balls and basically they are a mixture of clay and soil mixed with local wild seed from tree seed to plant seed and they will be rolled into balls and then kind of squidged or placed in nooks, crannies, miscellaneous border spaces within the city, sort of inducing a kind of plant versus concrete scenario but also just to create more green spaces within the city that are sustainable.

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ALLORA AND CALZADILLA

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla live and work in Puerto Rico. They recently exhibited at Tate Modern, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Walker Art Center, ICA Boston and the Gwangju, Moscow and current Venice Biennales

JENNIFER ALLORA: Well, thank you for having us talk today, we're very excited to be here, we're going to talk today about a body of work that we have developed over like the past five or six years around the island of Vieques Puerto Rico which is a small island off the mainland of Puerto Rico that has made international news in the past few years due to the civil disobedience campaign that happened on the island to evict the US navy from the island. Our presentation we decided to present is called Landmark and it's a working concept that we have been developing for a number of years as a way to think about the processes that were happening on this island of Vieques and as an example or as a kind of working concept to think about the ways in which lands become marked in different ways through different processes from colonisation to development to programming to different types of strategies, from marking and reclaiming different types of lands.

And in particular we were thinking about how a landmark is usually understood as this sort of prominent feature in the landscape that is a way for you to detect a certain designation of a land space and how by just taking the term and cutting it in half and inverting it, it kind of opens up other kinds of questions about the different types of political and social questions that come to mind when you think about the ways in which land is marked and the violence's and stakes involved in that. So specifically we were interested in what are the power relations that are evidenced in land marking processes and whose interests are served in the designation of certain places for preservation and others not? What are the strategies for reclaiming marked land and what are the stakes? And how does one articulate ethics of land use? And finally who decides what is worth preserving and what is worth destroying?

We're going to just present to you here just a series of images kind of giving you a background about the history of Vieques and the island and a recent history of what had happened that led up to the civil disobedience movement of the early 2000's. This is just a map showing you where it's located in the world, specifically in the Caribbean. This map is an old map of a topographical map that presents the island and on your left hand screen is the mainland of Puerto Rico, Vieques is in the bottom and above it is Culebra Both of those two islands are part of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and then beyond that is the US Virgin Islands and British Virgin Islands, to kind of give you a sense of where this is located.

But I'll go back here for just a second to show you this image of the world map because it's also important from another point of view to understand the reason why the military became interested in the island of Vieques, as you can see it's the Caribbean especially Puerto Rico which is a possession of the United States, of still having a colonial situation, is located midway between North America and South America so from a tactical point of view, well a strategic point of view I should say the military were very interested in Puerto Rico and in particular this island of Vieques because it's the island that actually marks the passage into the deep waters that then allow boats to go up towards North America.

So this part of the Caribbean is very important area for defence; at least that was the argument for the military at the time for wanting to be involved in this island. So here's an image of the island as it was divided in the late, or actually the early 1940's around 1943 the island was divided into three sections, the middle section that is designated by the diagonal red lines represents the civilian population of the island, the western portion of the island which is on your left hand side was designated as a

munitions storage facility and then eastern portion side of the island was designated for live firing practices.

Here is a military map that designates those areas as you can see, the area of the danger area and restricted area meaning where the weapons were being stored, and that very small sliver in the centre again was where the people of Vieques were forced to live and in order to accomplish that. Anyway this is just an image of how the military sort of marked this land of Vieques and how they saw this land mass in terms of their programming. So you can see here in a kind of semi-aerial shot of the mainland of Puerto Rico again in your bottom corner and Vieques in the centre of the screen and this is a graphic demonstrating the flight patterns for the bombing missions that would happen over the inner range in Vieques.

And this is an aerial of satellite photograph of the bombing range. You can see the target in the top of the picture. this is the observation tower from which, all the different military manoeuvres were overseen from and incidentally this was the place where a civilian guard was killed by a stray bomb in 1999, and that was what sort of reunited the civic initiatives to further attempt to get the military out of the island. It sort of was like the final straw that re-ignited the very long process of resistance for over 60 years.

Another kind of land marking is these two images of these missiles that are in the front of that observation tower sort of as a gateway to that landscape designating or marking what the purpose is of everything beyond that high point is designated for. Interestingly to us is that right on the other side is this other view which I mean, in reference to this conference and this idea of what, ecology and environment mean that these terms and the necessity to unpack them and to really understand the ways in which they're used, is very important because many times they're used to mask certain types of problems and in fact the very look of something like this can become problematic and can be precisely used to mask certain types of political positioning as it looks like a sort of untouched pristine environment.

But in fact this is the area where all of the land exercises take place and they were using the kind of low cover for those types of manoeuvres and areas completely contaminated and filled with all sorts of ordnance and these are things that are not visible to photograph of that area, it's something that is in that landscape but not necessarily immediately apparent.

The area that designates the civilian from the non-civilian area looks like this with heavily fenced in gates and so the people of Vieques who once lived on the entire island have this new sort of marking of the landscape that was signifying one's access to reform the environment that used to be formally open to them. And moreover the kind of imagery that the island was then marked by with these types of barbed wire fences and military planes and tanks really sort of changed the character of the island and how it perceived it's self with these new military iconography in the landscape.

This is a map of the western portion of the island and you can see all of these small numbers designate munitions storage facilities in the western landscape and they chose the west because it is the more mountainous region of the island and the red area where the highest topographical point is, is another observation tower that overlooks all of the bunkers which store the various munitions. And as you can see

there were many, many of these sites and they contained everything from bullets to more hazardous things like plutonium and uranium.

This is an image of the landscape marked by these bunkers and an interesting type of design really by the military in which, the way the bunkers are designed you can hardly see it actually. It's completely immersed into the natural topography as a kind of defence tactic; just an image of that and here's a frontal shot of the same storage facility. In order to accomplish this sort of military take over of the island in the 1940's what had to happen was that they basically expropriated all of the civilians who lived on this island to this centre area and a letter such as this one was issued to all the people who lived on the land throughout the whole island that they had to leave their homes immediately and be relocated to the centre of the island. And that in itself constitutes a grave violence to the people and their relationship to the land. Even more diabolical was another action by the US Navy in the 1960's that because the US military really wanted the whole island to themselves, they just wanted to use the whole thing to do whatever they wanted and they didn't want anyone to ask any questions about it and there was this small remnant population that had survived despite the lack of economic opportunity on the island because of the military's presence there. They nevertheless survived for a number of generations and in the 1960's the military had been so fed up with the fact that these people wouldn't leave they had the idea to in fact exhume all of the bodies from the local cemetery and move them to the mainland of Puerto Rico along with the remaining inhabitants with the idea that if the dead, the people who were born in the island and from the island or buried in the island, if that gets forcibly removed from that land there will be no reason to come back and then they could do what they wanted and it was commonly called by the local inhabitants Plan Dracula.

And so around this time at that moment and with that sort of gross neglect of the civilian population's right to be there, a committee was formed that was called the Committee for Defence of the Vieques Land and this organisation still exists to this day and from the 60's onward there have been organised forms of resistance against the US Navy that have had throughout history various successes and failures. And then leading back to the story that I started off with wanting to explain this history, it sort of made a new culmination in the early 2000's after this civilian was killed by a stray missile the new civil disobedience action started to take place on the island. And this is the building of that same Committee today that faces the former bombing range and at the time was the bombing range and it was a central place from which to organise the different forms of struggle at that time against the Navy's presence on the island.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: Civil disobedience has been going since the 60's. This was the moment in which it reached a collective group of people from completely different and ideological backgrounds, religions, ages, political positions; they all somehow identified something in common.

JENNIFER ALLORA: So you can see they're facing the bombing range and there's this Peace and Justice Camp and then in front of this is this heavily policed border that obviously it's trying to keep the people from entering it to this bombing range. And what happened with the civil disobedience of the early 2000 period was that because the military in order to do any bombing, they have to make first of all public announcements stating that they're going to do that and in this island that happened more than...

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: With the time they have to say when they start bombing at this time and...

JENNIFER ALLORA: ...and in this island it happened over 280 days out of the year so it was almost daily that this was happening these announcements and so the former civil disobedience that the people decided to enact was to actually enter into that bombing range and put their bodies there and by placing themselves in that area, because the military can detect with their heat sensors the presence of people there. By law they're forced to stop and that posed a very serious issue to the Navy because they were renting this property for over 80 million dollars a day to various NATO countries and other allies of the United States so it was a very big cost for them to have this happen aside from their argument for the necessity to practice target training.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: So out of these daily practices basically it was really for a long, long time we work in collaboration with various activist groups and civil organisations in Vieques and we sign a project.

JENNIFER ALLORA: So the project we're going to show now is called Landmark Footprints and we're just going to show you the sort of result, the trace of the action that we did or the design that we did, it was kind of...

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: It was good only for a year and a half almost two year, it was basically a sole that we designed with messages to each individual person, that were either counter representations of the current function of this island or there were proposals for the future development. So it was the idea of walking as an act of counter bombing and marking that terrain with all these different images and proposals. This is just some pictures and something that was also, there was various moments of reception. One was we thought like the military was (gone) in a moment also that the people were walking and moving through the space entering that contested geography but also they photographed themselves, of these documents of sort that don't necessarily exclusively function as a major representation or document of this action.

They for example because of the framing of the image, they show all these different footsteps and the footsteps suggest different directions, not only physical directions but also ideological directions and positions. In the image you see how through this images that these was not a homogeneous group of people sharing the same positions at different locations but rather a completely reconciled positions, one stepping on top of the other one so it created like a strobal for marking and to see which...

JENNIFER ALLORA: While at the same time they all had this one common enemy which is to obviously have the military leave. But for example there were people there who were more traditionally like conservationists who were outraged by the military's presence there for the problems that it posed to the wildlife and flora and fauna and fish marine life there. While there were other people who had family who used to live on that island and they wanted their land back so they could build a home again; to people who were part of the Independence Party in Puerto Rico who saw it as another example of a place for which them to talk about their platform for independence. So you had many different people there for a totally, you could say almost irreconcilable, or various reasons and what we're interested in is making something that would be an expression of each person's individual desire and

motivation but there would be this record that also represented the ways in which their positions diverged or maybe came into conflict or confrontation with one another.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: But also the images themselves, they are an index of someone's weight on the surface but also it has an element of speed; so depending on how you move and walk you can develop an image on the sand and also we like how that element of speed has a relationship to the image itself, photography you know?

JENNIFER ALLORA: So anyway, so this was this project that we had done at that time during this moment of civil disobedience on the island. So that activity was so successful that in 2003 that area that I showed you just a moment before with the police has now been converted into a national wildlife refuge so to some extent there was a success in that activity.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: In demilitarising ...

JENNIFER ALLORA: In demilitarising the island to the extent that the military is no longer bombing that area and the munitions areas have been certified empty but there is still so many serious problems and the legacy that it left behind in terms of waste and other contamination.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: Contamination, health problems.

JENNIFER ALLORA: But again, this is another kind of like marking of the land. This land that was marked a year prior to that with a police fence now has this big welcome sign that says come in during the hours of dawn till dusk. And it's really interesting the way in which you see how this landscape, this sort of struggle for marking and claiming land in these different ways and how it unfolded in particular in this island.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: So a work that we did that we're going to show you is a video, it's five minutes and it happened at the time the lands were open for the first time in 60 years and the video is basically shows Omar, who was one of the civilians driving around the island for the first time and basically on a motorcycle but the motorcycle had a trumpet welded onto the muffler so the muffler is an instrument to silence produced by the motor by putting this trumpet it sort of makes a loud resounding call. So it was almost like a celebration but also we like the idea that putting in question the new states.

JENNIFER ALLORA: Right, the idea of this was for it to be simultaneously a kind of sounding and answer to the bombs that had fallen before but also a kind of call to attention to the, sort of the new battle that was about to be mounted on the island.

((Interruption – Video))

JENNIFER ALLORA: You get the idea. So basically that was the first time as Guillermo mentioned that those lands were opened and he, Omar was sort of mapping all of that space that had never been opened up at least in his generation and even the generation before him and so he was sort of tracing that trajectory through that area.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: Maybe we talk about one more project or should we leave it there?

JENNIFER ALLORA: Yeah I mean like we have two more.

((Interruption – discussion))

JENNIFER ALLORA: Anyway so we've been following the developments on this island in many different ways and have done things in sort of response to the different moments of it's history as we've come across it and encountered it. There's really not time to talk about this other work that we do called Landmark because it just takes a long time but just to, kind of for you I guess the new project that we're doing now is a video project that we're finishing at the moment that is also dealing with this island again and where it's at right now in the year 2005 which...

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: The current state of the land is totally stark and there's nothing has been decided like who is going to, to whom is the land going to go is it going to the Municipality of Vieques or is it going to the...

JENNIFER ALLORA: ((?))

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: Yeah to the fish and there is this sort of sense of frustration and desire to do something so we made; we're making a video that is basically a discussion table.

JENNIFER ALLORA: Which we like the idea or are interested in this idea of a discussion table because that's kind of a symbol of like where things are at in Vieques at the moment. Things are on the discussion table, but at the same time sort of association with the discussion table in sort of liberal thought is that each person has an equal stake at the table. And that there will be this kind of fair negotiation that will happen as non-violent and agreeable to all the parties involved but in the case of Vieques what is sort of excluded from that is the very construction of who is allowed to come to the table in the first place and who is allowed to participate in that debate to begin with and who is excluded and in the case unfortunately with the local population, the same people who have been sort of at the wrong end of this throughout the past century are once again found in the same position where they really don't have a bargaining place at the table in the same way that many of for example North American property owners do or big corporations who have an interest in developing tourism on the island. And the strong conservation lobby and the US Department of Interior which is another issue too that one of the things about this is that because the whole area is now a wildlife refuge that now people can't, they can't find a way to position themselves with regard to the Navy to clean up any of the landscape and so by calling it a wildlife refuge is actually a way to displace and defer responsibility for the ultimate cleanup of that land.

So anyway the piece that we are going to show, I'm just going to show you two pictures of it, is 'Under discussion' and basically what we've done is we've taken another person who is the son of a fisherman...

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: Who were the leading civilization movement in the 60's and basically got a table and put it upside down with a motor on it and then Diego is driving around along the parts of the island that start to see under discussion. Thank you.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Q: Greg Hilty from the Plus Equals agency, I just want to raise a question to you referring back to what came up this morning, I think we've all enjoyed the complexity and sophistication of the presentations of engagement by artists in the environment both this morning and this afternoon, but whereas this mornings seemed to offer a potential and in many cases an aspiration to engage through government or commercial mainstream activities and being realised, both of your practices seem to be more consciously oppositional and I just wonder if that's true, that's a correct perception, and what your relation in that case to mainstream and mass engagement would be?

JENNIFER ALLORA: Well actually the piece that we didn't present wasn't specifically. If we respond first was a work that we did do that had to do with land use development similar to the charette situation that was described earlier this morning and we had done a sort of research project with a group of students, a poly-technical university in Puerto Rico and an art school and the university there to develop a case study about the island and to develop a set of proposals that were concrete proposals about what to do with that land but it was something we didn't have time to go into right now.

But in fact we had engaged it in that way and we actually have a very close relationship to the civic organisation on the island. It's called the Community for the Rescue and Development of Vieques and a lot of the things that we've done we've shared with them and we feel like we have a good friendship and that what we're doing is not necessarily enough, well whilst in opposition to the Navy, is not an opposition to some of the civic organisations on the island.

DECLAN: Kayle or Heath do you want to respond to that?

KAYLE BRANDON: OK well, sometimes to get involved in specific councils, to ask for permission and to become very legal and structured in this way just causes complications and for very simple things you can end up discussing until you're blue in the face and its often not necessary even though we might be led to believe that it is necessary, even legally necessary, it often isn't at all. So for simple projects like tree-climbing day, I mean we actually ended up being approached by the council, which came as a total surprise to us in a way because we were wondering what was the problem with it? But there was a problem because of all the people having this confusion about ownership of land and what if we get sued if somebody falls out of a tree, they weren't sure where they were legally with this project and then for other projects, yeah it is necessary and good also, a positive thing to speak with councils and organisations and stuff.

DECLAN: OK, another question.

Q: Bronac Ferran, Arts Council England, it's building on Greg's question, I suppose what was going through my mind looking at both the presentations was an almost, I'm referring back to the discussion this morning where the relationship is almost like a break but it's a break back to, almost like an old fashioned notion of, it's almost artist as hero revealing something or resisting something and it's almost like an aesthetic unethical rather than married with an aesthetic approach. So I just wanted to sort of probe both projects in relationship to that notion of almost an old fashioned idealism or a heroism and to ask how far that is a break with perhaps the post Second World War notion of the artist maybe not being able to make anything

of despair except perhaps to show it in that sense and this is almost like a, you know the notion of the warrior or the activist. I wondered if you had anything to say.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: Well, I think it's very aesthetic choices I mean to have a trumpet welded to a muffler on a motorbike but this is a very aesthetic choice I don't think it's completely natural. I agree with these type of things being romantic at putting their artist as a hero and things like that. Completely not you know. This for example, the works word is not something that you do and you actually reflect, see something from it and reflect about it and think and then there's this sort of - there's actually, these things are functioning you know in the fabric of what is happening you know, they're doing something and they're producing sound so leaving an index or a mark you know on the land. It's an evidence and a group of ones presence you know, ideologically but also physically, and in this side or related with what is happening in the context, I mean there's aesthetic choices being made very clearly and I think, I don't think it's romantic at all.

HEATH BUNTING: For me I like to have a narrative in my life and I like to have control over that narrative. Just sitting around or cultivating food, having a very simple life does get a bit boring. I like to, well my favourite method adventure is being an artist, I always try to promote this to other people and I try to use methods of art in every aspect of my life. I guess also it's the responsibility, being a publicly funded artist either from the Social Security or the Arts Council, so I feel that I should share those things and be rigorous with those things in my life. So for instance every aspect of the production that we go through or I go through I feel it is important to follow the ethics or the ideas that we hold or I hold valuable. So for instance we, you know I joked earlier on about open-source software; I don't want to use anything that is somehow contrary to my beliefs. So those things are just kind of serious things, serious side of life but I think you do need a glue or as I said a narrative and you know I'm not so young anymore but the best narrative or the most suitable narrative for me was the heroic one at the time.

KAYLE BRANDON: Also going to this notion of artists, original artists hero, heroic, I think in some ways that's kind of an excuse for people not to have to do things themselves and it happens in all sectors of work, you know this person is doing this so I don't need to make, have these questions myself or to work at it at all.

DECLAN: OK, question here.

Q: Hi, I'm Simeon Nelson, Art student as I said before from the University of Hertfordshire, I think in about 1968 Hans Haake turned his attention from a natural ecology to the ecology of the art world. Do you, this question I suppose is more for Kayle Brandon and Heath Bunting, is the art ecology or the culture ecology something which interests you as well because I mean a lot of your artistic activists activities, I suppose, sorry this question's a bit confused, but do you see yourselves primarily as coming out of an activist base or are you artists who have become activists as well, I mean or you may be both obviously you can be both and lots of artists are very successfully? So Hans Haake when he turned his attention to the hidden power structures in the art world found himself in quite a difficult position in relationship to the museum. Would you have any comments on that in terms of your own practice?

KAYLE BRANDON: Well, I was educated as an artist but I think when you are starting to work in your daily life and try and engage with situations that you're confronted with daily, it's bound to become political, it's bound to become an activist situation because you are actively dealing with your daily politics.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: I really hate this idea of having, making these divisions like are you an activist or are you an artist? Do you know what I mean things like that because you know a banker can also be an activist, an artist can be also a scientist and is actively engaged in some element of civic life I mean I don't think this...

Q: Sure, I totally agree with you.

DECLAN: Except, there is a proviso to that except the banker doesn't activate his life through his banking if you're talking about participating in civil life surely? Whereas here we're talking about the grammar and syntax of your art form is your way of being active in civil life.

KAYLE BRANDON: I disagree with that, I think you can take any activity and follow it rigorously and with discipline and it can transform your life obviously in a good way or a negative way.

DECLAN: But if we're talking about civil life you're talking about also transforming other lives as opposed to your own and a question that I want to put generally is who is the beneficiary, who is the intended beneficiary, for anybody of your activity as an artist? Of your activity or indeed it's to the floor as well, but who could be the intended beneficiary?

((Interruption – applause))

DECLAN: I want an answer to that question.

DAN PETERMAN: I can answer that question one way maybe. There are other heads of state, there are other governments for example Hugo Chavez could be a beneficiary of what you do. I happened to write a letter once to the New York Times and then the Venezuela Government asked me questions, so this guy so he's looking around in your hemisphere for other ideas, I can't speak about heads of state for you, you know there are ways with like the Venezuelan Hallé or the Havana Biennial to reach out to other countries to find ways of venting so that there's a much bigger audience than just the art world here in England.

JENNIFER ALLORA: I would definitely agree with that and I think we were dealing with these issues was on the level of representation and there's old huge political power for that too in terms of how you present these ideas and reformulate them again visually in some manner to sort of disrupt the certain normative readings of those places. And that has a great political potential and moreover if we do circulate as you say in this kind of ambulatory economy of exhibitions and what not, there is a great potential and people like this Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques is very excited that there's going to be a work about Vieques in the Venice Biennial. For him is a really important moment of contact for a new audience and potential new people to get involved with that subject.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: But also to your question, I think there are many moments of, for example if you go to a museum, you see these paintings right or something and then you are in the street I mean I think that is in a way like talking

about representation like, if you want to call it that, that political potential, that a work of art can have this transformative dimension. But it's not in a Utopian way, but a very simple way like it's kind of a sole interrogative process like you know, you question your own preconceptions about the image that you see. Your notions about, through the representations or relationships to other people, how you know how an image or a work, whatever medium it is, it has this potential and then maybe you see this painting and you go out and then tomorrow it reminds you of something so that perhaps is still a moment of the work you know, it's still a moment of forwardness or maybe that transfer into a conversation with somebody else and you know when does it end?

Q: I was just wanting to ask, I'm Dominic Willsdon, this thing about the way in which a lot of what's being challenged with, what's discussed in this session and before it was something like regulation and this thing of doing things against regulation and for the sake of deregulation and if we're thinking about what is the contribution of art to the kinds of matters of concern that we all hold in common. And if it's not because the people doing it, is Guillermo's objecting to the idea that the people doing it are sort of special people, that they are artists, is it something to do with using the sort of apparatus of the art world, you know the Venice Biennale and the magazines and events like this and so on, which is a relatively deregulated space in order to do things that there isn't space for in other kinds of institutions and is that sort of what might be specifically arts contribution to these issues that lots of other areas of life make contributions to as well?

HEATH BUNTING: I think for me as I get older things, certain things become obviously good and obviously bad things and if you're certain in yourself that you're making an improvement then I would say just ignore the regulation, you know get on with it. Planting trees in my city is a good thing; you know driving a four-wheel drive around, running children over is a bad thing you know? I'm not going to have a four-wheel drive; I'm going to plant trees.

Q: (Dominic Willsdon) But I suppose what I'm asking is that you can do that but if you do it under the heading of art then it can be something that you can sort of share more widely with the public. You can make it public.

HEATH BUNTING: It can be anything. No it depends on your specialism. You know I, as an artist, that's my history or that's the character, best character profile that I fit into, it is the best way for me to live and do my things quick. It's no better than anyone else and what they're doing.

KAYLE BRANDON: But yeah I think that in some ways an art context is away, once you place any type of work within an arty context it allows a certain type of space that you can't necessarily find in other avenues of economic or social situations. Yeah I mean obviously like the art space is just a sort of concentration and mass representation of what happens on a daily life level as well where people are daily viewing situations, contemplating, discussing, and contextualising their situation, amounts from the question.

DECLAN: OK I think that's fine, we're actually right at the end of the session so I'll just take two more questions from people who haven't asked a question already and one person here and one person there.

Q: Hello my name is Natasha Machin, I'm an artist and my question comes back to art and ecology and it's about do you think that as an artist you are acting

ecologically? As in you, Heath you mentioned earlier that you are an organism, a human being and we live in a world with other organisms and I just wanted to ask or just ask you to talk a bit more about being an ecological organism and responding to the world through that kind of way?

DECLAN: In about 30 seconds.

HEATH BUNTING: That's not just addressed solely to myself is it? That's for the whole panel? Do you want to start that Kayle?

KAYLE BRANDON: What was it? Sorry.

HEATH BUNTING: As an organism, how do you respond to the world or the ecology around you?

KAYLE BRANDON: Well just through relationships really with humans and non-humans and that's it and you know as a human organism you tend to have this incredible desire to work and make things and I suppose yeah you need to as personally as this organism I feel I need to be responsible for the things that I make and to try and grasp a situation.

JENNIFER ALLORA: I think my response to that kind of answers the question we were thinking along ourselves about the necessity for art not to have an end in a certain way or have ends because if it has it's assigned end and that then relates to maybe these questions about it's use, value, it's utility, it's ability to make a concrete sort of something you know. But if it has a concrete, if it's assigned an end whether it's to say that it's a million dollars or to say that it's fabulous or to say it did this, can potentially kill it because by putting an end to it then it closes down and forecloses any other possibility and so for us it's very important that art doesn't have, I mean in this kind it has to do with an ecological idea in a way that if the system that doesn't end but is endless in a way and has an opening infinity of possible ends in which you can then kind of grow and move on in different directions.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA: And that's what makes it monstrous because it's these forces that fight against being reduced to a thing, being reduced to an economic dimension, reduced to anaesthetic dimension, to politics, to activism but that by fighting against this being reduced doesn't mean that is vague or ambiguous at all. I'm dealing with this and that form you know with nothing particular, no, no, no it functions through very specific enactments but there are many of them, there are innumerable.

DECLAN: We could almost end on that but I did promise you a question so... OK, no I think, that's a very good ending. Thank you very much to the lady, thank you.