

Mexican artist collects dead dogs and turns them into art to reflect on animal life

Berenice Olmedo believes that "the relationship of humans with canines in Mexico is instrumental" for understanding its reification and exploitation.



Berenice Olmedo

At 30, Berenice Olmedo has become one of the most disruptive artists in Mexico. Her proposal: to collect the corpses of animals and turn them into textile products, in order to reflect on the hierarchy of domestic fauna within society.

From this work, Olmedo has been invited to lecture in Istanbul, and recently gave a seminar 'Art from the second half of the twentieth century' at the Old Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. In addition, she has collaborated with institutions such as the Ex Teresa Arte Actual Cultural Center, also in Mexico City.

In an interview with RT, she questions that, biologically, "every corpse is destined to putrefaction, what happens within the conservation of anatomical specimens by means of formaldehyde solutions or plastination?".

RT: Where did your interest in creating products made from canine corpses come from?

BO: In a class at the University of the Americas Puebla (UDLAP) I studied phonetic relationship between 'museum' and 'mausoleum' and its proposal as 'adornment'. According to this premise, museums become traditional forms of burial for works of art and, therefore, the art they contain is condemned to death. Then, the question was whether the work of art was alive or dead. And I thought that, if I was dead, why did I not then exhibit dead objects?



RT: What is your research work? Your pieces of art are waste or remnants that, at some point, were part of a living cycle.

BO: Exactly, my research is derived from putting life into consideration not as a given and closed whole, but to think about life from the relationships that make it work. From the waste or the residue, apparently, life is not able to be completely thought of, but is nevertheless implied in it.

RT: What do you want to achieve with your research work? Any kind of awareness of animal life or other activism?

BO: When I was developing the project in the UDLAP, I wanted to put into debate how the concept of life is capable of creating a significant system that is not only biological, but is also a political, ethical, and jurisprudential statute that is deployed. That is to say, I wanted to rethink the problem between the administration of bodies from the animal horizon.

RT: In that sense, to what do you attribute how the Federal Civil Code of Mexico considers animals as movable property and not as living beings that can be subjects of rights?

BO: I think the problem is that the relationship between humans and animals is of use or instrumental reason, as they are reified or seen in an accessory, utilitarian or exploitative manner. The dog that is not familiar with its natural life can become a good, and this is the pre-dispositional notion of the person. I focused my attention on the canine species, because it was the dog that seemed to be an extremely paradoxical species, both in the legal sphere and in that of the social sense.



RT: Is there any other aspect that caught your attention during your research work?

BO: An economic aspect, with respect to biological waste, derived itself from the slaughter of dogs. In the Mexican state of Puebla, the company Ecotérmica is responsible for the incineration of slaughtered dogs and charges the Canine Welfare Center of San Andrés Cholula about 16 pesos (about a dollar) for a kilo of dead dog. While a similar center in the southern area of Puebla charges eight pesos, almost half.

RT: Is there any kind of profit or economic benefit with the death of dogs in Mexico?

BO: In 2013, in the southern area of Puebla, 24,000 dogs were slaughtered and the previous year, in the municipality of San Andrés Cholula, 15 tons of dead dogs were counted. Assuming an average of 13 kilos per dead dog, for the South Zone Canine Welfare Center implies an expenditure of 2,496,000 pesos - more than 140,000 dollars - and, for the municipality of San Andrés Cholula, approximately 240,000 pesos, or almost 14,000 dollars.

RT: Where is your work displayed?

BO: In Puebla, it was exhibited on two occasions: in the Erasto Cortés Workshop Museum and in the San Pedro Art Museum. In Mexico City, I presented at a conference at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) Campus Lerma, and the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Recently, I received an honorable mention in the category of 'Hybrid Art', so the project will be shown this September in Vienna (Austria).