

Exhibition Review

Chiachio & Giannone: *Monobordado*

Pasaje 17 Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires, April 27–June 9, 2016. Curated by Chiachio & Giannone. Exhibition catalog: Chiachio & Giannone: *Monobordado*. Buenos Aires: Pasaje 17, 2016.

Reviewed by Patrick Greaney

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Buenos Aires-based artists Leo Chiachio and Daniel Giannone—partners in art, love, and domesticity—have worked together since 2003 as Chiachio & Giannone. Trained as painters, they are known for their embroidery, but their practice includes ceramics, painting, and drawing. *Monobordado* offered a cross-section of their work from 2010 to 2016, mostly installations centered on their large-scale embroideries from the past two years.

In the large gallery and small foyer of Pasaje 17, the embroideries were surrounded by works that responded to or documented them, as in the installations of *Selva Blanca* (*White Jungle*) and *Selva Enjoyada* (*Bejeweled Jungle*) (Figure 1). Garlands of temari balls were hung in front of *Selva Blanca*, and in front of *Selva Enjoyada* there was an installation of ten recycled works—some using discarded material from the artists' studio, some using embroideries given to them by friends and the family of friends—that the artists reworked with their own embroidery or with silkscreened patterns. Each exhibited work was thus multiple in itself; besides containing many quasi-autonomous miniature images (for instance, embroidered abstract mini-paintings), they were supplemented by accessory works that highlighted the artists' alliances and interests.

The embroidered wall hanging *El Regalo* (*The Gift*) (2015) was exhibited similarly (Figure 2). In the right half of the embroidery, the artists embellish a Christmas-themed fabric printed with shirtless men posing in holiday scenes.



Fig 1 Installation view. Left: *Selva Blanca (White Jungle)*, 2014/15. Hand embroidery with cotton threads, wool, rayon, and jewellery-effect threads on fabric. Wall hanging: 4.60 × 2.85 m; installation: variable measurements. Right: *Selva Enjoyada (Bejeweled Jungle)*, 2015/16. Hand embroidery with cotton threads, wool, rayon, and jewellery-effect threads on hand-print fabric with serigraphy, temari garlands, and framed embroideries. Wall hanging: 2.70 × 2.20 m; installation: variable measurements.

Chiachio & Giannone embroidered over the chimneys, wrapped gifts, and Santa capes to create an elaborately detailed work that leaves little more than the men's skin bare. The left half is a more subdued self-portrait. Leaning up against the wall where *El Regalo* was hung were three wrapped gifts—drawings of the artists' dachshunds and cat—draped with embroidered Christmas lights. Facing them on the opposite wall were two works that record the making of *El Regalo*: *El Regalo, el Anverso (The Gift, The Obverse)*, a photograph of a portion of the back of the work; and *El Regalo, la Memoria (The Gift, The Memory)*, a record of the stitches and thread used. With these

documentary works, the exhibition explicitly incorporates into the artists' oeuvre a great deal of the process and materiality of their craft, including the variety of stitches, the textures and colors of their threads, the three-dimensionality of embroidery, and the adventure of sourcing (another documentary work in the exhibition, *Payé en el Pompidou, la historia [Payé in the Pompidou, The History]* [2014] [Figure 3], groups threads under the category "bought in the markets of Guatemala").

El Regalo and its satellites make up a family portrait, with "family" here taking on a specific meaning discussed by Chiachio in an interview: "We as artists have the ability



Fig 2 Chiachio & Giannone, *El Regalo (The Gift)*, 2015. Hand embroidery with cotton threads on gabardine and Alexander Henry© fabric. 1.25 × 2.1 m.

to change our DNA ... according to our tastes and points of reference. For us, Sonia Delaunay is our grandmother; eighteenth-century French painting our great-great-grandfather; and the list could keep going ...¹ The exhibition foregrounded many of these elective affinities. Delaunay's *Rythme* (1938) is an object of veneration in *Payé en el Pompidou* (2014) (Figure 4), as well as in many works in the exhibition catalog.

In her catalog essay, the poet María Moreno calls Chiachio & Giannone an "anti-Oedipal ensemble," evoking Deleuze and Guattari's insistence that "we always make love with worlds" and never only with a specific love object.² There was a wealth of objects in the exhibition, from the artists' frequently depicted pets and the pin-up boys to their fictional aesthetic genealogies and the materials and processes of their craft. Chiachio & Giannone's

love and desire extend past each other into their work and beyond to embrace, among many other things, the history of painting, Latin American craft techniques, their own studio and domestic spaces, and the entire field of creation, production, and exhibition. Writing about Alighiero e Boetti's collaborations with Afghan artisans, Jean-Christophe Ammann claims that "embroidery is not only a handicraft; it is inscribed in the collective biography of a people."³ Chiachio & Giannone's works include images, techniques, titles, and materials from Guaraní, European, and Asian cultures, all prominent reminders of Argentina's history and present as a postcolonial, multicultural society. However, "people" here can be understood in a much wider sense to include Latin America as a whole (the catalog includes reproductions of their works explicitly tied to Bolivian and



Fig 3 *Payé en el Pompidou, la historia* (*Payé in the Pompidou, History*), 2014. Graphite, cotton threads, wool, rayon, jewellery-effect threads, tassels, Hermès tweed on paper: 35 × 50 cm.

Colombian folk traditions), an international community of embroiderers and artists, and a broad queer audience (their work was included in the exhibition *Queer Threads*).⁴

Chiachio & Giannone's practice is queer not only because they are gay, but because their work opens itself up to all of these collectivities. By exposing their studio

practices and everyday life, the works in the exhibition emphasize how the artists, in much of their practice, reflect on how art and craft can call into question the border between privacy and publicity. In interviews about the exhibition, the artists comment on the ways in which embroidery hails a heterogeneous audience, from the



Fig 4 *Payé en el Pompidou* (*Payé in the Pompidou*), 2014. Hand embroidery with cotton threads, wool, rayon, and jewellery-effect threads, and tassels on Hermés tweed. 80 cm × 1.50 m.

usual followers of contemporary art to those unfamiliar with and uninterested in it. The location and architecture of Pasaje 17 accentuated this. Located in the heart of a historic central neighborhood of Buenos Aires, home to small shops and artisans, many focused on art supplies, the gallery's large front window faced the doors of a supermarket right across the narrow street, issuing an invitation to thousands of shoppers every day, many of whom came to see the exhibition. Their audience seems close to

what Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner call a "counterpublic"; Chiachio & Giannone's work, especially in its openness about its makers' lives, materials, and techniques, becomes "the occasion for forming publics" and "elaborating common worlds."⁵

The exhibition title, *Monobordado*, could be translated as *Monoembroidery*, a term chosen by the artists to convey their feeling that it's one continuous "embroidery that we've been making since we began working as artists, with the same obsessions." It may also indicate how embroidery, for them, is a unifying practice that encompasses painting (they think of themselves as "painters who paint with needles and thread"), pop and appropriation (in the use of found images and textiles), and other mediums (their drawings and documentary works are part of the embroidering process). The exhibition allowed visitors to sense the vibrant tension between continuity and multiplicity that characterizes Chiachio & Giannone's complex works.

Notes

- 1 All quotations from the artists are from the interview by Luján Cambariere, "De mano propia," *Página 12* (June 25, 2016).
- 2 María Moreno, "Dale que . . .," in *Chiachio & Giannone: Monobordado* (Buenos Aires: Pasaje 17, 2016), n.p. The trilingual—Spanish, English, French—catalog can be downloaded from the artists' website, available at: www.chiachio-giannone.com (accessed September 26, 2016). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 294.
- 3 Jean-Christophe Ammann, "Alighiero e Boetti: Ordine e disordine," trans. Catherine Schelbert,

in Lynne Cooke and André Magnin, *Worlds Envisioned: Alighiero e Boetti, Frédéric Bruly Bouabré* (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1995), p. 64.

4 See Jeanne Vaccaro's review in *The Journal of Modern Craft* 7(3) (November 2014): 325–328.

5 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), p. 61.