

Hande Eagle: I've been reading about your oeuvre for the past couple of weeks. I would like start with a question about time. Listening to you talk about various different works or your impetus for creating them I noticed that time is very central to your creations. Dates of works or events that inspired you, for example, how old you were when you read William Wilson by Edgar Allen Poe at age 12 or when you came across The Sunken Cathedral at age 20... In your previous interviews you are always mentioning what age you were when you did something. Can you tell me a bit about your obsession with remembering the date when something pivotal took place in your life?

Jorge Macchi: Wow! Nobody asked me something like this. Obviously, I don't have the answer. But you are right, I am always remembering how old I was when something happened. Maybe I sometimes feel that there is a strong feeling related to what happened, perhaps this is why I remember how old I was at that time. I don't know if this is something automatic or something I think about. This is why your question is so interesting because I never thought about that. For me, it's a surprise. I don't know if this is related to the pieces that include time, for example clocks, or music. But, yes, I think I am quite obsessed with time.

H.E: There's another thing I noticed. Although you say that you don't want your work to be recognizable in an interview you gave to James Meyer, curator of The Double: Identity and Difference in Art since 1900 held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 2022, your work is recognizable in its own way. To quote your statement from that interview, "I prefer not to be a monolithic artist, I prefer not to be recognized by my own image. I prefer to be open and prepare for new things. Not to repeat the same image. I prefer not to be recognized. The important thing in visual art happens underneath." Obviously, you made this comment right after you talked about 'the doubles' in your work. And seeing your new exhibition "False Autumn" here at Galleria Continua San Gimignano, I also noticed a few doubles. Your work has become recognizable due to your continuous work with the double, the replica. I could see your work in any space and identify it as a Macchi.

J.M: I understand your point. From the moment you're working in your studio, and you are open to new images and a theme appears but, you are not aware of that. This is where you eventually see the doubles. However, this was not my intention from the start. I don't produce series. Sometimes I have an image, I always build upon the image and not an idea, I develop the image, and I think about the materials and the space for this image and then I notice the double recurring. This is something essential. If you ask me why I am always working with doubles, I have no answer to give to you. I prefer not to have an answer.

H.E: You don't have a twin brother, do you?

J.M: No!

(Laughter)

J.M: But I prefer not to have the answer, because if you do that's a problem. Because if you know rationally, that is the end of art.

H.E: That leads me to another question... Within all of us, there's another, an opposite copy that pulls in another direction. Why is doubt important?

J.M: I'm always living in uchronia, i.e., this idea of what if I had taken another decision at a particular time. For example, Philip K. Dick in The Man in the High Castle puts forth

this idea of what if the Nazi's had won the war and what kind of world we would have had now. When I make a decision, there's always another Macchi asking, "Why did you do that?" And had I made a different choice; my life would have been completely different. In recent years, I feel I have made some very good decisions. In hindsight, I made one of the best decisions when I was 35 or younger. At that time, I was living in London, and I was trying to decide between staying there and returning to Buenos Aires. The idea of returning was like hell, and the idea of staying was obscure, I didn't have money, I'd have to start working. I had just finished the residency at the Delphina Foundation. So, one day, I was riding my bike, and there was an automatic barrier, I passed really close to it and it became activated. It hit me in the face. I had to go to the hospital.

H.E: Oh! Were you bleeding?

J.M: Yes, I was bleeding. I talked to a very good friend of mine who had been in London for a long time, and I told him what had happened to me. He said, "Why don't you go to Buenos Aires, buy a computer and have Buenos Aires as your base?" I told him, "I think this is very intelligent." So I went back to Buenos Aires, bought a computer, it was my first computer. This was one of the best decisions of my life. I felt Buenos Aires was my home. I never had this feeling in London or Paris. I think that was when my career as a visual artist started.

H.E: Talking about the idea of returning from London to Buenos Aires you referred to it as hell. How did you switch from hell to heaven?

J.M: The first days I felt it was like hell. I kept saying I should have stayed in London. But then, I calmed down and I started working and everything was fluid. I didn't have this feeling of doing something that wasn't good for me. Finally, there was a work – a book – that originated from my return to Buenos Aires. It's titled, Buenos Aires Tour [Turner Publishing, 2004] which I brought to life with Edgardo Rudnitzky and Maria Negroni. It's a very important work for me, not only from my perspective as an artist but also as a person. It's like a self-portrait.

H.E: So, to dig deeper into your artistic practice, which of your two interests came first in your life? Music or image?

J.M: Hmmm, difficult to say. I was always very good at drawing from early on. In particular, drawing horses.

H.E: Really?

J.M: It's strange. There was short TV programme, they were showing somebody drawing things related to the countryside; horses, cows and unrelatedly, knives. So, I started drawing horses and I was very good at that. I never thought of it as a profession. When I was fifteen... You are right, I seem to always make a point of mentioning the age I was when I did something particular. I have to talk to my psychoanalyst now. (Laughter)

I wanted to study the piano. So I began, and it was very intense. I was practicing perhaps two to three hours a day. I kept on going for four, five, six years. It was so nice, it was such a pleasure to play music, to move my fingers and to hear the sounds forming. So, I thought what can I do after secondary school, I could go and study piano but I could also study medicine because my father was a doctor...

H.E: Did your father play the piano?

J.M: No. But my sister said to me, “you’re very good at drawing, why don’t you go to art school?” I thought, “What”? But then I took the entrance exam, and I got in. I had the option to study medicine but in the end, I decided to study art. It was at that time that I realized I wasn’t very good at playing music, so I decided not to follow that as a career.

I would say that music came first, but drawing came much more naturally to me. I always wanted to be a musician, but there’s something wrong with me... In the end playing music becomes torturous. I now see my son singing and playing the drums, there’s a strong relationship between him and music. I didn’t have that. I have a rational approach to music and that’s not the way.

H.E: In an interview you had with Edgardo Rudnitzky published on Bomb in Jan 2009, you talked about your frustration in your teenage years with the political situation, the dictatorship in Argentina. Was that why you felt compelled to leave later?

J.M: No, because when the dictatorship started, I was twelve and it ended when I was eighteen. I can say that I was frustrated because the whole time after I thought, what a shame that I had to spend my adolescence during the dictatorship. Finally, I discovered at that point, there were lots of adolescents that had a night life. It was not the dictatorship who made me the way I was, I chose not to go out. The moment I realized that I was full of anguish. I had done it to myself. Dictatorship was the backdrop but there were lots of people going out, going to secret parties, playing music and attending concerts.

H.E: In your biography on the Galleria Continua website, they describe you as “an artist of loss and nostalgia”. [Note: Since this interview the biographical text about Jorge Macchi has been changed on the gallery website. For updated information click [here](#).]

(Brief silence followed by roaring laughter)

H.E: Do you think these two qualities are what molded you into an artist?

J.M: There is a word missing from that description. Humor is central to my work because if you only have loss and nostalgia(?) that’s hard. I think that only describes twenty percent of me. Humor is very important. Perhaps I can work with nostalgia and loss but through humor.

H.E: How much of not knowing helps you to discover new things? How much of that made you so prolific?

J.M: Do you think I am prolific?

H.E: I think you are very prolific.

J.M: I don’t have this feeling about my work.

H.E: No?

J.M: Strange.

H.E: Your work is very continuous; you don’t have any breaks in between. Some other artists take time out, maybe to reflect or to travel. You’re very productive, your work is very linear, you’ve produced for thirty-odd years now, when you look at your solo exhibitions and group shows, you can see at least one engagement for every year. By my account, that makes a prolific artist.

J.M: I will call you every time I feel insecure.

(Laughter).

H.E: So, let's go back to the original question. How much of not knowing helped you with your work?

J.M: I will tell you about a work I am currently producing. It's a process that started in 2020, after the pandemic. I have been looking for papers in the street. These papers have things written on them. Sort of notes written by someone to remind them of something. Once it's no longer useful, it's been thrown out onto the street. This is the kind of material I've been collecting. In the beginning, I was attracted to the feeling of finding something that was important only for a very short period and then thrown away. Then, I became passionate about it, I was walking the streets to find them. It's not easy to come by. Sometimes it's hard to recognize them because they are crumpled up. I was discovering that I knew there was something there and I found a text.

H.E: What kind of places do you go to find these papers? Train stations?

J.M: Just the streets around my studio. In the beginning, I just happened to encounter them on the way to and leaving from my studio. The moment of finding each and every one of them was so interesting. Each of them. It was so interesting not knowing what it meant or what would be written on it. So, I would say that not knowing is the best position you can have. It's full of mystery. I would say this is a very good example of not knowing. I am working on this at the moment. During the process, I sometimes didn't know what to do with them.

H.E: The Rorschach works - site-specific murals currently on display at Galleria Continua San Gimignano - which provide another representation of the double, is referred to as a work that is meant to make us think "what if the walls could move and fold"?

J.M: I think these works are a representation of an actual Rorschach test.

H.E: Yes, because in previous works when you worked with newspaper clippings of murders, those images you created double-folded also look like the Rorschach test and when I saw them I immediately thought of it even though in the interviews you gave you didn't mention that aspect of those works.

J.M: I don't know why I didn't talk about it back then. It's very complicated to talk about this new work, because there are several layers. It's not that I produced a system to reproduce the effect of transporting the inkblot, instead I decided to paint, and you can see the brushstrokes. In fact, they finally become murals. This is the first time I am exhibiting them. For me the question is, what if the walls could fold. Maybe this is the main question. But as there is a representation, there is art in the middle, everything is much more complicated. I love that this is complicated. I love the idea that finally the main character in this piece is painting.

H.E: What do you think you'd find out about the mind, the imagination and consciousness of your work's viewers if you were truly treating as an actual Rorschach test?

J.M: (Giggles) That's another layer in this work. This is what I love to talk about, the interpretation. Every time I produce a show, the organizers come to me and say, "What can we say about your work?" I always say, "I worked on the image, on the media, the space, and so that part is your job." I took lots of decisions and I can talk about those decisions but if I bring my interpretation, it's problematic, because then everyone will

follow my interpretation. The Rorschach test is for making an interpretation, but this is another kind of interpretation than the interpretation that the visitor's make on art.

H.E: And of course, *Déjà vu* is another double... Half of a table that has been left outside to weather the elements and the other half kept indoors and reunited at the end of that 24-month period.

J.M: Yes, I love this work. It's very melodramatic. I feel like it kind of represents two people who were separated, had completely different lives, and then after a couple of years they got back together. Perhaps, this is also related to your first question about time and also about being an artist of "loss and nostalgia". To me this piece is very humorous. Perhaps humor is the way in which I talk about nostalgia, perhaps otherwise it would be too much, too heavy. For example, loss and nostalgia together is far too much.

H.E: When you think about it in another way, it kind of rings true. Through loss and nostalgia, and this anatomy of melancholy, you are actually creating something that's beyond that. It becomes a thing of its own and you can't attach a single word to it. It has a living life of its own without a particular noun to describe it. When I saw the exhibition yesterday, I loved your work, *TRain* (2019). I have done so many train journeys that I could really relate to the experience displayed in that video work. In your video installation, there comes a little raindrop on the train window, that eats another one and becomes larger, and almost looks like a tadpole or a little fish, until it disperses. And then a line of raindrops, cutting the panorama in half, the mountains in the back. It reminded me of my numerous train journeys in England. Did making this video installation occur to you when you were sitting on a train and you saw this image?

J.M: I saw that image and I decided to record it. I had no idea about the final work. I think this experience leads me to a very important issue in my work. I always work with things that the viewer or spectator recognizes as being very common. If not, I cannot work on them to produce a new way of seeing them. For example, in this case, I thought that this is very common and wanted to do it. The actual experience on the train was much longer, it was during the afternoon, and then the video is only about three minutes. The whole experience lasted perhaps half an hour, and it was getting darker, the light inside the wagon was going out. Finally, I was seeing more of my reflection than what was happening outside. This passage was beautiful, perhaps it's also related to time. (Laughter)

H.E: I really felt that it was as emotional a work as it was humorous.

J.M: You know what happens with music in this video... The accompanying music gives you a feeling that surpasses the meaning of the image. This work is not just mine, it's a work by two people. The image and sound are working together to produce this effect. It's not just the image and it's not just the music.

H.E: In relation to two artists working together, in the previously mentioned interview with Edgardo Rudnitzky (with whom you collaborated with on *TRain* as well as other works) which I mentioned earlier, you touchingly said: "After these years of intense collaborating, I've come to the conclusion that what makes an interaction like ours possible isn't just sharing interests or aesthetic tastes. A strong relationship as friends, which extends (beyond the narrow territory of art) is fundamental."

J.M: I think this is one of the best dialogues I had. It's beautiful.

H.E: In that interview you talked a lot about music and also your relationship with theatre. You stated, “If I think about the moment when a more intense dialogue between visual arts and music began – it corresponds with the time I began to work closely with theatre, discovered fiction and began to give more consideration to formal elements.”

J.M: This was a very important time. Perhaps when you talk with artists you feel that visual artists are against artifice. I was that way, completely. Then I started working in theatre and I realized that in theatre all the people work naturally in fiction. Everything is fiction, and no one asks if this or that is real. If there’s someone talking about their own life on the stage, it’s fiction. So, for me, this experience of theatre was revolutionary. I always remember this conversation we had about the kilometer underground. [Referring to, Walter De Maria’s Vertical Earth Kilometer, where a kilometer-long brass pole was driven into the ground, with only the very top showing.] Before becoming engaged with theatre, I would have sworn there is one kilometer of pole there, and then suddenly, the theatre director asked me, "Is it important?" "Oh yes", I responded, "of course it’s important". He said, "Who cares about that? No one cares." I told him, "No, no, no, no! What are you saying?" (Laughter) There is one more thing about theatre. When you produce something with someone else there must be a horizontal relationship between different aspects because if you take one of the elements out, something becomes missing from the whole.

H.E: Have you noticed how well your work joins together with Sabrina Mezzaqui’s ongoing exhibition at the gallery? There’s a brilliant trajectory. There is such a sense of wholeness. Someone who doesn’t know your work or her work might think it’s all the work of one unique artist.

J.M: An artist of loss and nostalgia.

(Laughter)

H.E: Yes, but also in Sabrina Mezzaqui’s work there’s a great sense of loss, nostalgia and melancholy. Did you intend for your work *False Autumn* to be a statement on environmental issues when you started working on it? Is that a major concern of yours?

J.M: No, the point is that when I was working on *False Autumn*, I wanted to keep them green but at the same time, I wanted to keep them on the floor as if they were autumn leaves. But then I said, they are green so it’s not autumn. So then, the idea of something that is false came about. I like the idea of something that is false, because this is art and fiction. Then, the title *False Autumn* came about. I know it has another ecological meaning as well.

H.E: But that wasn’t your thought?

J.M: No, no, no... Perhaps someone can make this link, but I would never say that.

H.E: Because that’s what they wrote in the press release.

J.M: Yes, before I changed it yesterday.

H.E: Have they changed it? When I read it yesterday evening it was still there. [Note: It was changed in the final copy of the press release.]

J.M: Oh my God!

H.E: It’s okay, no one else will ask you these questions.

J.M: I think it's symptomatic. When you have something like this, it's so easy to write about, everybody goes in and grabs it, and it stays in their hands. It's much easier to read the paper than to see the work. I always have the feeling that the texts you are given in museums are like anxiety pills.

H.E: When someone walks into an exhibition, they don't know what to make of it and immediately they go to the text to avoid feeling insufficient.

J.M: For me, a sense of anxiety is very important. If you don't sense it you are not seeing art. And sometimes, they provide information that has no relation to the artwork, such as the artist comes from a country that had a political upheaval, and the person visiting the exhibition goes, "Ah, now I understand everything." But no, in reality, they don't understand anything. Suddenly, this information makes you calmer. My advice to museums is that it would be best to remove the texts. Or maybe, there's always a question for the artist. What can I say about my work, or my way of working. I always think that there are so many things to talk about but they are related to the choices you make in the process. You can talk about them without making an interpretation because if you make an interpretation that is the end. As an artist, everybody will follow your interpretation. So I can talk about the image, the materials, and the decisions I took but I cannot talk about my interpretation of the work.

H.E: That's great. Another question I have on my mind about *False Autumn*, the puzzle pieces. How did you cut them?

J.M: They are die-cut.

H.E: Have you tried to put them back together?

J.M: This is the question of the work. Is there a final image?

H.E: Is there?

(Laughter)

J.M: I don't know!

H.E: Brilliant!

H.E: Drawing from the paradoxes inherent in your work, the real paradox about life on earth is how destructive we remain in the face of a burning world. I read the other day that the orders for electric cars are on the decline. People are still choosing to purchase fuel-consuming cars, instead of opting for more environmentally-friendly solutions. Why is humanity behaving so madly? Why are we in this whirlpool of not being able to change the ways in which we behave?

J.M: I feel that there's a desire for self-destruction. I am not saying that I am pure or that I put the rubbish in the right place. I am a disaster, too. I am a part of this disaster. I think it's self-destruction. It is unbelievable how we conquered the whole world, and now we are destroying it. For example, we cannot stop AI, but at the same time we know eventually it will kill us. Nobody will stop that. It was the same with the atom bomb.

H.E: What would you do if you were told that you had one week left to live?

J.M: (Laughs) A friend asked me this. I said, I will go and sort out all the necessary paperwork to leave everything to my sons. She said, "You're crazy, why don't you go to the seaside, or travel anywhere, enjoy life and sex, and everything." I responded that's not

what I had in mind! (Laughter) It seems I am much more into sorting things out so that life continues the same without me.

H.E: Is your studio very tidy?

J.M: I don't think I am very organized. I have a photograph of it, but it would be impossible to find it right now. It's quite a big space, I have some natural light, the space measures 8 meters by 12 [just under 100 square meters]. I always like to go there. It's a very good place for thinking. The neighborhood is beautiful. Perhaps not beautiful... It's full of car repair shops and timber suppliers. It's quite chaotic but I love it.

H.E: Earlier today I was looking at your book, *The Lost Virgin* [2019, Garamond, 500 limited edition copies]. It's a beautiful publication. Although I don't speak Spanish, when I scanned through it I could make connections between English, Italian and Spanish and get the gist of it. In the future, you should think about having an English translation of it. It's a very peripatetic read.

J.M: I have to find somebody who can work on that. I was so into it, I wanted to have the option to have it in English, but I didn't want to postpone the Spanish edition. I was so happy with this book. I think it has moments of humour, some moments of anguish. I realised that there was an image of a virgin in Bariloche [a copy], and that the authentic one was in Chile. Departing from Bariloche, I travelled to Achao [a town on the Chiloé Archipelago] where the original was. And then I travelled back. It was a strange and stupid performance. Once again, it's a double. The book is like a diary of that trip. However, it also talks about other works that are related to this theme, to the replica and also some situations from my life through which I can relate to the double. It's a very intimate book. I love it, sometimes I read it.

H.E: Many people are afraid to read their own books after publication. I am a translator of Turkish to English, and I translate art books as well as fiction. When I work on a book for such a long time, I can't dare to open it perhaps for six months, for fear that I will see a typo, a missing comma.

J.M: (Laughter) In the beginning I thought that would happen to me. My God, why did I edit this book? It was a surprise for me to read the book after it was published. But I love it, I don't know if it's well-written, but it's intense.

H.E: To me, it felt like a very intimate book. Thank you so much for your time.

J.M: Beautiful interview, thank you.

H.E: Thank you, I try my best.

J.M: I have some material for my psychoanalyst.

(Laughter)

With special thanks to Galleria Contina San Gimignano.

False Autumn will be on display until 26 January 2025 at [Galleria Continua San Gimignano](#).

For more information on Jorge Macchi and his works visit: www.jorgemacchi.com/en

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