

Unbreakable Toys

Artium, Vitoria-Gasteiz

Unbreakable Toys looks back at the last seven years of Mabi Revuelta's artistic research, which is structured around three main themes: language, play and art education. This exploration stems from the book *Abeceda* ('alphabet' in Czech), published in Prague in 1926, a collaborative piece between the writer Vítězslav Nezval, the artist and designer Karel Teige and the dancer and choreographer Milca Mayerová. These forerunners of the Czechoslovak Avant-garde imagined a (playful) alphabet for modern life, their intention being to lay the foundations for a new language, a school spelling book which, through poetry, design and dance, would help to build a new world after the disasters of the First World War.

Almost a hundred years on, the artist has developed an alphabet of her own, based on Nezval's poems, Teige's designs and Mayerová's static poses, enabling her to consider in various series of works questions such as the structure of graphic signs (the design, shape and size of letters) or the expressive search through semantics, anti-semantics and the magnetic aura of words. *Divertimentos tipográficos* (2010; Typographical Amusements) is the first piece in the exhibition and also the starting point for her new works, which attempt to expand the book and school teachings into the realms of games as constructional elements and of toys—by extension artefacts—as tools for cultural development.

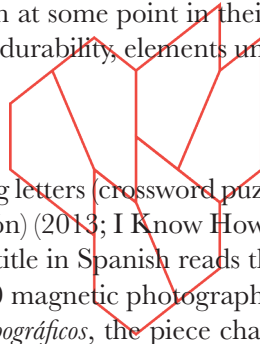
The central space in the room is occupied by *Geómetra* (2015; Geometer), a huge house of cards constructed using 164 pieces based on the *House of Cards* (1952) game created by the American architects and designers Charles and Ray Eames. In their work, the Eameses followed the principles of the Bauhaus and, as a result, they did not confine themselves to designing and manufacturing objects in accordance with the principles of function and form, but also understood the educational importance of schooling and paid special attention to educational games and toys. For these designers, the beauty of toys lies in the fact that they exist for pure pleasure. In addition to containing hidden poetry and teachings, toys and games are a prelude to serious ideas.

Just as the Eameses did in their day, Mabi Revuelta incorporates into these cards images, designs and digital collages in which everyday objects become extraordinary. The photographic reconstruction of the maze in *The Shining*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, made using Lego pieces, a study of a fragment that broke off from a ceiling in the Alhambra, drawings of networks generated using the golden ratio and compositions of snow crystals in free fall gradually accumulate in a construction verging on instability and built in the form of towers and levels. The work is an unfinished constellation, as there is the potential for increasing the number of cards or assembling it in countless forms.

Cuaderno de notas para Geómetra (2015; Book of Notes for Geometer), on the wall, presents us with a series of micronarratives associated with the images of the house of cards. Situating oneself 'geometrically' means turning one's gaze towards older forms of knowledge. In scientific terms, the ability to 'measure the earth' requires a reading of the world that takes evidence as its starting point and is com-

plemented by deduction. There is an intention to add to this analytical stance a divergent and relational aspect linking this miscellany of short fictions and quotations together.

To return once again to the house of cards, various objects that form part of it are shown under the umbrella title of *Juguetes irrompibles* (Unbreakable Toys). One of these is *Maqueta N° 1 para Geómetra* (2015; Model No. 1 for Geometer), the model of the existing piece made on a domestic scale and open to future interpretations. The second set, entitled *Sólidos* (2015; Solids), presents us with a collection of 21 three-dimensional geometrical shapes made of wood that the artist used when learning to draw, now covered with gold leaf applied using the traditional process of gilding. The third and final piece in this series of works consists of 13 ceramic rattles that bear the words *Juegas con mi corazón como si fuera un corazón de juguete* (2015; You toyed with my heart, like it was a toy heart), a reproach made by Lisa in one of the episodes of *The Simpsons*. The piece brings to mind both the teachings contained in childhood lullabies and the fragility of human feelings, which are juxtaposed with the tradition of an art (pottery) that produces objects liable to be broken at some point in their useful life. The ingredients in this work are repetition, sensitivity, sensuality and durability, elements unquestionably shared with the very nature of play.



The aesthetic of games involving letters (crossword puzzles, Scrabble, etc.) is brought into play in *Sé verlas al revés* (poéticas de la permutación) (2013; I Know How to See Them Backwards [Poetics of Permutation]). This palindrome (the main title in Spanish reads the same backwards or forwards) provides the title for 22 metal panels, around 900 magnetic photographs and another notebook. Using the typography we saw earlier in *Divertimentos tipográficos*, the piece charts the construction of meaning through language from the precise click sounds of the Khoisan to the infinite fields of anagrams of Unica Zürn.

As we come towards the end of the exhibition, we find ourselves in a space in which the artist presents us with *PlayTime* (2008-2015), a prototype that examines teaching strategies founded on art and adapted to the format of a playing card. The *PlayTime* prototype designed by Mabi Revuelta holds two decks of cards: the Alphabet and the Laboratory. The alphabetical deck has no pre-established set of rules and can be used for numerous games, both mental and corporeal. The Laboratory set is a range of processes structured in accordance with a common script and consists of 30 cards produced by artists, educationalists and collectives involved in art, who were asked to produce an educational proposal related to their area of professional interest.

The exhibition closes with a display case containing *Complete Pack of New Cotillons*, an English deck of cards from the late 18th century loaned by the BiBat Fournier Playing Cards Museum. Each of the cards in the deck features a few lines of Baroque dance music notation. One of the cards, the ace of spades, is missing, providing an opportunity for the artist to reconstruct it, working with the electroa-

coustic composer Otto Castro in order to complete it. The music that can be heard in the room consists of the pieces printed on the cards, played by the Bóreas Cámara chamber orchestra, alternating with Castro's work.

The exhibition is completed in the BiBat Fournier Playing Cards Museum, where Mabi Revuelta is showing a selection of nine recreational and educational decks of cards produced by artists, among them *Shuffle* by Christian Marclay (2007); *Why To Fear The Future* by Carlos Amoraes (2004); *Take on the Improbable* by François Deck; *House of Cards* by Charles and Ray Eames (1952); and the deck by Basque artists issued by Tarte Moda in Bilbao in 1987

