

ART

# EDUARDO NAVARRO IN ORBIT

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Not long ago, Argentine artist Eduardo Navarro's head was in the clouds. For *Instruction from the sky*, his performance piece at Frieze New York 2016, he released a set of dancers in sci-fi reminiscent garb (with mirrors adorning their waists) to follow the clouds in an improvised dance. Now, Navarro's sights are trained on the sky. Tomorrow he will initiate a three-day long series of performances on the High Line in New York titled *We who spin around you*. At sunset, from 6:30 to 8:30 PM, he invites the public to safely stare at the sun while wearing circular bronze masks that transform the celestial body into a green orb. Two astrophysicists (Summer Ash and Jana Grcevich) will be present, offering further illumination on this star that's taken as a constant and continues to fuel life on Earth.

"I wanted to do something with the audience wearing some sort of technology that allows them to stare at the sun, see the sun, and hear about the sun," Navarro tells us when we sit down over coffee in New York. "It's not that you're observing something that is new; you're observing something you've always seen with the potential of seeing it differently. I think it's interesting that for a very long time we thought the sun was spinning around us and now we know we're spinning around the sun," he continues. "There are no guarantees in perception. Time is intuitive."

Navarro's outlook and works are informed by a personal routine: he has meditated since 2010. "I didn't even think about it, it just became a part of my practice," he says. In addition to this new commission and his project at Frieze, he recently climbed to the crater of an active volcano to create litmus prints from its fumes (*Poema Volcánico*), and transformed into a turtle for a two-hour long performance at the 2015 New Museum Triennial (*Timeless Alex*). In joining the poetic and the scientific, Navarro creates works firmly planted in the surreal, and hopes to shift viewers' perspectives. "With most of the works, I am trying not to study [the subject] but rather to transform it," he says. "I like the idea that the sun is in your head, you're composing it visually inside of your head, so that when the lecture ends, there's something of that moment that you keep in your memory...I like the idea that people take the work with them," he continues. "They can dream about it."

NAME: Eduardo Navarro

BORN & BASED: Buenos Aires, Argentina

DON A MASK: I was working on a helmet that worked with a solar panel, where you could see the sunset inside the helmet and you would see some subtitles, and the subtitles would be working with the energy of the sunset. It was kind of like making the sunset a movie and having subtitles under it, narrating something or having a dialogue there. It became a bit complicated to do that, multiplied by 100, and actually I didn't know how to do that so I started investigating welder's masks. I did a first prototype of the mask [based on] a very ancient mask that looks like



the face of the sun, and it was done in bronze. I wanted to do something that allowed you, very simply, to stare at the sun for a long time... I like the power that masks have. Once you put them on, you're no longer yourself, you kind of transform. I think there are two possible ways of seeing the work; either you see the 50 people with the masks on from the outside or you're inside the mask.

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ASTROPHYSICISTS ON SITE: [Summer Ash, Jana Grceвич,] and I met a couple of times and we spoke a lot about perception—how we perceive what is out there because we are humans. For example, do fish see the sun? If you see it, it's there, and if you don't see it, it's not there. I wrote ten questions that I thought were interesting for them to explore but I haven't seen the [lecture] draft yet. I think it's good that I don't intrude too much in their territory. In previous works I've worked with different specialists and I think it's good that they have their own space. I'm just doing the masks and they're being astrophysicists. I think they're really excited to do something for an audience that is not too scientific—we don't know who the audience might be, most of the people are just going to be there walking. The astrophysicists like the mask fortunately. I was worried that they'd perhaps think it was very stupid to wear a mask and talk about the sun. [laughs] But there's something about wearing the mask that completely makes everything black except for the sun; it's kind of a release once you put it on, and I think they enjoy that—finding a new element through which to see the sun.

BEYOND THE CLOCK'S TICK TOCK: I like the idea that at sunset the sun hides and then the work is done; there's something about the sun needing a stage. I think it's interesting to use a natural clock rather than set time frames.

JOIN IN: There's something participatory about the fact that people can just walk by and wear the masks. The other works [I considered] were more performative, like last year when I did [*Timeless Alex*,] a work for the New Museum Triennial where I became a turtle. I think those works are more hermetic and people need to see them for a long time. The High Line is like an avenue of ants or people—it's constant. It's not that people go there to see an artwork. I think [the work] has to have that combination of being practical and at the same time not being too demanding.

GETTING TO THE CORE: Most of the time [my work is] very intuitive. I have a notebook where I write a lot of ideas. For each work, I perhaps have 10 possible ways to approach that idea. When I meet with the institution or curator I'm working with, I map out everything that I've thought, and they are able to say, "This one is worth it. This one is very bad." [laughs]

CHANCE: The last works I've been doing are a lot about contemplation and trying to reach a different state of mind by contemplating something that is not human. For example, [*Instruction from the sky*,] the Frieze project, had to do with following clouds. It's kind of like delegating the ownership of the work, or the power, to something that is beyond our control. At the same time, that means I don't have any guarantees there will be any sun. For the Frieze project we thought, "What happens if it rains?" So many of the works have to deal with chance. I have to improvise usually. [When it rained at] Frieze, we were inside the fair, and worked around the mirrors and possibilities; we also took the chance to explore the work with no clouds. In this case, for the High Line, if there is no sun there is no sun. [laughs] I have to not worry.

NATURE AS A MUSE: It started with the works that I did in 2013. Previous to that I was collaborating with different disciplines, like lawyers and priests, and I think that the role of who I'm collaborating with switched in that moment—especially during [*Órbita*,] a work I did in a stadium in Argentina, which was guided meditation, and a work I did [titled *Horses don't lie*]. The point of departure was more surreal, like a dream atmosphere between nature and mankind. The works I started making in 2013 have a lot to do with how to transform perception. I think that had a lot to do with meditation and reading about meditation, and how we conceive the world from our perception. If we transform that, then the world is different.

REACTIONS: I see the works as ways of contemplating. Contemplation and meditation have a lot in common. I try to make the audience contemplate something for a period of time that's really absurd, and at the same time they have to get rid of their preconceptions of what they're observing. Either you get into the mood of the work, that's very slow, or you see it for one second and you leave. A lot of that happened during Frieze; people would stare for 10 minutes and there are people who would say, "Okay," and leave.

In Argentina, people are more in your face. If they don't like something they will come up to you and say, "Hey, I think your work is very obvious and a cliché." In

other places, when you're a foreigner and you're showing a work, people are more reserved. I think here it's more about posting; the immediate reaction is putting everything [on social media] and documenting it. There's a sea of images out there that people show. In Argentina, that's not that common. It's another kind of experience, I'm cool with it, because it's another way of perceiving. Their brain is their phone; they're keeping all of the images on there, so I don't know if they're keeping them in their head or not.

*EDUARDO NAVARRO'S PERFORMANCE WE WHO SPIN AROUND YOU WILL TAKE PLACE JULY 19, 20, AND 21 ON THE HIGH LINE AT THE RAIL YARDS. IT IS PRESENTED FREE OF CHARGE BY [HIGH LINE ART](#). FOR MORE ON NAVARRO, VISIT HIS [WEBSITE](#).*



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