



PEDRO GÓMEZ-EGAÑA

Object to be Destroyed

Abrons Arts Center / Performa 13 Premiere / Presented
by Performa and Entrée / Curated by Randi Grov Berger

“Cut out an eye from a photograph of one who has been loved but is seen no more. Attach the eye to the pendulum of a metronome and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well-aimed, try to destroy the whole at a single blow.”

Such were the initial instructions given by Surrealist Man Ray for his much renowned *Object of Destruction*, first presented as a drawing in 1923 representing a metronome with an eye stuck to its pendulum. Now the piece is protected behind glass at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, but as Pedro Gómez-Egaña suggests¹ – there is an inherent romantic violence expecting to be triggered.

In *Object to be Destroyed* Gómez-Egaña instructed a series of ushers to lead small groups of audience members into a dark theater to experience his performance. Audience members paused, standing in the dark passage for the first part of the piece where they heard, but could not see Henri Dutilleux’s *Au gré des Ondes* (1946) played tenderly on a piano behind a curtained wall. The wait escalated their imagination and expectations to what they could sense happening with the music in the other space.

Next, the guide gently directed the group beyond the curtain, where five chairs were placed in a half-circle directed at a performance space with a distance of about ten feet in front of

another wall of beige velvet curtains. The audience was invited to sit down for the second part of the piece, the lights changed, two women in grey uniforms moved synchronically as the piano started again repeating the same solo-piano composition. The women turned their attention toward two golden objects, each picked up from the floor. These were pendulums, which were ceremoniously and magnetically moved toward each other. As the piano music ended, the pendulums, which were both connected to filaments and fitted with strong neodymium magnets, were suspended in the air with half an inch of air between them, an arrangement that was arduous to achieve.

The lights changed and the same young man who led them here swiftly pulled aside a curtain and invited the group into yet another chamber, providing access to the “back stage” of the performance. This room was arranged as a domestic space with plants, tables, carpets, lamps and crystals. For this third part, again the group was invited to sit, this time on low wooden benches looking back at the curtains through which they had just passed. Once seated, they heard steps from behind the curtains. As the piano piece started again, for the third time, now a familiar melody, they sensed another group following behind them. The man who had guided them started the same careful process of placing two magnetized pendulums in balance, very gently and very precisely. The group witnessed the strong magnetism as the pendulums hung in the air. Once Dutilleux’s *Au gré des Ondes* concluded for the third time, the group was ushered out by their guide, passing the pendulums in tension when moving out of the room. In the next passageway a different uniformed man was watching over a table of purple amethyst crystals (each containing their own magnetic field) as the group dispersed from the theater. The audience then walked in a reversed half-circle to where the action of the piece had begun, while simultaneously a new group of audience members were seen entering the performance.

In total three groups circulated inside this time-machine of Gómez-Egaña’s, *Object to be Destroyed* where a group of four dancers were instructed to lead and perform. The performance was like a theater of mirrors, a visual live performance arranged as half an hour’s journey that brought together symbolic and historical time, mystical fantasies and the magical experience of science at the point of intersection where bearing witness meets spectacle. *Object to be Destroyed* was a reflection on how time has clear signifiers but also, as an experience, how time is the result of flows of actions and perceptions. Gómez-Egaña has pointed out, “we walk on the street, we go to the train stop, we get in the train, we reach our stop and walk on the sidewalk, we step into an elevator, step out; open the door and we’re home. Everyone is doing this, we are like little rivers of people fuelling a civic machine administrated by ‘stop’ and ‘go’ signs, devices, notifications and vehicles.” In this context, the idea of an interruption of our compulsive everyday habits and routines – is what has inspired Gómez-Egaña’s recent body of work. He offers the audience a disruption, the possibility for moments to observe and focus, and in these instants of contemplation, the sudden *immobility* of a gesture might trigger a renewed curiosity toward the familiar magic that we daily experience.

–Randi Grov Berger

¹Gómez-Egaña referenced Man Ray’s *Perpetual Motif (Object of Destruction)* during an introductory lecture about his work (Artist Class: *The Beating Motif*), at the Performa Institute on November 19, 2013 prior to his performance at Abrons Art Center.