

Carmen Argote
Nutrition For A Better Life (Compre Chatarra)
Curated by Nicole O'Rourke
September 1-October 5, 2019
Opening Sunday, September 1, 6-8 PM
Şahkulu Sokak No.15
Galata, Istanbul

In *Nutrition For A Better Life (Compre Chatarra)*, Carmen Argote's practice focuses on Istanbul and its modes and signs of exchange. Lately, Carmen has been interested in the mechanics of trade and the recalibration of systems of value; she is searching for a visual language about the movement of merchandise as it relates to the body and space and the city in which the exchange is both born and which it exemplifies. Specifically, she looks to discarded objects transformed into items for sale - *chattara*, as its called in Spanish - and the way it reflects her own practice as an artist in transforming objects anew.

Recently, she spent time in Guadalajara for a residency. There, she used the primary local produce - the orange - as both a material and performative element in her exhibition, transforming the everyday fruit. And, in Spanish Harlem New York at her show with Ballon Rouge Collective late last year, Carmen used the avocado to make works relating to the fruit's popularity in gentrified society in stark contrast to the realities of its farming and export from places like Mexico.

After several days of walking Istanbul (a primary part of her practice in order to situate and observe in cities not her own), Carmen's point of focus became the *Hurdaci*. *Hurda* means scraps, junk, salvage, and *-ci* is a suffix to denote the person selling the word it finishes. *Hurdaci* walk around Istanbul with a hand-cart (*el Araba*) selling scraped and found materials. She was drawn to the human scale, the simplicity, and the migratory and ephemeral quality of this vehicle of exchange. The hand-car, the objects found on the cart, and references to the streets upon which it moves make up the pulse of the exhibition.

At the start of *Nutrition For A Better Life (Compre Chatarra)* is "Perimeter" (2019), a light installation made to mimic the lighting used in temporary local marketplaces. On the walls closest to the installation are three tires which could be used to build a *Hurdaci*'s cart sat atop street stone shelves and carefully wrapped with fishing rope and buoys. Carmen calls these landscape paintings. The black of the tire has been painted over and over again in acrylic, and each tire's respective rope and buoys create a horizon line. These works' ropes are almost entirely held up by a tension, and their buoys representative of either seagulls and ferries, or rising and setting suns, or the reflection of the moon on the Bosphorus at night. These wheels are the rolling movement of the *Hurdaci*'s hand-cars, and of exchange on and around the Bosphorus.

Then, placed alongside the tires are objects that Carmen sourced from different *Hurdaci* during her walks around the city. Placed atop street stone shelves and woven in fishing rope with buoys they are named after Bosphorus fish. The temporality and the seasonal made permanent,

unsinkable, and placed sturdily on the ‘ground.’ All of these objects are at the same height of the base of the hand-car.

Appropriately at the center of the exhibition is “Yaşar Bey (Studio),” an installation with a Hurdaci’s hand-car that was named after the man it was purchased from. Set firmly in place with ropes and knots mimicking the ropes and knots and fixtures seen along the shore of the city to dock boats, the hand-car as such is a metaphorical representation of its role in the exhibition. It is the exhibition’s anchor and became the literal studio upon which Carmen produced five works on paper which hang centrally with both sides of the paper visible. Each paper is the same size as the base of the hand-car, and on each work a print of the base was made. On the reverse side of the print are layer upon layer of bird seed - a nod to the migratory and moving, to both the hand-car, the sea and the overwhelming sense of the movement of goods, people, animals, and objects in Istanbul itself.

In another gesture towards giving the constantly moving, impermanent, and tossed away a new life, is Carmen’s installation titled “Dulce Banana”; using plastic crates, seen throughout the city near fruit and vegetable markets, sometimes as makeshift tables, and oftentimes thoughtlessly discarded, Carmen has made them into frames for minimalist paintings. The simple black rectangles on the paintings ask you to see the beauty in the object itself and like the works with seed on paper they are the abstracted synonym of the sculptures. Objects of everyday life are transformed; found items become Bosphorus fish caught with fishing rope and line and buoys and thrown onto the street; throw-away crates become paintings; and, a meant-to-be-in-movement hand-cart is anchored and fixed in place and is made into a studio for Carmen’s works.

Carmen Argote (b. 1981, Guadalajara, Mexico) lives and works in Los Angeles. She received her MFA in 2007 from the University of California, Los Angeles, where she also received her BFA in 2004. She has an upcoming solo at the New Museum in New York opening September 24th, curated by Margot Norton where she will show *Exprimidos* (2018), the installation she made for her recent solo exhibition with Ballon Rouge Collective in New York (2018); other solo exhibitions include *Commonwealth & Council*, Los Angeles (2018, 2016); *Instituto de Visión*, Bogotá, Colombia (2018); *Panel LA*, Los Angeles (2017); *Adjunct Positions Gallery*, Los Angeles (2015); *MAK Center*, Los Angeles (2015); *Human Resources*, Los Angeles (2014); and *Vincent Price Art Museum*, Los Angeles (2013). Argote has been featured in group exhibitions at *Hammer Museum*, Los Angeles (2018); *Orange County Museum of Art*, Santa Ana (2017); *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Los Angeles (2017), *Ballroom Marfa* (2017); and *The Denver Art Museum* (2017). She is the recipient of the *Artadia Los Angeles* award (2019), *Artist Community Engagement Grant* from the *Rema Hort Mann Foundation* (2015) and a *California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Artists* (2013).

**Compre chatarra* is a Spanish term denoting the purchase of unnecessary items, scraps, cheap things, small things, unsustainable things.