

## Transkript Interview Débora Delmar

Gekürzte und bereinigte Transkription vom mündlichen Interview mit Débora Delmar am 24.06. 2020, per Skype.

**Marlene:** Hello Débora, can you tell me about the *MINT* piece? I was really interested in how the connection was – because I thought there was a connection between the *Upward Mobility* show that you did before. I had the feeling that a lot of the topics that were in *MINT* came into this. Could you elaborate how it is related and developed into that?

**Débora:** Yeah, they were really connected. Basically, I did the show at Oxford before the Biennial and then I think DIS kind of curated me into Akademie der Künste based on the show. Because in that show I did a juice bar. It wasn't a main part of the exhibition, but in the art education room and the really cool thing was that the people making the juice were staff of the gallery, even the director did it one day. It is little bit of a shame, I feel like that didn't really come off, or maybe people weren't so aware of. For me that was really interesting, because it was intervening with the institution, it is like relational aesthetics, or Institutional Critique. But it's more a form of collaboration with an institution instead of just criticizing the institution. That doesn't make any sense to me, you know like just for the sake of criticism.

**Marlene:** As I read it, it takes it a step further, it is not just the criticism, but it's somehow something more. I realize that I have difficulties to really focus or verbalize what it is, but I have the feeling, that it's taking all this kind of Institutional Critique from the 90ies and takes it somewhere...

**Débora:** Yes, it is not sticking to the time when Institutional Critique was happening. But obviously, I like Andrea Frasers works. A lot of the work is not really about objects necessarily, I like to play with this idea of circulation, how to re-exhibit certain works, that can be exhibited in different ways. At the time I was working under Debora Delmar Corp. After the Berlin Biennial I stopped it. Now I've just been working under my own name. I've been always trying to give explanations of why. I think that people didn't know that it was just me and because of that, it made it more interesting. But then it got to a point where it would become gimmicky, since people already knew it was just one person. It becomes a mock-up of a thing, it is not really criticizing, it lost a bit of the mystery. I just felt that I need to use my name, like an agency of the work.

**Marlene:** Do you think it had to do with the Berlin Biennial show, because there the whole thing of the corporate identity and the whole branding thing was a big topic in the whole Biennial? Do you think it had to do with that as well, or was it just you, personally.

**Débora:** No, I think, it definitely was after the Biennial. I moved to London, I went to school, I started a Postgrad that I finished last year, and then I had a bit of time to rethink about my practice, like how I was working, also the sustainability of it. But you were asking the kind of the relationship between the two shows. So, there was the juice bar at *Upward Mobility* in Oxford and then I was talking to DIS about the Berlin Biennial. They knew that I did that and then they were like, what about you using the cafeteria at the AdK? And I thought it just made sense, in a way it was a transition.

**Marlene:** Was it redefining the work that you did, or reformulating it?

**Débora:** Taking it a step further. I'm not into this idea of the artist that just repeats the same object over and over again and that's it. But obviously, I have certain themes, that interest me

and then I develop them. I feel like doing another show can be a possibility to push something more. The show in Oxford was thinking about the UK and being in Oxford at this super elite place where all this world elite goes to school. The concept of upward mobility is very present there. I had hedges that were imported from Italy and then again hedges are a really British thing. It also moved to Mexico for example, people have their hedges being shaped into animals or whatever, it's like a symbol. It's always from a perspective of me being from Mexico and growing up in Mexico in that time of NAFTA and all these treaties, that opened up Mexico to opportunities. We know now how not beneficial it's been. In the Berlin Biennial I was also thinking about this. I went to a German school when I was growing up, so I was thinking about Germany and their obsession with green stuff and the Green Party and the trend of juices coming to Europe and especially places like the UK or Germany. In Mexico it's just a very simple thing: you go to a Market and then it's there. In other places it's become this very trending thing, a global trend and celebrities being the one's carrying the juices all the time...

**Marlene:** Did you think about this term LOHAS, like for Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability, as a consumer group? Did you ever use that?

**Débora:** Yeah, I know the term, but I never really used it actually.

**Marlene:** But would you say that this kind of people, this kind of sums it up what you were targeting?

**Débora:** Yes, exactly. Also, this kind of perspective of health being a very contemporary idea, like taking a very simple thing that has no aspiration or value to it, and...

**Marlene:** and then how it becomes this really important lifestyle object.

**Débora:** Yes, like a fetishism towards this lifestyle on Instagram or people that follow it.

**Marlene:** And the hypocrisy of it, right? That comes into it with the whole meaning of the word MINT and stuff like this, you also play on this?

**Débora:** Exactly, MINT was a term coined by Goldman Sachs and meant up and coming countries, I mean that's economy, it's all obviously seen from the perspective of an Eurocentric or American corporate centric point of view. It's basically a way to get investment in these countries, in reality we just see that this is not true. We had a lot of crises, financial etc., in Mexico; Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey and I mean Indonesia, all this stuff happening, political stuff...it just shows how volatile the situation is.

**Marlene:** Yes and that this kind of term doesn't take into account the whole problems, like ecological problems, social problems, they're not mentioned at all. If you think further, it goes together with the lifestyle, with the LOHAS lifestyle, which is hypocritical because, it questions the whole thing, when everybody aspires this kind of lifestyle it cannot really work for the earth and the ecological problems that come with it and so that this is just a really short thinking of what we really want, about economic growth in general and if this should be looked at critically. Is it right that you want to go in this direction with the work as well?

**Débora:** Yes, it's very opportunistic and seen from a very specific point of view, not really being involved in the political issues or further issues happening in these countries. The green juice for me, was like a superficial, very small thing, like a reflection of bigger issues. I think it is good to find things that we can relate to or understand on a smaller scale rather than talking about world economics. I'm not a scholar, so for me that's my way of bringing it to reality and making it more

accessible, I guess. A lot of the products for the green juice come from all those countries that I mentioned, and then it's like what about the agriculture, what about how these corporations and companies make their products. How do they treat the soil, how do they treat nature, you know like overproducing avocados to the point that the soil is getting destroyed. There is a very hypocritical lack of responsibility that happens.

**Marlene:** I looked into this topic and into the studies that actually show that people who claim to be sustainable, these kind of LOHAS or the newly acquired green political side, they mostly have the bigger ecological footprint than other people, because they travel so much. They only think that they are living sustainable, when in fact they are just exceed much more resources than poor people for example or people who are not even aware of this. So, it's also proven, that it is like this, the studies are a bit old, but still I think it can be held up. Did you think that the presentation at the Biennial worked for you? Were you happy with it and was it accepted well with the public and was it understood in the right way?

**Débora:** I don't know because, it's strange when you work with different audiences. If I were to show that in Mexico or somewhere else, maybe people would get it more. Maybe people in Europe don't, I don't really know. I mean there was a lot of writing about it. I can't even remember the amount of criticism that the whole Biennial even received, which in a way is good because it meant that people were interested and talking about it. I worked with a juicer who was quite enthusiastic, and he told me, that he was living in California and that he met a Mexican, that brings Chilies from there, and I was like ok cool. He has his business, and that was a really interesting part of the project, kind of involving myself, that's a lot of what I enjoy in my work, to work outside of the art world and directly deal with this people that are involved in these things. There were things that happened, that I wasn't expecting. There was a woman that was in charge of the cafeteria and there was an agreement, like a contract between the AdK and this woman. At the beginning she agreed to all of it, we had a meeting with DIS. But then after some time, because her contract wasn't directly with the Biennial but the AdK, she saw it as an opportunity to make money for herself. I think she really overpriced the juices and then there was awkward timing with deliveries. And then there was a time, when she was like we are not selling them, they're going to go back, and I was like, can you just donate them, you can't just throw it in the trash. It kind of made me realize how complicated it can be sometimes to work together, because she was very enthusiastic at first and we made this green menu and then after some point, she just started selling Coca Cola and there were cakes brought in. In a way it was interesting, this business kind of broke, you know like it just didn't work out, it kind of changed it.

**Marlene:** That she couldn't see the conceptual or artistic concept in the juice bar, and she wanted to do a money driven juice bar?

**Débora:** I guess it was her source of income, well that's what her business is, and she needed to sell stuff, but then she overpriced. In a way it also worked, juices are overpriced obviously, but then I felt a bit like, yeah it was...it took me off guards.

**Marlene:** Sure, you didn't expect that at all. Do you know how much the juices were sold for?

**Débora:** I think, maybe like 8 Euros, I have to check again, I mean it was in a context of art, you are going to pay I don't know how much money to go to the biennial.

**Marlene:** If you go to Art Basel you will eat overpriced food the whole day.

**Débora:** Yeah, in every Art Fair it's always like this, and some people understand it as an artwork, some people didn't, maybe they just thought it was a cafe and that was it, then that is what they understood.

**Marlene:** And that's fine for you?

**Débora:** I kind of liked that blending of whether this is an artwork or not, like you were saying before.

**Marlene:** Coming back to the collaboration with bjuice, that's the company, right? Did they design the juice? or did you just take the juices that they have anyway, or did you give some ideas, or how did it exactly work?

**Débora:** We had a meeting and just talked about what things they had available. We had a tasting, and it was all based on things that they thought would sell to the German people, to the public. I guess, there is always a taste, you can't make it too spicy, people like different tastes. So, we just tried to work together. They had some options and then we selected the best one. I think there were three or four, I can't really remember, but we had a few options.

**Marlene:** And were they at all interested in the whole background of the MINT project and what we just talked about or the artistic concept of it?

**Débora:** I think he was enthusiastic to be part of art or being in a context of art. I'm not sure how much he got it as a criticism or whether it was more like a way to have some advertisement for the brand. I mean there was some gaining as well for him, he wasn't just going to do it for free. I think he did do it for free but for free means his brand was being credited. I'm not sure how much he understood, but I don't necessarily need him to be on board, as long as he just provided, that was good for me.

**Marlene:** The Biennial show had a second part in the gallery Duve, right? The Headquarters...

**Débora:** Oh yes, I did the show with Duve. I had this gallery show coming up and I was like I don't want to just bring something completely different. It doesn't make much sense, and then I was just thinking how to change the work or show a potentially different side of it. I was introduced to this furniture designers, this kind of typical Berlin Start-Up kind of furniture. They lent me the furniture that was in the exhibition. The guy from bjuice, we got him to make fake juices, because for his shop he also makes fake juices for display, bottles with color basically. He made us all these bottles with the ink and we had them in a fridge, the same way he would do it in his shop.

**Marlene:** But it's a mock-up, like you do in Japan, like the plastic dishes?

**Débora:** Yeah, something like this. I thought of the gallery as the place of business. There is an office already in the gallery so, I just thought it could be cool to set it up as the office for these people that are making this brand, and this is where they have their ideas or talk about concepts or whatever. There were some objects, like a yoga ball, you see at the Google offices.

**Marlene:** Yeah, it's this kind of start-up, think-tank interior...

**Débora:** Also, from the idea that they are different from regular corporations or a regular way of working, because it looks a bit more casual but at the end it's still an office.

**Marlene:** I have some detailed questions about this display actually: Did you use the fake drinks as well in the Biennial? Because there was a fridge as well, but were there the real drinks in this fridge?

**Débora:** There were the fridges behind the bar, because obviously the Biennial was a lot longer. After the show closed with Duve, they asked me if I would like to put the fridge with the fake juices in the show, as a way to display the juices, without always having to be selling them. because at the beginning you would see them all behind the bar, that was really amazing.

**Marlene:** And you used the same decoration, the plants for example, did you also have this cast of a salad or silicone vegetables and stuff?

**Débora:** I bought some objects and then they were casted. I went to this Vietnamese market in Berlin, because I'm interested in markets as well and I was trying to find objects there that could relate to the project. I was thinking of these cast objects as decorations and not necessarily as sculptures. How would they decorate the juice bar if they hired some artist? What would they commission to have in there?

**Marlene:** Would you sell them individually as an artwork?

**Débora:** No, not really, more as an installation, the whole thing. It's like this kind of ownership thing I guess, where I just feel if I claim that as my own thing, I just take this seriously as my own sculpture – I'm not.

**Marlene:** (Laughing) It's like it's just a salad. But I think it is really interesting, how these objects are treated.

**Débora:** It's about making something that you don't really like, because of the work. Maybe I personally wouldn't consider it, but it made sense in the framework of the whole work, like the crates for example...

**Marlene:** I totally understand. It has this very specific kind of look and lifestyle, especially this kind of upcycling, green and biological, that you see in every kind of Friedrichshain place. That's why also the gallery space reminded me not only of the office, but also of a concept store, because when you go to the stores, they have tables, with very few objects placed really nicely on them, like Andreas Murkudis. I don't know if you know it, it's like this huge really crazy concept store in Berlin, and they have this display – they don't really use hangers, it's just tables where single objects are placed on it, for me it has this feeling of...and especially with the Berlin based furniture, it had this kind of concept storey-feeling as well.

**Débora:** Yeah. The casted objects were made of a combination of powder juices that we found in Apotheken, in Germany, like Matcha and they all had these names, very German, that was also a way to bring a German thing that is actually consumed into the work. Those were infused in the sculptures and also in the paintings that I had in the show with Duve.

**Marlene:** What was the technique of the paintings, how do you call this?

**Débora:** It was tie-dye, Hippie but kind of cool, I was thinking about fashion, I guess.

**Marlene:** You took the canvas, you stripped it and tie-dyed it and then you strapped it?

**Débora:** Yes, I mean very simple, like not much process involved in the work.

**Marlene:** And these paintings do they have the same status as the salad cast? Or would they be a separate object or artwork for themselves, or would they be part of the installation as well?

**Débora:** The paintings? Because it was a gallery show, I think the gallery said we need to price them individually. That's just how it is if you have a show in a gallery. Also, you can't be that opposed to selling works in a way, but I mean ideally, I will at least show them together, not have them as an individual piece or individual works, cause that's not the point of the work either.

**Marlene:** I have some last couple of questions. I think the *MINT* work as well, but also your other works, they happen on different levels: in the exhibition display but also in different formats, for example you used the Prezi slide show or in other instances you used Instagram and that would be my question: Do you use Instagram as a channel? Or did you just do that for the Corona thing? And my question would be: how important are the different levels of display situations or display formats in each work, or do they come spontaneously? Or do you actually have different channels for different kind of work, or how do you deal with these levels?

**Débora:** I think I'm interested in social spaces and the interaction and connection with the juice bar. For *MINT* it just made sense that this company had a Facebook account and an Instagram account, right? Where I shared images and stuff like that. It has to conceptually work for me, it's not like I'm always going to be using other media for the sake of it. During the pandemic it was my personal Instagram account. For the self-isolation series, I took photographs of these kind of social spaces and non-places that obviously during this time I couldn't visit. I was also thinking that Instagram is making money off of the images that I share, I was thinking about this circular economy: I make some money but then I also I give it back through the sales of the works or even sometimes giving a 100%. I wasn't really expecting to sell many of them, it was an experiment to see what happens. During this time we are going to change so much, that's why I was thinking I don't want to continue sharing in a regular way. At the end it just turned into this work, which was interesting for me. I had to stop it after two months, it became too much of a job. Also, it just made sense two month where the most people have these intense times. Yeah, and then now I'm kind of thinking how I will use it from now on, a lot of stuff happened, and I made a little break, but in a way, I do like using these outside platforms. There is some agency I guess, that you can have, how you interact with people or how the work is seen or extended in a way where you have control, but also just kind of open the work a bit further, just beyond the exhibition space, that I am interested in too.

**Marlene:** Yeah it makes sense. Because also for me, when I looked at other artists, or how they deal with online platforms as maybe potential exhibition spaces or in this context of branding, like a lot of people do online shops, for example for their work or they sell stuff online, kind of clothes or whatever and they do like a merch, like *DIS* did it and Timur Si-Qin did it as well, so I was just interested in how this can be used as a channel but as you said, it has different qualities, or can have different functions in different cases

**Débora:** I think it's a different approach. I can't just be like oh now I'm going to start selling T-shirts or something. I think that becomes too much a mock-up of something and then it just doesn't make sense. I'm not that good at technology for example, (laughing) I'm terrible actually, I'm always asking myself, how can I extend an artwork, and how can I push the artwork, that attracts me more about it.

**Marlene:** But didn't you do T-shirts at some point? At the very beginning of Debora Delmar Corp?

**Débora:** Yeah, at the very beginning. But I didn't have it as a proper merge. A friend asked me recently if they could make some, they made some socks and things for...they have a project that is called Mall and they make artist wearables basically, so they invited me to do that. But I don't feel like myself doing it, I don't know, I don't see the point.

**Marlene:** And is this project already running?

**Débora:** Yes, they are from Colombia, and they have their own gallery and we collaborate sometimes, I was meant to have a show there this summer. Obviously, I'm not going there but now we're doing another thing and they've been working with museums. They went to Basel last year and they have different things, blankets where I printed images, photographs or other artists that do like clothing and stuff like that, they presented it in a space there.

**Marlene:** Sounds very interesting, can you maybe send me the link? Or do I find it online?

**Débora:** I can send you the link.

**Marlene:** That would be great thank you. I saw that the show was running now during the pandemic, I saw it just a little bit on Instagram, you did like a virtual run through, or did it have a real opening?

**Débora:** There was no opening, and it was a Zoom visits at the gallery. I had my own tour of the show like that. It wasn't very complicated cause nowadays there is like a website, where galleries can get like a google street view kind of thing for galleries. This was just her talking to people about the work, which I really like. It became this personal experience, through the conversation with her and then through moving through her steps in the space. I thought that was really interesting, because also the work, there was like this piece, the barrier work, that was really about experiencing it, being there in person, like a lot of work. In the end I make objects, I make things and they are meant to be experienced. Obviously, with images it's not the same either.

**Marlene:** I'm just asking this because Corona showed us so much how the exhibition space, the actual exhibition space is so important. I think because the whole conversation has been, since digital images or the whole digitalization has taken the whole art scene and people were just like you can look at art online...

**Débora:** Why go to the show?

**Marlene:** Yes, and all these Apps came up, with 360°-views of the show, every museum did it. Everything you could experience from outside, which is super interesting, but the potential of the actual exhibition space and the displays in the actual exhibition space... I thought it is really interesting how it intensified this conversation about it and that I always had the feeling that you just have to be there. If you look at the images of the shows it is always so perfectly lit and nice and if you're actually there you see that it's a whole other experience sometimes, not always, maybe it's loud or the light is dim and there are cables that retouched in the actual shoot and just so many different kind of things that come in when you actually go there and also of course actually see the artwork, that looks totally different from different angles and stuff like this.

**Débora:** People think about it in a neoliberal kind of way, because they think like oh you can just see it online, you can sell it online. I can take a picture of this painting and then put it online and a collector can just click on it and be like I want it. Yes, you can do that, that can work, but also I remember when 2006 or something you were saying, there was so much of these online

exhibitions and everything was so based on this online communities and people making works on, pretending to have a gallery space and putting objects and you're just basically on your computer. I am personally really interested in the relationship with the gallery as a visitor but also as an artist and how I interact again with the people in the gallery, with the space of the gallery. I am playing with these power structures in the space of exhibition. I feel during this time, people were like, how do we remain relevant or active and how do we still have people looking at our stuff? They became very desperate with generating content and all this stuff. It becomes a very naïve approach, I guess. It's cool that you make it available but, but then maybe it's just not necessary all the time to have so much.

**Marlene:** Yes, exactly that's what I felt, and basically this is one of the points, I also try to make in this work. We live in the so-called post-digital age, why do we need the museum space even? I want to make a point for the museum or art displayed in the actual space and say why it is important, say what can happen there. Especially with the whole online thing, it can be interesting but then again it can be so exhausting. During this whole three month of the pandemic, I was at one online exhibition, at one vernissage that my friend did, and this kind of zoom vernissage thing, which was super exhausting, because 40 people in a zoom call, you cannot really talk to each other.

**Débora:** Yeah, I miss going to openings because of the social space that it generates, the gallery as a place to meet your friends. Living in London, it's super hard to meet with people cause people live in many different areas, so this becomes the meeting point with friends and then you have a beer, you go for food or whatever...these social spaces that are generated through galleries are super important. You cannot just do that through your phone. If I want to see a work, I will go to the exhibition itself when I have time but for me a lot of this gallery shows I go to are for the socializing.

**Marlene:** How were you personally affected by the pandemic?

**Débora:** At the beginning there was some really boring days. A bit what do I do and this kind of feeling that I have to keep doing stuff so giving myself tasks, like to read, you have to do this, you have to do that and then I was just like no, I have to relax a bit and give it a break. My family is in Mexico, so it is a bit worrying seeing the news and seeing how things are. When I did the self-isolation images, it was a good way to start dealing with it a bit, because the pandemic has actually been really interesting, how it has affected economies, how it's affecting circulation, how you cannot go to certain places. These commercial spaces are closed now completely, I find a lot of potential for learning and maybe building new things as a society or questioning certain things that we should question and in that way it's been good. Now it's going to a point where I feel very comfortable at home, so that's kind of weird too, and I was reading this really interesting article in the New Yorker, it was talking about how our relationship with architecture has changed and how it's changing. I mean there has to be measurements of security and stuff, but it started with sanatoriums in Europe and the aesthetic of Minimalism and then Bauhaus later on. In my work a lot of the installations are also dealing with this kind of cleanliness or cleansing of corporate minimalist aesthetics, it was talking about that in relation to Covid and then our relationship with our home and minimalism going to the home but now also the home, us kind of rejecting that a bit more, because you want to have something that makes you feel special.

**Marlene:** Yeah, especially in these times you want to feel cozy, and everybody starts to redecorate their interior.