

**3/7/2020**

**DANIELLE DEAN**  
*IN CONVERSATION WITH*  
**SOFÍA HERNÁNDEZ**  
**CHONG CUY**

**CONTINENTAL  
PRIVATE ROAD**

**1646.**

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About This folder.

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via WhatsApp and stretches through the whole period during which the artist develops their initial idea into final results.

1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process. In trying to picture what result the artists' work is getting to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Danielle Dean, Continental Private Road, 2nd of July 2020, in 1646.

This artist  
Danielle Dean

This correspondent  
Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy

[11:57 PM, 6/29/2020]

SOFÍA: Writing near midnight, from Rotterdam

DANIELLE: It is near almost 3pm here. I am at home in San Diego

SOFÍA: Do you generally work from home, or do you have a studio as well?

DANIELLE: No, I usually work from my studio

SOFÍA: Is your studio at UCSD, where you teach?

DANIELLE: Yes

SOFÍA: What course(s) did you teach this semester? I recall you were doing revisions a week or so ago

DANIELLE: I taught a grad crit' class with the UCSD MFAs and an intermediate sculpture class with some undergrads. I finished just a couple of weeks ago.

SOFÍA: Teaching and all the while you were creating new work for your exhibition at 1646?! Plus, the experience lockdown?!

DANIELLE: Ha ha! Yes, it has been full on.

SOFÍA: I hear from some artists that the current lockdowns and social distancing we've been experiencing due to COVID-19 has given a much-needed space for thinking through ideas, working through things, giving space to oneself. But that doesn't play out the same everywhere.

DANIELLE: Wow - it has been like living in an end of times movie.

SOFÍA: How has this experience affected you?

DANIELLE: In regard to what you said about needed space, not so much. I have felt it has been so hard to focus on art making - or to find the reason to do it.

SOFÍA: This is both an existential and situational experience, maybe we begin with the latter, as it entails addressing the work you've been developing for 1646 - You have been creating new work for your exhibition, maybe we begin with that, with what you've been able to work on...

DANIELLE: Yes, I mean for the first month or so I found it hard to continue to work on the projects, both because of time - teaching online takes over your body and soul - but also because it felt a little pointless. For me art is a lot about building community, and I do prefer to do this in person. However, the community can also be built online, of course. I have really good friends in the Netherlands that I was looking forward to seeing when coming to work on this project at 1646 - the travel ban took away the personal community aspect of doing the show.

SOFÍA: Moving to and from the USA and NL is not exactly viable or easy right now. Installing an exhibition remotely may be challenging, for sure, but just simply working during these times is hard, whether that means making your artwork or teaching art or dealing with personal finances. Building community is one thing that the current situation we live in has been most confusing; digital connectivity - as in this exchange - may enhance but not replace physical presence, at least for many of us.

SOFÍA: Before going into the travels your new work may involve - just want to touch base on your existing connection with the NL. Can you please elaborate?

DANIELLE: Yes, I was in the Rijksakademie from 2017 - 2019. And I was also part of the "Freedom of Movement" exhibition at the Stedelijk.

SOFÍA: What work did you present in "Freedom of Movement"?

DANIELLE: A work shot in Houston, Texas, called "True Red Ruin (Elmina Castle)".

SOFÍA: And is it related to your current work for 1646?

DANIELLE: It is not directly related, although some of the themes that come up in that work are also present in the project for 1646, such as thinking about labor and colonialism, and how history is still active in the present.

SOFÍA: [I am downloading your new animation now]

DANIELLE: ha ha! It doesn't have sound yet! It will have sound by the time the show opens... working up to the last minute.

SOFÍA: Not yet fully downloaded. In the meantime: You sent me a press clipping that is source material or inspiring piece: an advertisement of a 1965 Lincoln Continental, a forest in the backdrop. I understand there's a connection you make of this with Fordlandia, Brazil. But the animation is still downloading, so hard to connect the ad with Fordlandia with this press clipping alone....

DANIELLE: Yes, this advert will be presented in the show, as a small photocopy.

DANIELLE: I wanted to show it, to make the connection in the animation. The animation begins with the image for the Ford Lincoln ad, but without the car, nor traces of people in it.

SOFÍA: [The animation just started; watching it now on the computer]

DANIELLE: The animation starts from the "Private Road" sign in front of a typical North American woods and moves forward, deeper into the forest, it gets darker and it starts to rain heavily. The woods together with the "private road" sign is a staple of North American suburbia, especially in the so-called frontier. The animation plays with

this landscape suddenly becoming more like a jungle, perhaps the Brazilian rainforest or just an 'elsewhere' place.

SOFÍA: I see now -- luscious landscape, garden to jungle

SOFÍA: And what kind of sound or soundtrack will you use?

DANIELLE: Very simple, mostly just the sounds of the forest, the rain and the jungle.

SOFÍA: The Amazon has been burning as of late, and Fordlandia was a disaster then and apocalyptic to date. How did your work get to Brazil, as in, thematically? Was it through Fordism or climate crisis or maybe the relation between those two?

DANIELLE: Yes, the Amazon has and still is being destroyed to make money for a few.

DANIELLE: I got to think about Brazil through looking at some Ford archives held in Detroit. I was living in Detroit - and spent half my time in Detroit and half in Amsterdam during that time. In Detroit, I looked at a couple of different archives.

SOFÍA: What kind of archival materials were you looking for?

DANIELLE: One archive was held at the Henry Ford factory and museum, which was business materials, journals and various documents about Fordlandia, which was a work camp that Henry Ford set up in the Amazon to yield rubber for tires for cars they were making on the Ford assembly line in Detroit. Another archive I saw was of a collector in Detroit. He had a massive archive of Ford commercials that he let me come and photograph.

SOFÍA: Are these archival materials the source of the new banners you are planning to present at 1646? Curious about why they are watercolors... or banners for that matter...

DANIELLE: The advert that is the source of the animation comes from the Ford commercial archive. And the new banners come from the Fordlandia archive, yes. They are watercolors, translating the materials into another medium, a kind of drawing that renders the photograph, or 'factual' document more subjective.

SOFÍA: [I am now seeing the second video you just emailed me, the "Amazon Turk..."]

SOFÍA: How depressing this video, puff! I now see the relationship you draw with the labor practices of Fordlandia in the Amazon with Amazon.com, as well as the economic and ecological landscapes.

DANIELLE: Yes. The video is kind of a work-in-progress. I am working on a much more ambitious version of the work for a show coming up at the Tate Britain, in London. But I am happy to show this with the animation here at 1646 - to also make a connection to the production of the animation too...the multi-plane camera.

SOFÍA: Of course, those associations make me think of crisis; but, also, of the place of landscape in art history, which is generally associated with power or privilege and certainly colonialism, as in the landscapes commissioned (and especially those first ones of Brazil by European explorers).

DANIELLE: Yes, I am super interested in how landscape has been represented and how this has justified the use of land and people as something to be dominated by 'humans', and the concept of 'human' has often meant white humans. Ford was a colonialist and imperialist.

SOFÍA: The collection of works you are presenting have an intersectional approach to labor indeed, but racial issues are less prominent in the work, I feel. [I have been in the Amazon, near but not in Fordlandia, and the social impact that enterprise had there was social devastating to this day; the deforestation, the poverty, the alcoholism, it's really intense...]

DANIELLE: For me, there is an inherent intersection between labor relations and race - or rather, racism.

SOFÍA: Considering it's getting late here, would like to at least circle back to where we are -- so back from the Amazon landscapes to our realities, yours especially. You are installing your exhibition remotely, considering the pandemic, lockdown and travel bans... and in our exchange, you have mentioned living now in San Diego, and before in Detroit, Amsterdam... and I know you lived in New York City, too... So where did you begin -- where were you born and raised, and how or when did you begin working as an artist?

DANIELLE: I was born in Huntsville Alabama, U.S.A., but I left when I was a baby and grew up in a small town in England called Hemel Hempstead. This is where my mum grew up... My mother is British and my father is Nigerian. My Dad lives in Houston, Texas, and my mum still lives in Hemel. But I want to circle back to what you said about the work being less about race. It is really important to me to think about racial capitalism in my work.

SOFÍA: Muy bien, so let's delve on this. Just before the Amazon video ends, the girl [voice over] speaks about gift certificates vs cash... and she makes the distinction of being able to use one's paycheck/money in whichever way as a sign of freedom...

DANIELLE: This is a key part of this work, which relates to the case of Fordlandia, for example, where the Indigenous peoples were violently displaced from the rainforest in order for the land to be used as raw materials for capital accumulation. The justifications for these acts were racist - to see the Indigenous peoples as not human or less than.

SOFÍA: ... that bit, which is, “on certain instances” exemplifying the near-slavery operandi of much neoliberalism, whether in America or, by and large, the Global South...

DANIELLE: The history of global capitalism is also a history of racism. Have you read “A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None”?

SOFÍA: I have not read this, and will look for it

DANIELLE: It is interesting to make a connection between the geographic/geological dimensions of racial capitalism and feminist black theory, as Kathryn Yusoff does. Her book is a bit complicated, but she has some interesting lectures online about this subject. The animation has less of an obvious connection to race, as there are no people in it. But for me the act of removing the car and the white woman from the original commercial and then forcing the connection between different geographies and climates is a way to look at the histories of oppression of racialized people (Black, Brown, Indigenous) in terms of the landscapes that have taken place in through the history of colonialism and via the production of consumer goods in capitalism. The animation removes people in order to see the landscape itself, or more precisely, to focus attention on how we see modes of seeing the landscape. Animation is a crucial technique in this regard, for both creating a depoliticized image of “nature,” and for selling it through the media of advertising.

SOFÍA: I see this happening in the Amazon video, considering the footage, montage, voice-over...

DANIELLE: I am currently working with Amazon Mechanical Turk workers - (Amazon) workers from all over the world on a video that re-stages some things that happened in Fordlandia. This work is a development of that video you see...

SOFÍA: Makes sense, yes

DANIELLE: It will certainly go into these topics more directly... the connections between class, race, and landscape. The new animation and Lincoln image in the 1646 exhibition offers a view of one part of the project, related to modes of seeing and reproducing landscape.

SOFÍA: Seeing those two works in isolation -- sans vitrine or banners, for example, or in relation to other pieces like your new video -- may not readily express your deeper investigation of labor, class and race

DANIELLE: Yes, it is more about my interest in the media-technical production of a certain landscape imaginary - that for me relates to class and race ideologically. I was interested in looking at the ways landscape is represented in connection to the production of a consumer imaginary. The way landscape is represented historically connects to our collective consciousness of land. I grew up watching Disney films - awful ha hah! Disney was influenced by the Ford assembly line - splitting up the parts of animation production in a factory-like approach.

DANIELLE: Using a camera called the multi-plane camera - originally it was actually made from car parts - Disney pioneered the splitting of the landscape into separate parts, pulling out the layers of the trees in the front, and the background. He innovated this type of camera in the 1930s, around the same time as Ford was developing Fordlandia. Separating all layers of the animation in sections creates the illusion of depth, making the landscape more seductive and immersive for ideological consumption.

SOFÍA: This is the one in the Amazon video, correct?

DANIELLE: Yes, I was interested in this connection between the assembly line and the ideological construction of the “American Dream”. Separated parts where the human is at the center, dominating over a space. The Master... disrupting ecologies. The imagined landscape affects how we connect to it, how we justify mass-consuming and destroying it. Can we imagine humans not at the center, not driving forward... consuming the space that surrounds them, as if these are a separate layer?

SOFÍA: Hmm... I didn't ask you about how you are installing these two videos. Where/when does the audience experience the new animation [of landscape] vis a vis the [Amazon Turks] video? I ask this per my previous comment, as in what mediates the experience of the newest work

DANIELLE: The audience will first see the window display, from the outside... So first you see the window display as you approach the gallery. The front windows of the space will have layers of trees from the animation. And then the inside window will have two images of where the participants I am working with from Amazon Mechanical Turk live and work. From their bed, or living room... This is a site-specific new version of a series of works I started for a show I had in Germany late last year. [Image of “I work lying on my bed” sent via chat]. Then, yes, the Amazon video, archival banners depicting the events at Fordlandia, and the 1960s Lincoln Ford ad will all be seen before the animation. The idea is that the first room provides a certain historical, material and ideological context for the animation in the second room.

SOFÍA: Okay, so I saw it the other way around - your new animation, then the Lincoln Ford, and so on : ) Nothing like the physical experience, as said when we began

DANIELLE: Yes, well we haven't finished installing, so...

SOFÍA: So, for sure, I think the newest animation will be more charged if its experienced last - mediated, so to say, by the other works.

DANIELLE: You should go to sleep now! It is crazy late for you!

SOFÍA: I am wrapping up now to go rest. - Buenas noches

[2:22 AM, 6/30/2020]