

# REGEN PROJECTS

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## ELEPHANT

### Abraham Cruzvillegas is Always Learning

From creating site-specific works for Louis M. Martini Winery to serving as artistic director for a new biennial in Yucatán, Abraham Cruzvillegas is more concerned with questions than answers. Meka Boyle speaks to the artist for Elephant.



Abraham Cruzvillegas for Louis M Martini at Art Basel Miami Beach 2025. Courtesy: the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York. Photo: Zack Paris

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“Language is everything, including art,” says Abraham Cruzvillegas. When we meet in Miami, the Mexico City-based artist has just finished an improvised performance artwork for Louis M. Martini Winery. In a small room inside Art Basel Miami Beach, he mixed pigment (crushed with a wine bottle) and water before painting pieces of paper in blue, pink, or yellow hues and then tearing and collaging them into the final product: a label for the winery. It’s a very present, in-the-moment process at a time when many artists are focused on more slippery, digital states of being and working. The project is part of an ongoing connection between Cruzvillegas and Louis M. Martini—two of his site-specific mural maps are installed on its walls in Napa. Titled “Two Abstract Maps (An Alchemical Self Portrait),” 2024, the maps incorporate knowledge of the terrain, from flora and fauna to past indigenous history and wine-making practices.

Like winemaking, his own practice requires research, as well as the alignment of many details: place, material, and process. There is an element of presence: not only where he is, but also who was there before him. Cruzvillegas’ maps break down the context about their form, and replace it with pointed critiques of what it means to chart and name territories. His assemblages find form and depth in familiar materials: a shoe is no longer a shoe, a ticket stub becomes something more. A key element to the artist’s practice is his belief that “every new project demands something different in terms of the context.” So with each work, he embarks on research and in an attempt to enter the consciousness of the place he is working from, tapping into the local communities, the nature, the people.



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Cruzvillegas is always questioning the world. It’s an approach that was imbued in him as a child. His parents were activists, who taught him the value of understanding his own heritage; his mother is *Hñhãñhu* from what is now the state of Hidalgo, while his father

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belonged to the *P'urhépecha*, now the state of Michoacán. By the time the '80s came around, Cruzvillegas was filtering his worldview into political cartoons, interrogating the permeable borders of language. He began to look at everyday activities and see semantics: “gardening, cooking, carving a piece of stone, painting.”



Photo: 2025 Louis M Martini

“I decided not to go to art school because I found the schools really bad,” he says with a laugh, adding, “I was more arrogant then.” So he studied education. Around the same time in the late '80s while he was working as a caricature artist, a colleague introduced him to the artist Gabriel Orozco, who became his mentor. When they met Gerónimo López, the three became a group, exchanging ideas and educating each other. Eventually Orozco, Mónica Manzutto, and José Kuri formed the gallery Kurimanzutto from this friendship. “It’s like a byproduct of that relationship,” he explains of those early days. Now they are like family.

Today he stays in touch with his former students, some going back over 30 years. These connections are top of mind as he prepares for his role as the artistic director for the debut of the Bienal de Yucatán, which will run from late November through February of

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2027. (The fair was founded by French collector and curator Catherine Petitgas, who is based between London and Mérida.) Cruzvillegas first encountered Petitgas through her initiative Proyecto Y, which offers a network that connects young local artists with curators, collectors, and other artists. I visited Yucatán a couple of times and I got in touch with the local young artists. “There are many layers,” Cruzvillegas says of Yucatán, “history, economy, nature, environment, language, politics. We’re trying to cross-pollinate in terms of bringing in people who can exchange ideas with the local community.”



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“I’m inviting artists that I’ve worked with previously from the Yucatán but also from all over Mexico and other places in France, the U.S., and England,” he says, before going on to list local artists who will be featured. There is Mónica Mitre, a young artist organizing collective action on the streets; Mitchell Urioste, who produces musical instruments from found objects; and Melissa Gabriela (often referred to as MeGa), an artist who explores what it means to have this kind of foreign presence in Cancún. “It’s a very good opportunity for them to make something that you can call art in the shape of a question,” he says of these artists. As he puts it, the partnership is not only addressing worries for the future but also joy and excitement about the possibility to produce alternatives. “We’ll make the first Yucatán biennial will gravitate around language. It brings lots of responsibility,” he says. In Mexico, there were many cultures before the Spanish colonial times, and Cruzvillegas is intent on underscoring their ongoing significance. “It’s not something about the past but very much about the future,” he says. The following biennial will address gender and identity. And the third one will be about the environment and water. As Cruzvillegas sees it, it is all related.

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Throughout his practice, individual work and community work have taken up two completely separate but important roles. Cruzvillegas sees engaging with human rights and education as a responsibility—and learning as an action in and of itself rather than a means to an end. “I think all human efforts are mistaken,” he says. “And I love that... Many artists want to communicate, they want to express themselves, but I don’t believe in that myself,” he adds. “It’s an effort. It’s a will. It’s a wish, but I believe in failure, in the success of failure, in the success of mistake, the success of inefficiency, the success of instability. I’m a champion of that.