

A CLASSROOM IS A SPACE OF DESIRES.

SOCIAL A/R/TOGRAPHY: VISUAL PROJECTS IN SCHOOLS IN THE MARGINS OF TEGUCIGALPA.

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*I've always loved pictures; they give me ideas.*  
(David Hockney, 2018:73)

**1. Introduction:**

The two purposes of this paper are to propose the convenience of the denomination Social A/r/tography to denominate the a/r/tographic projects in which the social dimension is as important as the artistic, educational and research dimensions; and, the second, to present two artistic actions of social a/r/tography that we are developing in primary and secondary schools in the margins of the city of Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

In a/r/tographic projects the social emphasis may be due to different reasons, among others: (a) the features of the educational and social context in which the project is developed; (b) the social commitment of the artistic, educational or research activities; (c) the expected community as a result of the intervention. When one or more of these reasons happen together, then it might be convenient to use the adjective 'social' along with the a/r/tographic approach to label this types of projects (Marin-Viadel & Roldan, 2017).

We are developing in Tegucigalpa the project 'BombeArte', a social a/r/tography approach in visual arts, as part of a program of educational cooperation on art education that began in February 2015, thanks to the collaboration between the University of Granada and the Non-Governmental Organization 'ACOES' (<https://aco.es/>).

**2. Inquiry Questions:**

According to the two objectives of this paper, there are two types of research questions: (a) those that correspond to the suitability of social a/r/tography as methodological strategy, and (b) those about the development of an art education project in schools in contexts of social exclusion risk.

**2.1.** Do we need one more methodological approach in arts based research? Despite the fact that there is currently an explosion of very varied methodological proposals, under what circumstances are there enough significant differences in the processes of inquiry to justify a new methodological approach?

**2.2.** What role should contemporary art play in an art education project for schools in social contexts completely disconnected from contemporary art?



Fig. 1. Authors. (2018). *Blue school chair #1*. Photo Essay composed of two Visual Quotations, on this page, left (Pollock, 1947) and right (Christo & Jean Claude, 1960); and, on the next page, Project Bombearte-17 (2017) *Chair and table in the Art classroom of Santa Teresa School #1*, participatory installation with school chair and table and transparent adhesive tape written with blue and green markers, 140 x 45 x 55 cm.





### 3. Social A/r/tography as a converging space between art, education, research and society.

A/r/tography is a broad and plural methodological approach: *A/r/tography is a research methodology, a creative practice, and a performative pedagogy that lives in the rhizomatic practices of the in-between.* (Irwin, 2013: 199). In a/r/tography the confluence of art, education and research, is not a closed triad of concepts, but open to new ingredients. For example, Mary Stone Hanley (2013: 3) writes: “A/r/tographically speaking, I traversed the permeable places between artist, researcher, activist, and teacher.” By introducing the role activist next to those of artist, researcher and professor, she introduces a new a/r/tographic approach.

When and why is it necessary to add ‘social’ to a/r/tography? A/r/tography usually implies commitment to communities, whether school or cultural (Irwin, 2017). But ‘community’ and ‘social’ are different concepts. When the adjective ‘social’ is applied to one or several of the three dimensions of a/r/tography, whether to art, education or research, then specific connotations appear.

**3.1. Art + Social.** The explicit involvement of the visual arts with social issues not has arisen in the current panorama, but began during the French Revolution (Egbert, 1970). Now, in the contemporary scene, new artistic concepts and proposals have appeared, which in the specific case of the visual arts, began to manifest strongly in the late sixties of the twentieth century: cooperation, participation, collaborative construction of the works of art, new spaces for artistic intervention, etc. (Finkelpearl, 2013).

TATE gallery (n. d.) defines the ‘Socially Engaged Practice’ saying: *...include any artform which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction. This can often be organised as the result of an outreach or education program, but many independent artists also use it within their work.*

Names and labels in the current panorama are abundant: Artivism, Art for Social Change, Collaborative Art Practices, Community Arts, Community-based Art, Participatory Art, Social Sculpture, Social Turn. Different types of Social Art are a challenge for the dominant forms of artistic creation, questioning the passive role of viewers and emphasizing that participants are directly and physically involved in the creative process. Artists and participants maintain a horizontal relationship and the work of art arises from the interaction of the participants with the situation proposed by the artist in dialogue with the community. Social art is often produced in economically depressed areas and the art project functions as a catalyst for social change (Atkin, Frieling, Groys, & Manovich, 2008, Bishop, 2006 and 2012, Brown, 2014, Poch & Poch, 2018).

Fig. 2. Authors. (2018). *Process for blue school chair*. Photo Essay composed with six digital photographs by authors.



Fig. 3. Project Bombearte-17. (2017). *Two blue chairs for Art classroom in Santa Teresa School #1*, participatory installation with two school chairs and transparent adhesive tape written with blue and green markers, 80 x 50 x 75 cm, each.

**3.2. Education + Social.** In the fields of education, schools, teachers and learning, the adjective ‘social’ produces a multitude of denominations, many of them widely recognized as differentiated disciplines and specific university degrees. Social pedagogy and social education are directly connected to the critical and emancipatory dimensions, as revealed the classical works of Paulo Freire (1974 and 1976). Its main features are the development of theories and practices targeted to social integration and inclusive dynamics, the critical attitude towards society, the pedagogical projects that help to confront social problems, the learning from the other members of the group and participatory practices (Hatton, 2013; Perez Serrano, 2004).

**3.3. Research + Social.** In social sciences research are a variety of methodological proposals that give priority to participation and action in the communities, for example, Community-based Research and Participatory Action-Research (PAR). In these approaches knowledge is conceptualized in a plural way and oriented to social change, they emphasize the collective inquiry and experimentation based on the social history experience of the group, all voices are valued, inclusion is pursued, and knowledge of the social world comes from the process of changing it (Anderson, 2017; Chevalier, & Buckles, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

In short, social a/r/tography is produced as a result of the combination of the qualities of socially en-

gaged artistic practices, social pedagogy and social education and participatory and community-based action-research methodologies.

In our particular case, the term Social A/r/tography appeared as a need to define the type of projects we were developing in Honduras.

#### **4. ‘BombeArte’ a social a/r/tography project in process.**

BombeArte is an educational cooperation project in Art Education for the schools in the neighborhoods ‘New Capital’ and ‘Ramon Amaya Amador’ in the periphery of the city of Tegucigalpa. In these neighborhoods, in which a population of about forty thousand people is estimated in each, the presence of the state or city authorities is quite tenuous: most of the streets are not paved, there is no public water network potable or sewerage, most of the houses have been self-built by their inhabitants with pieces of wood and metal, there are not enough public schools for all the children, there are no public health centers (and practically no private doctor or dentist because people do not have money to pay for healthcare), there is no police (there are ‘maras’ [gangs]). All these poverty features cause insecurity and extreme violence against children and young people.

ACOES (Asociación Colaboración y Esfuerzo) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in Tegucigalpa (Honduras) to develop educational projects in the most disadvantaged sectors of the population. ACOES HONDURAS was founded in 1993 with the conviction that education is one of the most effective instruments to overcome marginalization, both personal and social. The idea is not new, but it has not ceased to be true (Dewey, 1937).

*Education in itself is an empowering right and one of the most powerful tools by which economically and socially marginalized children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully in society.* (UNESCO, n. d.)

With this basic conviction about education, ACOES, among other educational projects, has founded four schools, attended by a total of approximately 5,000 students. The professors of the schools, the majority of whom live in the area, select the children that are excluded from the public education system, either due to lack of economic resources of the families to support the small expenses of the public schooling (uniform, books, etc.), or because the family context is so unstructured that it is not able to assume the commitments involved in the schooling of children.

The art education project 'BombeARTE' for the ACOES schools of Tegucigalpa. (<http://bombearte.blogspot.com.es/>) is developed in a context in which there are no cultural centers, neither public nor private. Practically no one of the students and very few teachers have gone to the cinema, ever in their lives. They have never gone to a museum or an art exhibition or a music concert. The main cultural activities of the neighborhood are the festivals and celebrations organized by the schools: the celebration of the Indian Lempira, the national identity festival, etc., which are animated with recreation competitions of the historical figures of the pre-Columbian ethnic groups in the current Honduran territory: Lencas, Miskitos, Tolupanes, Chortis, Pech or Payas, Tawahkas and Garifunas.

The BombeArte project develops curricular activities for all the grades. Most of the activities in the classroom are concentrated in a month and a half. Throughout these six weeks, Art Education activities are developed daily with each of the groups of each of the courses. In the two schools that have a larger number of students, the classroom dedicated to Art Education becomes a contemporary art gallery and visual arts workshop.

### 5. Two artistic interventions to write (and draw) in prohibited places at school.

Two of the artistic interventions that were developed in 2017 had as main objective to transform the space and the classroom furniture into a contemporary art exhibition hall. The challenge was to transfigure the functional environment of school, through a participatory intervention of the students and

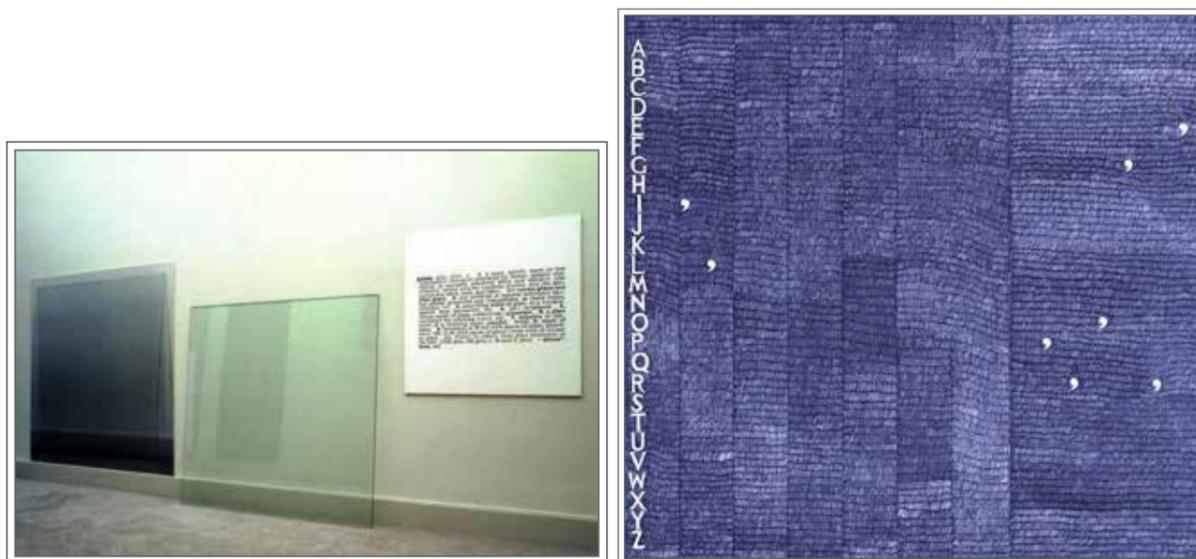
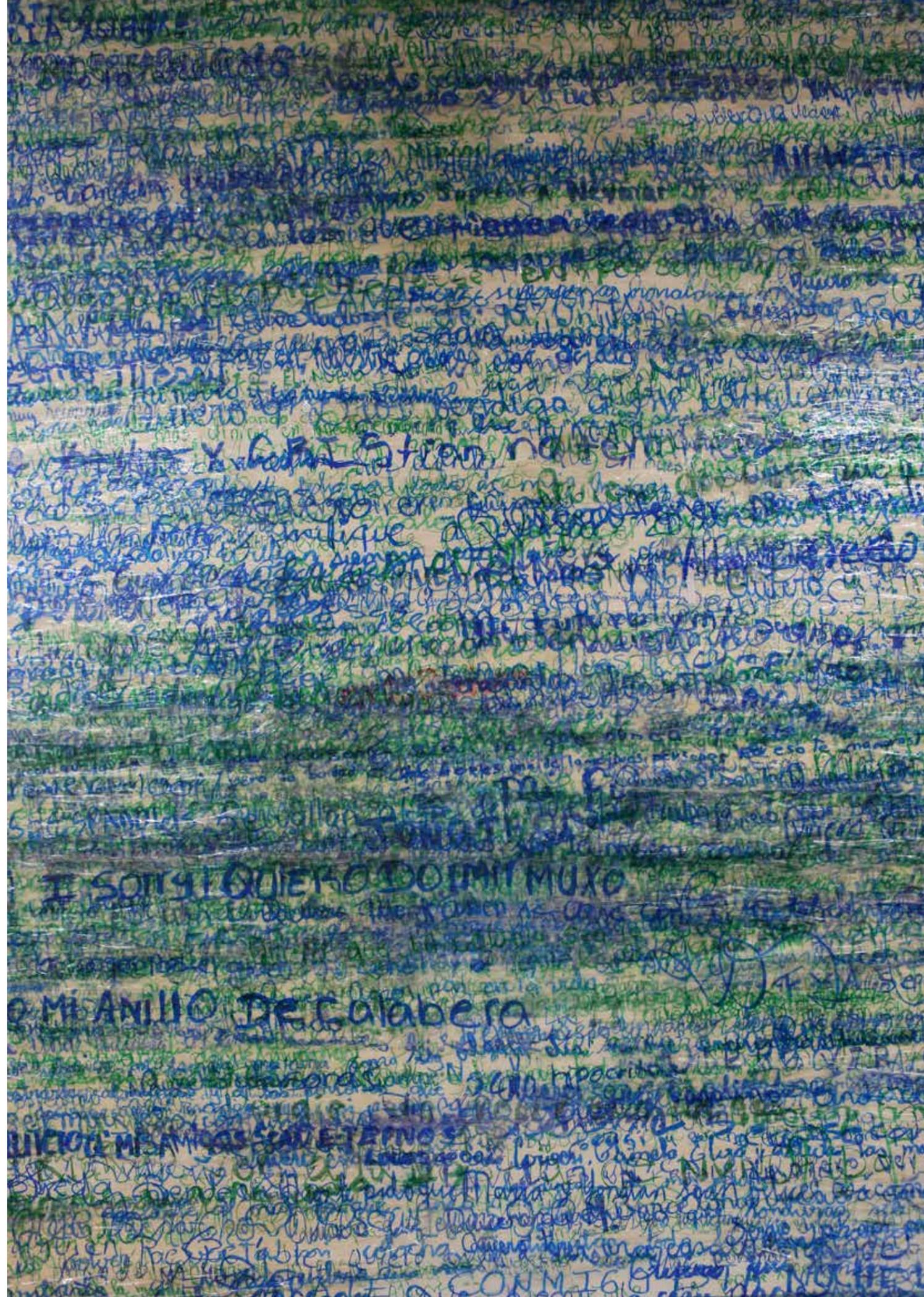
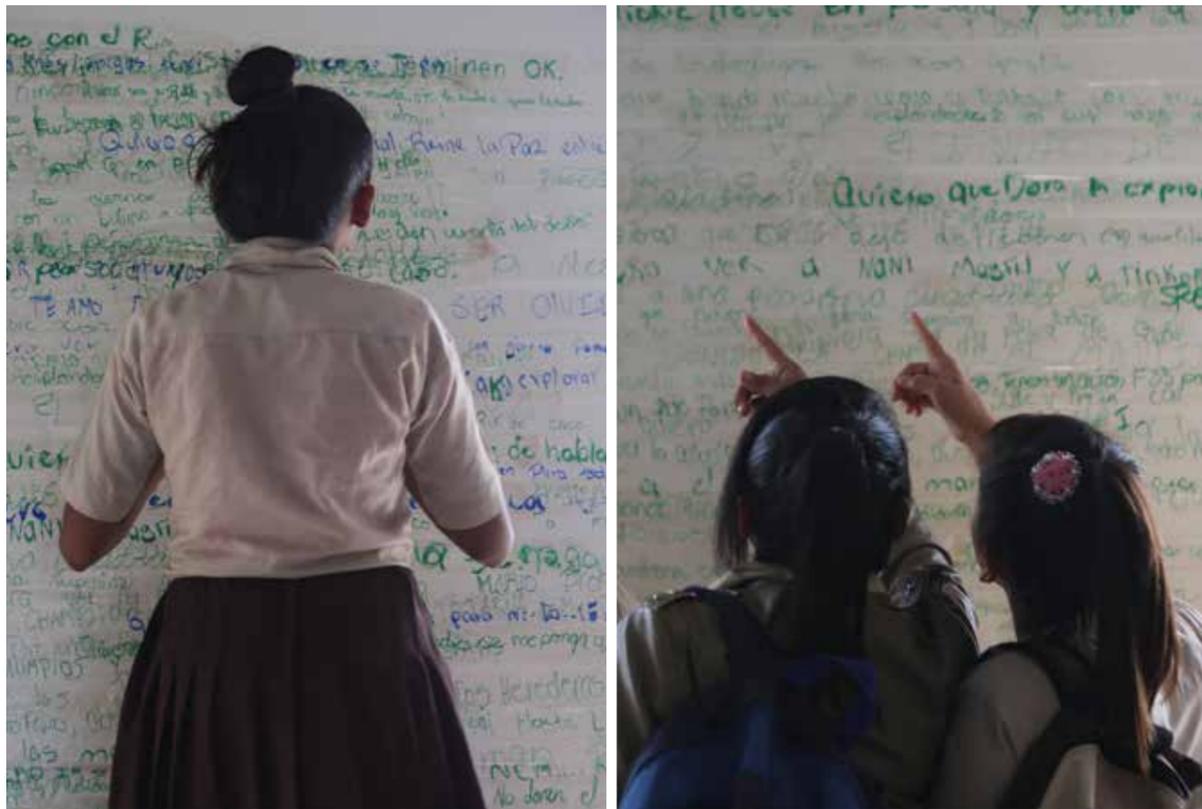


Fig. 4. Authors. (2018). *Blue and green window* in 'Santa Teresa' School. Photo Essay composed of two Visual Quotations, on this page, left (Kosuth, 1965) and right (Boetti, 1976-1977); and, on the next page, Porject BombeArte-17 (2017) *Blue and green window*, participatory installation in the wall of the classroom, transparent adhesive tape written with blue and green markers, 900 x 300 cm.





teachers, in a surprising scenario. The daily elements should continue to be recognized but their meaning would be disrupted towards artistic and aesthetic dimensions.

The materials we would work with were typical in a classroom: writing markers, transparent adhesive tape and the walls, windows and desks.

The artistic proposals developed the answers to two questions: what would I like to see through the window of my classroom? What would I like to say to my desk, in which I spend so many hours sitting?

These two questions could have been answered in the usual way of any questionnaire: writing the answer on a sheet of paper. But the artistic proposal was to ask in what way we can write and on what surface so the intervention produced a fundamentally visual result.

Writing is one of the main activities in the school. The students have to write regularly, class notes, summaries, essays and exams, in each of the different subjects of the curriculum. But the places where you can write at school are usually regulated with strict rules: you have to write in your personal notebook, you can write on the board when requested by the teacher, but you cannot write in the walls of the classroom not on the desks and furniture or in the books of the library.

Our two collaborative interventions proposed writing in prohibited places. This was an important incentive to participate.

Although the action was to write, the purpose was not to check the amount of knowledge of students on a subject, or the spelling correction of words or the grammar of the phrases, neither the calligraphic clarity of the manuscript text, nor its literary quality. The action sought to use writing as a mode of drawing or painting. The visual and chromatic result of the set of written sentences would finally be imposed on any other verbal criterion. Although in the final piece it was possible to read the sentences, the final image was more pictorial and sculptural.

One of the defining characteristics of the BombeArte project is that all proposals for artistic interventions in the school must be directly related to artworks of contemporary artist. Why this condition? One reason is because in this way it is ensured that the activities and proposals that take place in the classroom correspond to the activities and proposals in which contemporary artists work. This demand for synchronicity between what happens in the classroom and what happens in the professional panorama eliminates the outdated school exercises in the Art Education. No activity in the Art Education class that does

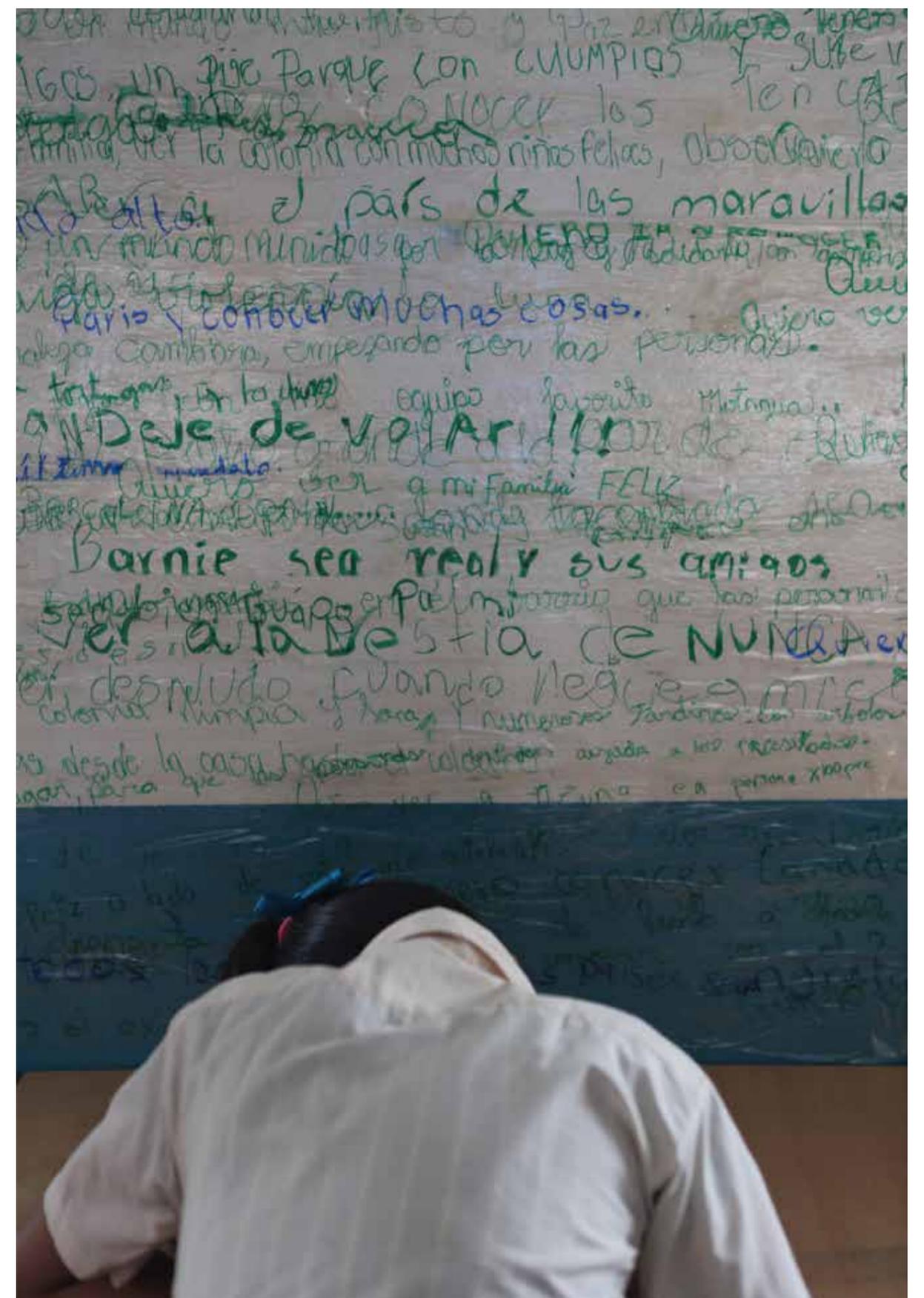
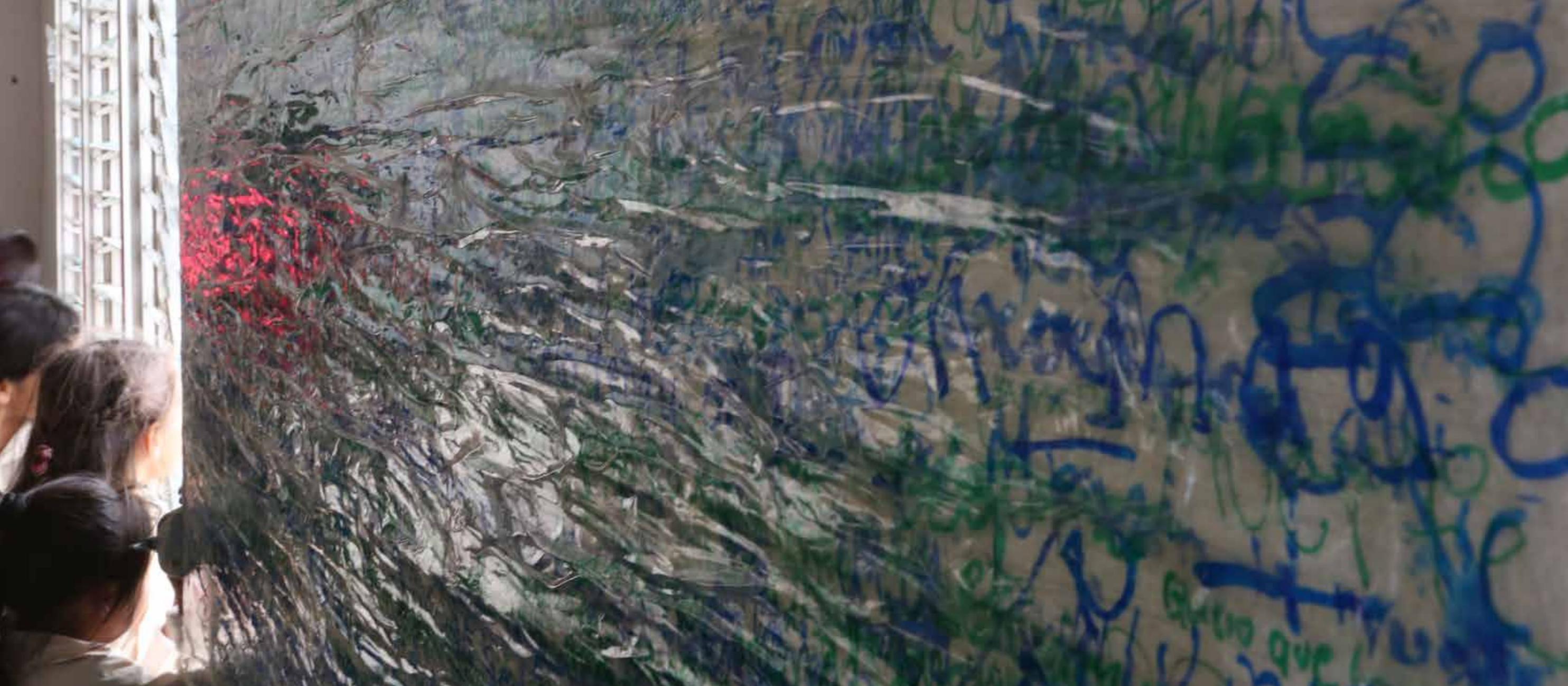


Fig. 5. Authors. (2018). *Process for Blue and green window*. Photo Essay composed with three digital photographs by authors.





(Previous pages) Fig. 6. Authors. (2018). *Process for Blue and green window #2*. Independent digital photography.

not correspond to the questions or interests of contemporary art. If Art Education students are involved in projects similar to those in the contemporary professional scene, and therefore reach similar results to those of contemporary artists, it is easy to understand, from the own personal experience, how and why contemporary artists do what they do.

Another feature of the artistic interventions proposed by the BombeArte project is that every of the more than one thousand students in the school want to participate. Therefore it is necessary to think about cumulative processes in which each individual intervention is reinforced by that of the whole group.

**5.1. Action 1: Write at the desk (from Christo & Jean Claude and Jackson Pollock).** The artists Christo & Jean Claude have worked, for decades, in the transformation of objects, buildings and natural spaces, through the action of packaging them (Christo & Jean Claude 1960). The artistic action of packaging, has little to do with the action of packaging to protect a product from any deterioration during its transport, or to wrap it for a gift, or other similar purposes. Packing an object in the manner of Christo & Jean Claude is a form of sculpture or installation: the utilitarian functions of the object or building must be subverted and its volumetric qualities enhanced. This was a concept of contemporary art that had to be learned.

Fig. 7. Authors. (2018). *Process for Blue and green window #3*. Independent digital photography.

A second artistic concept was put into play: that of accumulation. The pictorial work of maturity of Jackson Pollock (1947) was a suitable reference to understand how successive random strokes can get to create a dense and vibrant surface.

Blue markers were used because the manuscript text was more transparent than in black and allowed to continue seeing the surface of the desk; the other because, as is usual in many schools, the lower part of the walls is painted in dark blue to better hide the stains and damages.

Initially the transparent adhesive tape was only used to cover the flat surfaces of the chair: the seat, the backrest and the shovel. Once the successive groups of students had written on the flat surfaces of the desk, it was necessary to enlarge the writing surface and began to wrap the chair, but now considering the total volume of the object. The four metallic tube legs were four axes that perfectly delimited a prism; from the back to the outer end of the blade a very attractive volume was generated. The new surfaces, without concealing the original object, acquired a new sculptural sense. All the transparent surfaces generated by the strips of transparent adhesive tape were filled with blue words and phrases. Trying different ways of wrapping the desk many satisfactory solutions was found. Then, the high band of intense blue color, as background of the new object intervened took on a new meaning.

**5.2. Action 2: Two and three windows (from Alighiero Boetti and Joseph Kosuth).** The classroom dedicated to Art Education in the 'Santa Teresa' school is almost perfectly rectangular and has two large windows on the wall that faces the exterior of the building. The windows are located at both ends of the wall and divide it into three equivalent zones: window, wall and window. The proposal of intervention was to consider that the piece of wall between the windows could become a third imagined window, through which each student could see everything he or she wanted. The wishes would be written on the wall, but not directly on it, but on transparent adhesive tape. To write we would use the two colors that occupy most of the landscape seen through the windows: the blue of the sky and the green of the trees and plants, besides of the blue lower part of the wall.

When writing on the strips of transparent adhesive tape, and when sticking them on the wall, it should be taken into account that the windows are organized in horizontal bands of glass that oscillate to open and close the windows.

For this writing and windows proposal we look at two works of contemporary art. One, the piece by the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (1965) entitled 'Glass (one and three)', in which, according to his classic series of definitions, he combines the reproduction of the definition written in the dictionary of the word 'glass', a piece of glass and a photo of a glass. The second reference was the Italian 'povera' artist Alighiero Boetti (1976-1977) who covered monumental panels with small strokes of blue ballpoint pen on paper.

Once again, the ordered accumulation of overlapped written phrases created a delicate range of blues and greens, assimilated to a landscape painting: a landscape of written wishes and a painted mural, in which many of the phrases could be read. Some alluded to the desire to see famous cities: 'Paris and know many things'. Others want to see classic literature characters such as Lewis Carroll's Alice. Others more wished that the main characters of the television series "Barney and Friends" became real and walked in the other side of the class window.

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