

MADE

IN

L.A.

2012

CAMILO ONTIVEROS

Soil, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, is a mixture of inorganic and organic materials that makes up the loose surface of the earth to support biological activity. For this reason, federal regulations strictly control the substance under quarantine procedures, as its introduction into the United States from any foreign territory "can create a pathway for the entry of dangerous organisms across national borders."¹ Soil is also the point of departure for Camilo Ontiveros's project *El Pedón* (2012). (*Pedón* is a technical term for the smallest unit of soil taken from a place that still contains all the soil layers of that particular region, usually having a surface area of 10.76 square feet, or approximately one square meter, and extending from the ground surface down to bedrock.) For years, Ontiveros has developed a practice that rigorously mines and deconstructs the discourse of transnational law, migration, and binational exchange between the United States and Mexico through works that are both highly formal and politically charged. Interested in the lives of transient objects and their transformation as they navigate across nations, jurisdictions, and economies, he draws attention to the legal processes and policies that can convert a discarded object into a work of art. Salvaging washing machines from recyclers throughout the city and converting them to "finish fetish" sculptures or appropriating unused mailboxes for a sculptural wall installation, he has distinguished himself for charging traditional forms with a political texture through his conceptual approach and treatment of materiality.

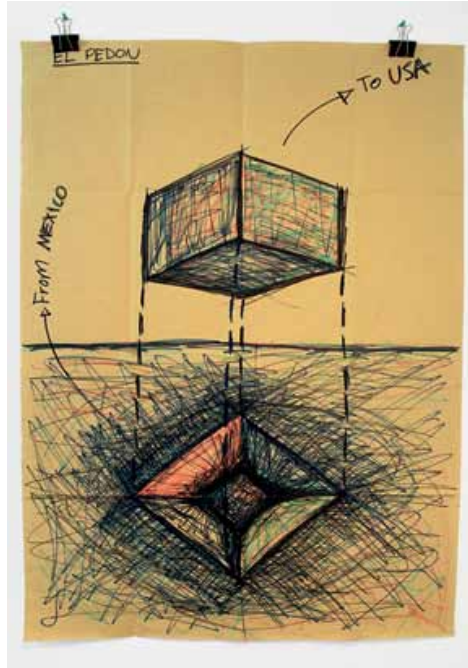
El Pedón, Ontiveros's most ambitious sculptural installation to date, will mark the culmination of a research-intensive project that he began years ago when visiting his brother Hermes Ontiveros, an agricultural scientist in Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico. Witnessing the process through which soil is tested for salinity levels in order to determine whether it is viable for the production of crops for export, Ontiveros commenced an inquiry into the trade regulations that establish these procedures and came across the statutes that prohibit the transfer of soil into the United States. Considering the deregulation created by NAFTA and the increased demand for Mexican produce, Ontiveros began to probe the possibility of transporting a large landmass from Mexico's southern terrain to the United States. His research unveiled the restrictions and an exception clause that allows for the transport of soil for "research, analytical, religious, ceremonial, patriotic, or similar purposes," prompting him to attempt to expand this clause to include "art" and thus allowing him to create a work sculpted by juridical implications.

El Pedón is a one-meter cube of soil pristinely extracted from Nayarit, Mexico, transported to the United States, and installed at the Hammer Museum. It gestures to the traditions of minimalist sculpture. Working in collaboration with a university and an art institution in Mexico, Ontiveros has negotiated a petition to allow the mass of soil to be considered an artwork for the purposes of meeting the exception clause. The paperwork documenting this process has been reproduced in a small publication, which will be available during the course of the exhibition. Working through the bureaucratic framework of policies that dictate relations between the United States and Mexico, Ontiveros elegantly puts forth a charged provocation. *El Pedón* expands his exploration of discarded objects while simultaneously speaking to a complex relationship that affects not only objects and materials but also the lives and conditions of many individuals who reside and work in Los Angeles.

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Notes

1. "How to Import Foreign Soil and How to Move Soil within the United States." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Circular Q-330.300-1, January 2010.



TOP: SKETCH FOR EL PEDON, 2012
BOTTOM: SKETCH FOR EL PEDON, 2012 (DETAIL.)



UNTITLED, 2009, FROM THE SERIES DEPORTABLES





TOP: MOVING MOMENTS, 2004
BOTTOM: 3600 POUNDS OF SCRAP METAL, 2009

COLCHON VI, 2008. FROM THE SERIES DEPORTABLES

