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COVER Pia Van Gelder, Tetrasynth, 2013,
in collaboration with Stephen Jones
Electronics, plastic, wood
Structural design by Andy McDonnell

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Loosely translated from the words of Jorge Luis Borges, “The past is clay which the present shapes to its will, endlessly.” And yet we are all firmly complicit in the exact opposite relation, that the past determines our capacity to sculpt the present by retelling the past. In her 2014 exhibition at Tercerunquinto, a recent work by Teresa Margolles in which the complexities of restoring also became apparent, but, in this instance, were prompted partly by accident. Margolles’s piece was shattered in transit from Mexico to the National Museum Cardiff in the UK, and horrified by the incident, the museum assigned a team of talented restorers to painstakingly reconstruct each of the shattered tiles, slowly gluing them back together as if it was an ancient object of incredible value. As suggested by its title, 32 años Levantamiento y trabajo donde cayo el cuerpo asesinado del artista Luis Miguel Suro, is a section of the tiled floor where the murdered body of the artist Luis Miguel Suro fell, extracted and transported into a gallery. As a device to create awareness for the reality of violence and social injustices in Mexico, Teresa’s voice comes through loud and clear. That aside, there are other forces operating within the work. Speaking to a colleague about the fire incident, Margolles was surprised and even touched to see the talented restorers treat the work so carefully “and so the two restorers, with tweezers and a brush, are doing a magnificent job in silence. It makes you want to cry. The respect for the work and the memory.”

What makes the piece a worthy object of rigorous restoration is not the value of the tiles themselves but what they signify the loss of a human life by the hand of an army. Luis Miguel Suro was a close friend of Margolles, so her dismantling of the tainted floor and restoring it for an audience is almost a public act of healing. It’s no surprise that Margolles was awarded the prestigious Artes Mundi award, which is given to artists that engage with the human condition and social reality.

Despite the differences in approach and context, the artists mentioned above share a desire to restore or reactivate past experience, questioning its weight, perhaps in the hope that with every brush-stroke and every tile repaired, we can make sense of our uneasy condition of existing only in the present, endlessly.

References
1 Taijarra Pimentel on Tercerunquinto, 2010
2 Taijarra Pimentel on Tercerunquinto, 2010
3 Cuashtelomodena, Towards a New Anarchitects, Estudios Concretos, Mexico City 2009