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Ball-Nogues

In its previous incarnation, the dilapidated three-car garage shared by Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues on a hillside street in Los Angeles's Echo Park neighborhood hosted death metal shows. When the duo moved in, Nogues says, "People just kept showing up and looking for the club." But once the locals understood what was happening inside, they started coming back for different reasons: Most days, Ball and Nogues are inside making a huge, glorious mess, and it's a remarkable sight to behold.

After meeting as students at SCI-Arc and working in architecture firms and production studios around Los Angeles, Ball and Nogues began collaborating on a range of experimental installations that combine uniquely purposed materials in exuberant vector-based forms. The pair moved into their cramped home base two-and-a-half years ago, cramming it full of a dozen hulking machines—metal lathe, table saw, welder—which they use to build intricate models of their humongous site-specific designs, like the shimmering tent-like *Liquid Sky* that draped over MoMA P.S.1's courtyard in Queens last summer, or *Rip Curl Canyon*, the hulking topography of corrugated cardboard commissioned by Rice Gallery in Houston.

Inside the garage, their portfolio is all around them in the form of maquettes pinned to the ceiling and tacked to the walls, rendered in you-name-it: wire, chains, netting, screens, even pantyhose. Six-foot rolls of Mylar are tucked into shelves close to the ceiling, curling down like metallic leaves, at hand for the next experiment. An 8-by-8-foot cocoon-like office is the only space safe enough to store their five computers. "It can look like Mount St. Helens in here," says Ball.

Out of this whirlwind, a large architectural installation for Extension Gallery in Chicago will soon emerge, followed by a new furniture and product line created from cross-manufactured elements of their past works. But white gallery walls and retail showrooms seem worlds away from the studio, which has more in common with the greasy auto repair shops that dot the nearby streets. To fit in with their surroundings, Ball and Nogues painted the studio's exterior traffic-cone orange and commissioned a local artist named Ziggy to tag it. His psychedelic bouquet of electric green mushrooms has since been layered with contributions by others who've embraced Ball and Nogues's presence—like a pair of teenagers who pause at the door to say hi before bolting down the street. "It's like having our own security force," says Ball. "They watch out for us," Nogues agrees, "but they tell us, 'Just don't ever call the police.'" www.ball-nogues.com

— ALISSA WALKER

ARCHITECTS
LOS ANGELES
SQUARE FOOTAGE: 460, plus 500 in a second studio, a double-story garage space two blocks away
NUMBER OF WORKERS: 2-10, depending on the project



Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues build their vector-based installations from a graffiti-tagged three-car garage in Los Angeles's Echo Park neighborhood.



DECOR ELEMENT THAT SAYS IT ALL:

The graffiti on the garage doors and everything that's been added to it since the pair commissioned it. "Other than that, we don't really have a decor. Sawdust is our decor," says Gaston Nogues. **ON THE STEREO:** Dr. Yo, internet radio.

FIRST THING TO BE RESCUED IN A FIRE:

"The book *A Day in the Life of California*—it has this great photo of my wife as a hardcore punk rocker back in the '80s—and my severely earmarked McMaster-Carr catalog. I flip through it all the time and daydream!" Nogues says.