Contemporary Transatlantic Dialogues

Art History, Criticism, and Exhibition Practices in Spain and the United States

María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco
and Robert S. Lubar, eds.

CENTER FOR SPAIN IN AMERICA
2013

Contemporary Transatlantic Dialogues

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Acknowledgements

Numerous individuals have contributed to this publication. The editors would like to thank José Luis Colomer, Director of the Center for Spain in America, for sponsoring the "Transatlantic Dialogues" symposium at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, from which these essays are derived, and for subsequently underwriting the publication of this book. We are also grateful to Laura de Simone, Laura Díaz and Isabel Morán for assisting in the book's preparation.

We are indebted to Patricia Rubin, Director of the Institute of Fine Arts, who generously provided a home for the symposium at New York University. At the Institute we also wish to acknowledge Brenda Pfifer Shrobe, Jason Varone, Yaelle Amir, Rae Kaplan, and Amy Miranda, who were instrumental in planning the symposium.

We thank the following foundations, museums and institutions for graciously waiving reproduction fees: the Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; Fundación Suñol, Barcelona; and Diputación de Valencia. We also thank Francesc Torres and Robin Cembalest who provided their own photographs to illustrate their texts.

Finally, we are grateful to José Antonio Martínez for introducing us to Rafael Conde and Pedro J. Fernández Sierra of Moonbook, whose wise counsel and design expertise were very helpful in the realization of this volume.

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Introduction

On April 1st and 2nd, 2011 the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University hosted a symposium that brought together art historians, art critics, artists, curators and museum professionals from Spain and the United States. Organized by the Center for Spain in America, the symposium was structureded around a series of dialogues and formal presentations that sought to engage key issues and experiences that have shaped the cultural landscape in the two countries over the past 50 years. The symbolic significance of the April 1st date was not lost on the participants. On that day in 1939 the troops of General Francisco Franco entered the city of Madrid, officially signaling the end of the Spanish Civil War. For the next four decades Spain suffered the political effects of an anachronistic dictatorship that isolated the Spanish people from the international community and foreclosed the project of modernity that had taken root in the first decades of the 20th century. Not until the Transition to democracy that followed, somewhat uncertainly, upon Franco's death on November 20th, 1975 did Spain begin to recover its lost history of participation in international debates, inaugurating a new chapter in Spanish cultural history.

Two decades earlier, the regime had begun to make a concerted effort to achieve a new position of legitimacy in the international political and economic spheres, taking full advantage of its strategic location in southern Europe during the Cold War. As the United States built military bases in the peninsula, Franco's government gradually but tentatively began to relax censorship at home, discretely supporting cultural initiatives that would confirm the image of a new, more open nation abroad. Although this operation belied the very real conditions of repression and cultural amnesia in the country, it laid the foundations for a new dialogue between culture and society that would fully be realized during and after the Transition.

"Contemporary Transatlantic Dialogues" begins at this point in history, when Spain and the United States initiated a new phase in their political relationship. The dialogue that ensued was decidedly uneven, with particularly important consequences within the Spanish context. Focusing on art history and political critique, the various functions and modalities of contemporary criticism in Spain, and the question of national representa-

tion in the institutional sphere, this collection of essays seeks to redress a significant gap in the scholarly literature. To speak of the relationship between Spanish Informalism and American Abstract Expressionism, for example, is to run the risk of reducing both to a series of formal templates and vaguely conceptual commonalities: the autographic gesture, political liberalism, and the internationalization of the Western art world in the 1950s. Such sound-bites, of course, tell us precious little about the specific character of the two movements, their historical points of intersection and/or influence, the social functions abstract painting fulfilled in the two countries, and the vastly different cultural contexts from which they emerged. In their contributions to this book, María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, Robert Lubar, and Robert Slifkin reconstruct the politics and social functions of postwar abstract painting in the two countries and their institutional relationships. Similarly, to speak of Spanish Pop Art is to impose a moniker that even in the case of American Pop may be more convenient than it is analytically precise, incorporating under a single umbrella a broad range of formal and ideological practices. If Pop Art negotiates in imagery culled from mass culture, how might we describe this appropriation critically while attending to the unique circumstances of artistic production and consumption in the Spanish and American contexts? The degree of political engagement among Equipo Crónica in response to the difficult realities of Francoist Spain, and how the group's ethos of political dissent might be understood in relation to international developments like Figuration Narrative in France and American Pop, are addressed by Miriam Basilio in this volume. For an artist like the Catalan conceptualist Francesc Torres, who came of age just before the Transition and spent his early years in Paris and New York (where he still maintains a residence), Equipo Crónica's unique brand of socialist realism appeared heavy-handed. Although he deeply admired their powerful provocations, he turned to international conceptual art and multi-media installations as a means to demystify ideology and engage in the practice of institutional critique. John Hanhardt's dialogue with Torres in this collection considers the anti-utopian nature of his approach and how his work obliges curators to adapt to new museological practices.

In 1975 Spain had only a handful of museums dedicated to contemporary art. Since the Transition the country has witnessed an unparalleled expansion of the institutional sphere for modern and contemporary art. Virtually every major city in Spain now boasts at least one museum of contemporary art, ranging from the model of the *Kunsthalle* to that of institutions with permanent collections. Unlike the United States, where the private sector historically has been instrumental in establishing institutions that serve the public interest, in Spain cultural entities are largely linked to a diverse hierarchy of administrations, from central to local governments, which have the effect of giving them an official imprimatur. These institu-

tions have been instrumental in building political consensus and forging national and regional identities among Spain's *autonomías*. The central questions today are whether these museums are mere containers with a largely representational value, and to what extent they have been successful in creating new audiences for modern art in Spain? Juan José Lahuerta considers the museum's "emptiness" as a fundamental condition of its historical origins in the 18th century, while Jean-Louis Cohen discusses the museum as an emblem and a cultural icon in the modern world. Richard Armstrong and Bartomeu Marí provide two case studies for vastly different models of museological narration. From its first iteration in New York City the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum established a dynamic prototype of reciprocity between the container and the surrounding environment. This effect has been especially successful in Bilbao, where American architect Frank Ghery's Guggenheim Museum has transformed the urban landscape and has become a nexus for tourism in the Basque Country. Another Spanish cultural icon, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), designed by German architect Richard Meyer, provides a different kind of narration in which the temporal modalities of music, theater, dance and film occupy center stage in the politics of representation, far removed from the classical museum model and its pretense of universal knowledge. In contrast, Rafael Doctor provides a panoramic view of the vast expansion of museums, private foundations, and cultural centers during the past 20 years in Spain, questioning whether this model of image production is sustainable at present and in the future.

The politics of national representation in contemporary art in turn extends beyond state borders, as epitomized by international exhibitions. Both Robert Storr and Estrella de Diego have served as curators at the Venice Biennale: de Diego as the curator of the Spanish Pavilion in 2001, and Storr as Artistic Director of the 52nd edition in 2007. Both curators have questioned the relevance of the Biennale and its structure of national pavilions. For de Diego this arrangement is patently obsolete, the outcome of a largely Eurocentric colonial model, whereas Storr describes his own brand of institutional critique from within. But as both de Diego and Storr also argue, albeit from different perspectives, where one's place actually *is* depends on a host of additional factors: affective cultural and linguistic affiliations, and the location of one's work and professional activities. Biography and personal trajectories are key aspects of identity formation, to the extent that what is "Spanish," "American" or "Angolan" is always a matter of negotiation and social construction.

Transnationalism may be a more appropriate model for contemporary artistic experience, but in the case of Spain the historical eclipse ushered in by four decades of Francoism has resulted in often desperate attempts to enforce notions of national difference, whether Spanish, Catalan, or Basque, as the case may be. Biography both enables and limits these kinds

of discourses. For Jordana Mendelson the archive provides a different point of departure for considering the history of artistic production in Spain, beyond biographical narratives. As she describes her work on a series of scholarly projects, well-known and widespread images, as in the case of the German-born photographer Margaret Michaelis, were often reproduced in Spain without acknowledgment of their authorship and placed within the service of non-artistic ends: social reform movements, contemporary reportage, and partisan ideologies. This is particularly the case of mass circulation newspapers and magazines, where photography's status as art was less important than the messages it communicated. From the archive to the museum, photography has occupied an unstable position. In the case of Robert Cappa, as Brian Wallis discusses, individual photographs taken during the Spanish Civil War were often subsumed within the larger logic of the photo essay. In reconstructing the history of photography in Spain, both Mendelson and Wallis call our attention to the significance of the archive and the need to reconsider the broad range of materials that constitute the history of Spanish art *tout court*.

If the Civil War was the watershed event that separated the history of 20th century Spain into two distinct periods – a before and an after – contemporary criticism has had the enormous responsibility of reconciling itself with this divided past. With the Transition developments in Spanish art criticism have followed upon the heels of the nation's re-entry onto the European and world stages. In twenty-five years of reporting on Spanish culture, Robin Cembalest has chronicled the vast transformation in mentality and infrastructure that the country has experienced. From the establishment of new museums and cultural centers to the prominence of Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao as major tourist destinations, from the image of a backward nation to the birthplace of Pedro Almodóvar and the *movida*, Cembalest's essay reminds us that pace of change in Spain has been rapid and decisive. For writer Javier Montes, the evolution of critical paradigms during this same period has had more political implications, as new voices and new mediums have come to replace the now outmoded clichés of an earlier generation.

Here we come full circle. If the 1950s witnessed efforts to open Spain to the world, in 2013 it is a *fait accompli*. With the current economic crisis and the global restructuring of political economy in Spain and abroad it remains to be seen how this vision of a modern, cosmopolitan and progressive Spain will evolve.

María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco and Robert S. Lubar

I.

ART HISTORY AND POLITICAL CRITIQUE

Spanishness and Difference. The Reception of Spanish Informalism in New York, 1960

María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco

Any critical approach to Spanish Informalism from today's perspective must confront the fragility of the discourses and ideas with which it is traditionally associated. This fragility indicates the extent to which art history depends on the specific circumstances from which it is formulated. In this case, it underlines the role of political discourses in postwar abstraction, both in its creative process and in its critical and historical reception.

Keeping in mind the multiple interpretations suggested by the word *difference*, and taking into account as well the homonymic term *différance* coined by Jacques Derrida in 1968[1], based on the French meanings of the word *différer* (to defer and to differ), in this essay I will address the question of meaning and identity in Spanish postwar abstraction. To do so, I will focus on the messages projected *by*, but also *on,* the actual works of art, both by their authors and by others, at home and abroad, and in their own time and later. My purpose is to point out how several layers of diverse and contradictory meanings were associated with the same works, thus revealing a complex series of relationships between artistic languages and messages, between the work of art and its audiences, and between the artist and the art institution. The chronological distance of half a century makes evident how the concept of national difference was deployed when applied to Spanish Informalism[2], thus challenging the old historiographical commonplace of the continuity of an idiosyncratic, peculiar Spanish school still relevant in the mid 20th century.

María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco

From the Spanish Perspective

Is there really such a thing as *Spanish Informalism*? Is it possible to define *Spanishness* in postwar abstract art when created by Spanish artists? Following art historians and critics from the fifties and sixties, I have asked myself these questions in the past years only to conclude that there is not a significant formal difference *in* the actual paintings. Indeed, Informalism was strategically presented as a crucial way to connect Spanish art and international art, a metaphor for a desired political and economic bridge between an isolated, conservative country and the international, modern commu-

1 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and other essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); See "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1982), p. 5; and *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971).

2 Jorge Luis Marzo: "1960. Formalisme i llibertat. La recepció de l'informalisme espanyol a l'estranger," in *Art Modern i Franquisme. Els orígens conservadors de l'avantguarda i de la política artística de l'Estat espanyol* (Girona: Fundació Espais, 2008), pp. 111-127.

nity of European and American democracies. This vision would agree with the generally accepted idea of Abstract Expressionism as a *lingua franca* (to use Dore Ashton's words)[3] of modern painting in the decades after World War II; that is to say, with the rethoric of *universalism* linked to postwar abstraction in general.

Behind the putative universalism of the Informalist language, according to Spanish art critics of the time a difference really did exist between works by Spanish artists and works by foreign artists. But what kind of difference? When this difference was claimed by Spanish artists, they argued that their works conveyed a political message directly linked to the undeniable fact of Franco's dictatorship: their work should be understood, then, as a political critique. Painter Antonio Saura (1930-1998), for instance, often described his painting as a *cry*, the anguished manifestation of a repressed individual in a repressed community. Informalism, then, was conceived as a form of resistance to power.

Ironically, because the lack of definition of its forms prevented any specific messages to be expressed didactically, a very peculiar alliance was established between Spanish Informalism and the Franco regime in the late fifties and early sixties, as Spain's diplomatic status in the world started to change and as the country developed a very aggressive propaganda campaign abroad[4].

In this scenario, the dictatorship chose to play the card of internationalism by disguising itself as a modern state contributing to the promotion of global artistic trends, while supporting Spanish abstraction in forums such as the Venice Biennale, the São Paulo Biennale, etc. Curiously, the claim of internationalim was inseparable from the claim of national difference. The existence of a national heritage that made Spanish Informalism unique in the eyes of its European and American counterparts was never abdicated by critics, art historians or officials associated with Franco's regime. Many publications in Spain in the late fifties and early sixties[5] supported the concept of a distinctive *Spanishness* in the work of Antoni Tàpies (1923-2012), Antonio Saura (1930-1998), Manolo Millares (1926-1972), Luis Feito (b. 1929) and Manuel Rivera (1928-1995), regardless of their personal artistic preferences or their diverse cultural differences within Spain[6]. It is important to remember that these were also roughly the years of a big campaign to promote international tourism in Spain, which launched a simplified, monolithic image of the country under the motto *Spain is different.* Far from the positive connotations – freedom, exoticism, uniqueness – that the idea of Spanish difference held in the nineteenth century French and English romantic traditions, by the mid 20th century the idea of *difference* had more obscure overtones: an alibi to conceal a problematic present – in economic, political and cultural terms – under the veil of separation from mainstream Western culture and history.

3 Dore Ashton, *A Rébours, La rebelión informalista (1939-1968)* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Madrid: Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1998).

4 Editor's note: See Robert Lubar's essay in this volume.

5 A compilation of these texts may be found in *La Pintura informalista a través de sus críticos* (Madrid: Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1961). These ideas were still supported in the early seventies. See, for example, Francisco Gullón, *De Goya al arte abstracto* (Madrid: Seminarios y ediciones, 1972).

6 Editor's note: See Bartomeu Marí's essay in this volume.

When the concept of difference was applied to Informalism by officials and by art critics favorable to the regime they referred to something that was not intended by the artists. If there was a "Spanish difference," the critics claimed it had to do with a nationalist vision that enhanced and reshaped a Spanish artistic tradition based on expressive, even brutal artistic traits as epitomized by Goya's "Black Paintings." In this construction, a direct lineage could be traced between the past and the present. Invoking this conveniently simplified interpretation of the Spanish tradition, critics aligned Spanish Informalism with contemporary international expressionist trends without abdicating their belief in an intrinsically national, *Spanish* way of making art.

From the New York Perspective

The difference in Spanish Informalism was thus explained as the need for artists to respond to regressive political circumstances in Spain during the fifties and sixties in relation to a tragic heritage that made Spanish contemporary art different even if it met international expressionist standards. Or it could be explained as both at the same time: all these ideas formed a cliché among Spanish art historians up through the last decades of the 20th century, when the country finally embraced democracy after the death of general Franco. Indeed, the pervasive angst of self-definition, along with the schizophrenic, simultaneously proud but sad realization of a heritage divorced from European culture due to political and economic circumstances, has been an obsession with Spanish critics and art historians, including myself, for decades. From the emotionally, aesthetically and politically detached position of a Spanish art historian in the early 21st century, when the need for an empathetic response to post war Informalism is now somehow lost, it seems only logical to redirect our research and thoughts to how this idea of Spanish difference was perceived and treated abroad, and for the purposes of the present volume, how and why it came to be accepted in America. In order to do so, I will focus on the specific moment when several shows of Spanish Informalism coincided in New York City.

It was the summer of 1960, more than a decade after the emergence of Abstract Expressionism in New York, when two group exhibitions were presented in two major New York institutions: the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. They can be interpreted as the byproduct of diplomatic agreements, but the operation had a commercial side as well, since a number of art galleries promoted the apparently dramatic appearance of Spanish art in the center of art world[7]. The Guggenheim exhibition, *Before Picasso, after Miró*, ran from June 21 to October 16. The Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture*, ran from July 20 to September 25, and circulated to

7 An exhibition of works by Millares, Canogar, Rivera and Saura at the Pierre Matisse Gallery ran from March 15 to April 9, 1960, predating the Guggenheim and MoMA major shows.

other cities in the United States afterwards. Everything was skillfully prepared by Spanish officials from the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Madrid, in cooperation with museum directors and curators in New York[8]. To describe this boom of Spanish art in New York, "Spaniards aplenty" was the very expressive title of John Canaday's art column in the June 21 issue of *The New York Times*[9]. As if to confirm the Spanish perspective, the idea of a distinctive "Spanishness" was made explicit in articles in the press, but also in essays in the catalogs published on the occasion of these two exhibitions, as I will discuss later.

Nevertheless, for some art critics in New York something did not look quite right. Following on the heels of critic Dore Ashton, who questioned the reasons behind the arrival of Spanish Informalism right after political negotiations between the two countries had begun,[10] Natalie Edgar, a painter and art critic associated with the New York School, rejected the idea of a Spanish difference and also the idea of a historic heritage behind it. She made her position clear in the title of her article, "Is there a new Spanish school?"[11] Edgar denied the possibility of a Spanish avant-garde on the grounds that Franco's ditcatorship precluded full freedom of expression. Consequently, she objected to this series of exhibitions, accusing them of being nothing more than political propaganda for a dictatorship that wanted to be perceived as progressive:

> One question is raised by the shows of postwar Spanish painting now at the Museum of Modern Art (to sept. 25), the Guggenheim Museum (to oct. 16) and several New York galleries – Why are there so many? … the paintings themselves are based mainly on *virtuosity*; their *intrinsic significance seems negiglible*. Yet anything which is the focus of so much attention gains an aura of importance. Why, then, have museums and dealers with a responsability for the creation of public taste given such importance to the new Spanish movement?
>
> (…) Only a glance is needed to plumb their depths: there are no undercurrents, no deeper, more allusive meanings to puzzle viewer. And they are done in the familiar styles of Tenth Street -Kline, Pollock, etc. with a little French and Italian added.
>
> Furthermore, the sheer talkability and saleability of a new school, readymade, whole-born as Athena from Zeus, with his historians, poets, manifestos, organizations, influences, religious significances, based on a tradition of Goya and Velazquez is enormous. The fact that these paintings are stylish subject matter for the "taste bureaucracy" cannot be discarded as a major attraction.
>
> Postwar Spanish painting is not an avant-garde movement at all, but rather a provincial aberration. Remember that it is limited by

8 Genoveva Tusell García: "La proyección internacional del arte abstracto español en tiempos del grupo *El Paso*," in *En el tiempo de El Paso* (Madrid: Centro Cultural de la Villa de Madrid, 2002), pp 87-117. See also by the same author, "La internacionalización del arte abstracto español. Exposiciones oficiales en el exterior (1955-64)," in *IX Jornadas de Arte. El Arte Español fuera de España*. (Madrid:Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003), pp. 121-130; and "La proyección internacional de los artistas de *El Paso* (1955-64)," in *El Paso* (Zaragoza: Ibercaja Obra Social y Cultural, 2003) pp 41-48.

9 John Canaday: "Spanish Art Aplenty." *The New York Times*, June 21, 1960. This article was followed by another by the same author, "Art: More from Spain. Modern Museum Show Follows Guggenheim's," in *The New York Times*, July 20, 1960. See also "The Joyless Spaniards," in *Time Newsmagazine*, New York, August 8, 1960.

10 Dore Ashton, "Notes from France and Spain," *Art and Architecture*, November 1957, p. 37.

11 Edgar, Natalie, in *Art News*, vol. 59, num. 5, September 1960.

> the conditions of a dictatorship; the free environment necessary for a genuine avantgarde movement is missing.

Edgar insisted that there was nothing behind the superficial virtuosity of these paintings. She confronted political repression and artistic freedom and located American art (the Tenth Street School) at the center of the contemporary avant-garde, and Spanish art at the periphery. She also rejected the possibility of a national-cultural discourse as an artificial construction. At the same time she underscored two relevant issues: the practice of art exhibitions as political propaganda, and the social and cultural responsibility of institutions in creating not only taste, but also history.

Even if the tenure of Alfred Barr as director of the Museum of Modern Art came to an end in 1943[12], both he and the museum remained very influential as "creators of public taste," in Natalie Edgar words. It is therefore worth considering the position of the Museum of Modern Art itself when it hosted the show of Spanish Informalist art in 1960. The preface to the catalog *New Spanish Painting and Scupture* displays every stereotype of Spanish art as traditionally seen from the anglosaxon perspective: Spain as an exotic, isolated, backwards country whose strong artistic personality is based on originality rather than on refinement; and Spain as the birthplace of powerful artists who were forced to immigrate in order to develop their creative vision. But what seems especially relevant to our topic is the way the author of this preface, poet Frank O'Hara (1926-1966), addressed the tensions between Spanish Informalism and international postwar abstraction:

> To the widely dispersed and controversial theories of Action Painting, of the *informel*, of the Absurd, of the Accident, of *art autre*, the artist of each language and each nation brings a correspondingly different interpretation. What makes for these differentiations within an international impulse which is sometimes deplored as uniform, not only throughout the western world but also in the East? The conscience of a nation, Shelley believed, lies in its artists. Recent history proves him right. Artists of different cultural traditions and present environments cannot simply "take up" the impetus of the international vanguard, any more than their predecessors did in forming it, without severely altering the tempo and the application of that energy. It is to the immediate cultural needs of his society that the modern artist addresses himself. That is precisely what has happened in Spain in the last decade[13].

After discussing in great detail "the special qualities which Spanish artists have brought to abstract art," O'Hara sought an explanation for those qualities in Spain's cultural heritage. Interestingly, he added to the names

12 Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr Jr. and the intellectual origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 354.

13 Frank O'Hara, "New Spanish Painting and Sculpture," in *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, Doubleday & Co., 1960), p. 7-10.

usually cited in Spanish texts – Goya, Velázquez – some other figures belonging to the modern tradition that were consistently supported by the museum. In this way, the new Spanish artists were not only legitimized by their ancestors in the Prado, but also by their Spanish predecessors in the modern era: Picasso and Miró, both of whom had been championed in exhibitions and publications at the Museum of Modern Art. Thus, two different genealogies could be applied to Natalie Edgar's questioning of the very existence of a Spanish Informalism and of the pertinence of the New York museums exhibitions:

> It is the Spanish past itself that has led to this cross-pollenation of tradition with contemporary innovation. Picasso, González, Miró, the magnificent churches, buildings and parks of Gaudí, the sculptural innovations of Ferrant, all have helped to create a workable *entente* between the past and the present in Spain. But beyond them in time loom the figures of greatness which, as much as its geography, give Spain its special flavor: the Catalan masterpieces in Barcelona; Velázquez and Goya (especially the late Black Paintings of Goya, which have had a pervasive influence); the Roman antiquities and the Roman ruins; the caves in Altamira: all elements which previous Spanish culture had absorbed to an important degree, but which also briefly indicate some of the enthusiasms held by contemporary Spanish artists.

In contemporary art-historical genealogies, mainstream narratives have always followed the dictates of the Museum of Modern Art. The goal of the actions taken by the Spanish Foreign Affairs Ministry was to focus international attention on young Spanish Informalist painters and to consolidate the idea of a Spanish art open to international trends, but also *different* from them. With great approbation, the Museum of Modern Art lent its institutional weight to this discourse. For decades, even Spanish art historians believed the story.

Manuel Millares and New Spanish Painting in America*

Robert S. Lubar

In the spring and early summer of 1960 several New York museums and galleries embarked on an intensive campaign to introduce contemporary Spanish painting and sculpture to the American public. The Pierre Matisse Gallery set the tone for the New York art season with an exhibition of "Four Spanish Painters" in March and April, featuring recent work by El Paso artists Manuel Millares (1926-1972), Rafael Canogar (b. 1935), Manuel Rivera (1927-94), and Antonio Saura (1930-1998).[1] In his efforts to carve a niche for this art in the New York market, Matisse immediately followed with Millares's first one-man show in America. By the time The Museum of Modern Art and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum mounted impressive anthological surveys of recent painting and sculpture from Spain several months later,[2] the prominent position Millares and his contemporaries occupied as major players on the international art scene had been assured.[3] For critics and the New York art public, an unprecedented burst of creative energy had emerged from Spain.

Robert S. Lubar

Although today it is difficult to gauge the full impact of these exhibitions, it is remarkable that just five years earlier Spanish art had been excluded from Andrew Carnduff Ritchie's survey of contemporary European art at The Museum of Modern Art.[4] Ritchie had justified this omission in the catalog, arguing that "not every European country has produced distinguished new artists," while insisting that sociological, geographical, political and economic conditions alone do not explain why "one country rather than another provides fertile soil for artists…"[5] In 1960, however, Ritchie's disclaimer would prove to be untenable. At the height of the Cold War and just five years after the United Nations recognized Franco's regime, the sudden international prominence of contemporary Spanish art was an undisputable fact, and critics felt obliged to consider the social, cultural and political ramifications of the new Spanish painting. Indeed, the critical response to this art was now decidedly inflected by political considerations. Specifically, the status of a free, avant-garde culture in a totalitarian state deeply concerned American critics, who questioned whether the Spanish avant-garde represented an oppositional culture or had been co-opted by the regime itself in the service of international polit-

* A longer version of this essay first appeared in *La balsa de la Medusa* (Madrid) No.22, 1992, pp. 49-72, as "Millares y la pintura vanguardista española en América." The original essay included in-depth analyses of the critical responses to the exhibitions "New Spanish Painting and Sculpture" at the Museum of Modern Art, and "Before Picasso, After Miró," at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. As these exhibitions are treated by María Dolores Jiménez Blanco in her essay for this volume, I have altered my text to avoid repetition.

1 The exhibition ran from March 15 – April 9, 1960. Each of the four artists had contracts or informal agreements with Matisse to represent their work in America. According to the Matisse Gallery archives (The Museum of Modern Art, New York), Saura and Millares entered into a contract with Matisse in 1959. Canogar maintained a more informal agreement with Matisse beginning in 1959, as did Rivera a year later.

ical and economic relations. At stake in the debates that ensued in the critical press were a series of broader claims concerning the autonomous status of avant-garde culture in both Spain and America. The exhibitions of recent Spanish painting and sculpture at MoMA, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and in New York galleries initiated a wider debate on the relation of contemporary art to national political ideologies at home and abroad.

The political implications of the new art from Spain gained attention in the critical press in the months preceding the MoMA and Guggenheim exhibitions. Matisse's "Four Spanish Painters" set the stage for a debate that captured the attention of critics and curators. Matisse conceived the exhibition as a reprise of a show featuring El Paso[6] artists Luis Feito (b. 1929), Antonio Saura, Manuel Millares and Rafael Canogar, which Joan Prats had organized in January 1958 at the Sala Gaspar in Barcelona.[7] Matisse's exhibition was strategically timed to avoid conflict with "New Spanish Painting and Sculpture" at MoMA, and to precede the New York showing of a survey of contemporary European art that The Minneapolis Institute of Art had organized under the title "European Art Today."[8] Unable to include Feito in his exhibition,[9] Matisse substituted Rivera, an original member of the El Paso group, and appealed to Spanish critic Juan Eduardo Cirlot to amend the text he had written for the Sala Gaspar show to reflect this change.[10]

Matisse's timing was prescient, as one month later, in May 1960, El Paso published its "última comunicación," announcing the group's dissolution. Having claimed a prominent position for the avant-garde in Spain by breaking with traditional artistic practices, the members of El Paso explained that continued activity in this direction "…would run the risk of stagnation and inefficacy" with regard to "a dialectic that had given real justification" to their practice within the Spanish art world.[11] Yet as these same artists understood, the struggle to win legitimacy in a conservative Spanish art world was by no means assured. Indeed, Millares himself helped organize an exhibition at the Galería Biosca in Madrid, which opened on June 7, 1960 and featured precisely those artists who would exhibit a month later at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.[12] The exhibition was clearly intended to direct attention to the embattled position of avant-garde art in Spain, marshalling the implicit institutional authority of MoMA in support of its cause. In this respect, El Paso's "última comunicación" registered the ambiguous social position of the avant-garde in Spain, maintaining its oppositional status to a retrenched and conservative cultural apparatus at home, just as Franco's regime began to court advanced painters and sculptors to demonstrate its openness and tolerance abroad. At the same time, economic considerations weighed in, as the decision by the El Paso artists to pursue independent work corresponded to the expansion of their market in New York. Any serious attempt to come

2 MoMA's "New Spanish Painting and Sculpture" ran from July 20 – September 28, 1960, before circulating to seven states and Washington, D.C. on a tour that lasted until January 1962. Organized by Frank O'Hara under the auspices of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, the show featured works by: Raphael Canogar, Eduardo Chillida, Martin Chirino, Modest Cuixart, Francisco Farreras, Luis Feito, Manuel Millares, Lucio Muñoz, Jorge de Oteiza, Manuel Rivera, Antonio Saura, Pablo Serrano, Antonio Suàrez, Antoni Tàpies, Joan Josep Tharrats, and Manuel Viola. The Guggenheim exhibition, "Before Picasso; After Miró," ran from June 21 – October 20, 1960. It featured works by: Isidre Nonell, Eduardo Alcoy, Raphael Canogar, Modest Cuixart, Francisco Farreras, Luis Feito, Juana Frances, Lucio Muñoz, Manolo Millares, Juan Hernandez Pijuan, Carlos Planell, Manuel Rivera, Antonio Sura, Antonio Suàrez, Antoni Tàpies, Vicente Vela, Juan Vila Casas, Manuel Viola, and Fernando Zobel.

3 Elsewhere, Luis Feito celebrated his first solo exhibition in the United States at the Grace Borgenicht Gallery in April. Antoni Tàpies was represented by Martha Jackson. Lucio Muñoz showed with Staempfli Gallery, and Joan Josep Tharrats and Francisco Farreras were affiliated with Bertha Schaefer Gallery. Although none of these artists celebrated one-man shows in New York in 1960, Bertha Schaefer did mount an exhibition of "Contemporary Spanish Painters and Sculptors" that summer, featuring many of the same names.

4 "The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors," New York, The Museum of Modern Art, May 10 – August 7, 1955.

5 Ibid., p. 11 of the exhibition catalog.

to terms with El Paso at the social level must ultimately consider the dual dilemma of its co-optation by the regime and its market value abroad.

The ambiguity and contradiction of this position registered in the very conception of the El Paso group at the moment of its inception three years earlier. The group's February 1957 manifesto stated: "We are moving towards a revolutionary vision – within which our dramatic tradition and our direct expression are present – and which responds historically to universal activity." Despite the group's insistence on its dialectical position vis-à-vis official Spanish culture, the process of history itself is collapsed here into a hypostatized "universal activity" that undercuts the group's "revolutionary vision." Given the narrow margins within which these artists could maintain an oppositional position in Franco's Spain, their language was decidedly ambiguous. Even Cirlot's preface to the 1960 Matisse exhibition catalog, originally conceived, as we have seen, for a show in Barcelona, employed a highly equivocal language. "The creation of the group," Cirlot insisted, "was motivated by the need to consolidate the isolated efforts of artists situated at the extreme vanguard in their esthetic and social concepts. Frequently, movements of contemporaneous art were obliged to rely on the principle of group psychology as the only way to acquire self-consciousness and to fight against the hostility and indifference of their environment."[13] But once again, the precise terms of this "self-consciousness" are unclear. What, we might ask, is the relationship between esthetic and social/political avant-gardism here? Cirlot's response was decidedly ambiguous. We can, however, glean some insight about his position from his brief introduction to the work of Saura in the same catalog. "Antonio Saura," Cirlot contended, "is a vigorous fighter who sacrifices all sensual factors in his art, demanding from himself a pure, nude creation, cruel in its fanaticism. The ambivalence of his pictorial concept exposes the vehement desire for totality and his constantly renewed longing for the absolute." Here, Cirlot's language hardly suggests the struggle to attain consciousness of a social totality, but rather, the attempt to constitute the self as a spiritual, psychological, and moral paradigm in the modern world.

The very equivocation that registers in El Paso's collective statements and in the critical literature of the period created a fundamentally unstable situation that lent itself to manipulation, both in Spain and abroad. This is particularly clear in the reception of Spanish painting and sculpture in New York in 1960. Matisse's El Paso exhibition was a primary mechanism through which American critics received information and formed opinions about the new Spanish painting. Many of these ideas were subsequently reinforced in the MoMA and Guggenheim exhibition catalogs. But the dialogue between Spanish and American artists and critics was highly mediated and complex. Through the agency of exhibitions like MoMA's "The New American Painting," which had circulated around Europe

6 In response to Spain's international cultural and political isolation, Rafael Canogar, Luis Feito, Juana Francés, Manuel Millares, Antonio Saura, Manuel Rivera, Pablo Serrano, Anrtonio Suárez, Manuel Conde and José Ayllón constituted the El Paso group in 1955. Martin Chirino and Manuel Viola joined the group later. Representing a range of stylistic influences, from American Abstract Expressionism to the work of French artists Dubuffet, Wols, Fautrier, Mathieu, and de Stael, The El Paso group is often associated with Spanish Informalismo, characterized by violent and expressive painterly gestures.

7 "4 Pintores del grupo El Paso," Sala Gaspar, Barcelona, January 10 – 23, 1958. Pierre Matisse had long-standing ties with Barcelona had met Prats through Joan Miró, whose work he had represented in the United States since 1932.

8 Matisse discussed the timing of the exhibition with Millares in a letter dated October 9, 1959. Pierre Matisse Gallery archives, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

9 In a letter to Pierre Matisse dated September 7, 1959, Feito's Paris dealer J. R Arnaud informed his New York colleague that prior commitments precluded Feito's participation in the exhibition. Pierre Matisse Gallery archives, MoMA.

10 Pierre Matisse to Manuel Millares, letter dated December 8, 1959. Pierre Matisse Gallery archives, MoMA.

11 El Paso's "última comunicación" is reprinted in Francisco Calvo Seraller, *España: medio siglo de arte de vanguardia, 1939-1985* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1985), pp. 488-489.

12 Manuel Millares, letter to Porter McCray dated June 7, 1960. Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibition archives.

13 *Four Spanish Painters*, exhibition catalog (Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1960).

in 1958-59, Spanish artists assimilated the heady language and formal strategies of American Abstract Expressionism. This is not to say, however, that the development of El Paso and Spanish Informalismo in general was dependent upon American models. On the contrary, cultural ties with France, and specifically with the critic Michel Tapié, the champion of Art Informel, were a far more decisive factor in the emergence of Spanish abstract painting of the 1950s and '60s. But in the eyes of chauvinistic American critics, the new painting from Spain appeared to be a translation – or worse, a pastiche – of an idiom that they specifically identified with the United States. This position was in turn inflected with nationalist overtones and claims of American cultural hegemony. To a critical audience familiar with Harold Rosenberg's celebrated essay of 1952, "The American Action Painters,"[14] the following statement by Saura that appeared in the Matisse Gallery catalog offered few surprises:

> A picture before anything else is a white surface that one 'must fill with something.' The canvas is an unlimited battlefield. Before it, the painter has a tragic and sensual melée, transforming with his gestures inert and passive material into a passionate cyclone, into cosmic and always irradiant energy.[15]

* * *

In his acknowledgements to the "New Spanish Painting and Sculpture" catalog at MoMA, Porter McCray, Director of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, noted how the exhibition afforded the opportunity of "reciprocating in some degree the generous hospitality of institutions in Spain and the warm response of the Spanish public to American art when our museum presented 'Modern Art in The United States' in Barcelona in 1955 and 'The New American Painting' in Madrid in 1958." The former exhibition, comprised of works from the museum's permanent collection with supplementary loans, traveled throughout Western Europe in 1955-56, with stops in Paris, Zürich, Barcelona, Frankfurt, London, The Hague, Vienna, and Belgrade. But it was the latter exhibition, organized (according to a statement in the catalog by René d'Harnoncourt, MoMA's director) "at the request of European institutions," that captured the imagination of artists and public in Basel, Milan, Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris and London. For the show's final stop in New York, the exhibition catalog was amended to include favorable press reviews from the various cities in Europe to which it had traveled, in a gesture that can only be called self-congratulatory.

Organized by Dorothy Miller for the International Program at MoMA, which had circulated fifty exhibitions worldwide since its inception in 1952, "The New American Painting" was of sufficient importance to war-

14 Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* (December 1952). On the significance of Rosenberg's project, see Robert Slifkin's essay in this volume.

15 *Four Spanish Painters*. See note 14.

rant a catalog introduction by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the museum's first director and guiding spirit. Although the tone of Barr's text is set by the now familiar existentialist themes of uncompromising individualism and the "desperate effort to discover the 'self,'" (with Kierkegaard cited as the guru of the young painters), what impresses today's reader is Barr's careful attempt to disengage this discourse from politics:

> They defiantly reject the conventional values of the society that surrounds them, but they are not politically engaged, even though their paintings have been praised and condemned as symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude.[16]

To the extent that this exhibition represented an attempt to export American culture to Europe, such a disclaimer may have been necessary to avoid overt political partisanship. In its place, Barr emphasized ambiguity as the operating mechanism of this painting, basing the authority of his assertions on a series of carefully selected quotations from the American painters themselves. "In short," he continued, "these painters, as a matter of principle, do nothing deliberately in their work to make 'communication' easy. Yet in spite of their intransigence, their following increases, largely because the paintings themselves have a sensuous, emotional, aesthetic and at times almost mystical power which works and can be overwhelming."[17]

The terms of this ambiguity of content, collapsing as it does into sensuousness and mysticism, are familiar to us from our discussion of El Paso. During the Cold War, this rhetoric, combined with notions of unimpeded freedom of expression, served the expansive goals of American political and cultural hegemony in Europe, a subtle dissimulation of the political into the aesthetic sphere. Detached from society, American Abstract Expressionism came to embody an abstract ideal of freedom that could perform its political work through the agency of form itself.[18] In Spain, Manuel Borja has traced the development of a parallel process in relation to the critical fortunes of Antoni Tàpies. Noting how the period between 1955 and 1957 witnessed a shift in Franco's cultural policy – a greater liberalization that paralleled the United Nations' recognition of the regime and the corresponding end of autarchy in the economic sphere – Borja suggests that the existentialist rhetoric of Informalismo (and this idea can surely be extended to the artists of El Paso) could be appropriated and commodified by the regime because its attitude of rebellion "did not have clear referents and in no way pointed to the specific political situation in Spain."[19] This is the equivocal position we have already encountered in the very nature of abstract art's potential for appropriation. Yet the Spanish government's attempts to maintain a façade of openness

16 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., introduction, *The New American Painting* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p. 16.

17 Ibid., p. 17.

18 For a discussion of American cultural imperialism within the framework of Cold War politics, see Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," *Artforum* (New York) Vol. xi, No.9 (May 1973), pp. 43-43; Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* 10, Vol. xii, (June 1974), pp. 39-42; and Serge Guilbaut's controversial study *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

19 Manuel J. Borja-Villel, "The Changes of Taste: Tàpies and the Critics," in *Tàpies: els anys 80* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1988), p. 246.

abroad did not translate into support for avant-garde art at home, thereby forcing young painters and sculptors into the contradictory position of participating in government cultural programs while maintaining semi-clandestine opposition to the regime. As Borja asserts, "Considering the stunted Spanish art market of those years, an opportunity to exhibit abroad, even if through official channels, was the only realistic choice for an avant-garde artist to make."[20] Yet beneath this ostensible liberalization of culture in Spain lay the crushing political reality that the objective of the government "was not to replace totalitarianism, but to make it compatible with a capitalist economy."[21] The contradictions of this approach were real and inescapable.

American critics, like the artists themselves, were acutely aware of the threat. In particular, James Johnson Sweeney and Frank O'Hara, the organizers of the Guggenheim and MoMA exhibitions of Spanish painting in 1960, had to negotiate a narrow path between the Spanish government's interest in promoting contemporary art for opportunistic reasons, and the artists' desire to resist colonization by the regime. In his loan letters to the artists scheduled to participate in the MoMA show, O'Hara somewhat disingenuously emphasized that, "Although the exhibition is not being shown under the auspices of the Spanish government, the Cultural Relations Office has offered to assist us with the assembling of the works for shipment.[22] O'Hara, like Sweeney, was in close communication with José Miguel Ruiz Morales, Director General of Cultural Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Luis González Robles, Chief of Exhibition Services in the Office of Cultural Relations in the same ministry; and Antonio Espinosa, Cultural Counselor in the Cultural Affairs Department at the Spanish Embassy in Washington, DC. Together these men helped to assemble works for shipment from Spain to the United States, and to expedite export licenses required under Spanish law. These unavoidable bureaucratic connections presented a potential source of embarrassment to the two museums, which sought to avoid accusations of political compromise at all costs. Thus, in his acknowledgement of the functionaries in question, Porter McCray felt obliged to add that the MoMA exhibition "has been organized entirely under private auspices…."

* * *

Millares was particularly sensitive to the threat of co-optation by the Spanish regime, voicing his concerns to Pierre Matisse on several occasions. In a letter dated April 23, 1960, Matisse apprised Millares that González Robles "will be involved in the exhibition, but in an unofficial way."[23] Millares, somewhat alarmed, responded on May 6, 1960: "What you told me about Sr. Robles being entrusted with this affair surprised me, especially since O'Hara promised me that he would be in charge of everything. I'm begin-

20 Ibid., p. 247.
21 Ibid., p. 249.
22 Frank O'Hara, letter to Luis Feito dated April 27, 1960. Exhibition correspondence, archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The same explanation was given to the other artists in the exhibition.
23 Pierre Matisse, letter to Manuel Millares dated April 23, 1960. Pierre Matisse archives, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

ning to see that this exhibition of Spanish Art is not on a very good path, which truly concerns me."[24] Several months later, when the exhibition traveled to the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., Millares voiced more serious misgivings to Matisse. "They say," he wrote on November 5, 1960, "that the Spanish Ambassador sponsored it. If this is true I am very displeased. I don't want us to be placed within certain political lines."[25]

Millares's concerns were well founded. The Spanish government sought to turn the success of the MoMA and Guggenheim shows into political capital. On July 20, 1960, Sweeney received a congratulatory note written in the name of the Consul General of Spain in New York, requesting sixty copies of the exhibition catalog for distribution by the Cultural Department of the Foreign Office in Madrid to museums, critics, and artists.[26] More revealing, however, is a letter González Robles sent to O'Hara on March 21, 1960, during the planning stages of "New Spanish Painting and Sculpture." It is worth quoting at length:

> I think the selection you have indicated should be oriented in another direction, especially since the Pierre Matisse Gallery is already launching the same values as the Museum of Modern Art such that nothing new is being discovered. What is worse, since the names are the same Matisse can say with pride that he discovered them and that the Museum of Modern Art is merely following his lead. This is an important consideration. Something similar occurred to me when I began to organize the exhibition at the Musée des Art Decoratifs. At that time Paris insisted that the exhibition should include very few artists, and given the unlikely coincidence that these were the same ones who were exhibiting in Parisian galleries, I was quite suspicious.[27]

Although on the surface the letter emphasizes the need for the museum to maintain its independence from the marketplace, there is also a clear political subtext. Given that the exhibition González Robles had organized in Paris several months earlier was a government-sponsored project, one may infer that the independence that he describes was politically expedient. As a posture it enabled the government to claim a primary role in the discovery and patronage of avant-garde art in Spain, without dealers and critics as intermediaries. By extension, the MoMA project offered another opportunity for González Robles to advance the cause of Spanish cultural politics, which was precisely the source of Millares's objections.

* * *

The Paris exhibition, "13 peintres espagnols actuels," undeniably served an ambassadorial function, legitimizing the Spanish regime through cul-

24 Manuel Millares, letter to Pierre Matisse dated May 6, 1960. Pierre Matisse archives, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

25 Manuel Millares, letter to Pierre Matisse dated November 5, 1960. Pierre Matisse archives, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. One year after an earlier version of this text appeared in *La balsa de la medusa*, Jorge Luis Marzo conducted an interview with González Robles in which he raised the inevitable question of the regime's stake in international cultural politics. Defensively, González Robles categorically denied any kind of government pressure, stating, "Some people like to raise things like that in order to sling mud at the tremendous work that got done, to say that I was a mannequin, that I was a puppet in I don't know whose hands. Nobody ever gave me orders, nor does nor ever will. Is that clear." In response to Marzo's comment on Millares's November 5, 1960 letter to Pierre Matisse in my essay – specifically, the artist's fear that his work was being manipulated by the regime – González Robles dismissively remarked: "These are just comments. It's very human, always wanting to run with the geese and the hounds, and one can't. Don't take any notice of those matters." González Robles's failure to recognize the difference between collaboration and legitimate dissent is especially striking 18 years after the end of the regime. Jorge Luis Marzo, "The Avant-Garde of Power. The Power of the Avant-Garde," *Revista de Calor*, No.1 (December 1993), pp. 28-36.

26 Letter to James Johnson Sweeney dated July 20, 1960. Archives of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

27 Luis González Robles to Frank O'Hara, letter dated March 21, 1960. Exhibition archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

ture in ways that were fairly obvious. In his introduction to the catalog, José Miguel Ruiz Morales constructed a genealogy for the new painting (all featured works were from 1958 and 1959) that attempted to undercut the potential oppositional status of the art itself:

> Those, who like us, serve Spain abroad have for some time now observed a wave of renovation in the painting of our country. Following the generation that gave us universal names like Juan Gris, Julio González, Picasso, Miró, Dalí and other artists who at the moment are less known beyond our borders – Solana, Palencia, and Cossío – since 1950 there has arisen in Barcelona the Dau al Set group and the El Paso group in Madrid….This phalange of abstract art was definitively consecrated internationally at the Venice Biennale in 1958.[28]

By locating the artists of El Paso within the same historical continuum as Solana, Palencia and Cossío, familiar stand-bys of the regime, Morales denied the specific cultural and social claims of the different groups, preparing the way for their co-optation. In this respect, the expression "phalange of abstract art" cannot be considered a neutral phrase. Morales's emphasis on the ways in which this art revealed the "typical traits of the profound Spanish soul," in line with the spirit of Miguel de Unamuno and the 1898 Generation in Spain, leaves no doubt about the janus-faced cultural position of the regime: to project a liberal attitude of cultural and social progress abroad while attempting to domesticate abstract art at home and to locate it within a timeless national tradition.

As the term "phalange" would suggest, a lightly veiled reference to the Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista, formed in October 1933 by the architect of Spanish fascism, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the reception of contemporary art in Spain was circumscribed by official ideology. At the same time, as we have seen, the potential appropriation and transformation of this art abroad was no less a matter of concern to young painters and sculptors. While American critics tended to insist upon an international art with strong national roots (a formula that was at the very heart of the successful exportation of Abstract Expressionist painting), the collapse of national schools in the postwar period was increasingly acknowledged. As Sam Hunter expressed it in his catalog essay for the "European Art Today" show at The Minneapolis Institute of Art in the autumn of 1959, "it is becoming increasingly difficult to seize upon the distinguishing accent that links abstract expressions and nationality. Our grouping does suggest, however, that it is no longer possible to assess the temper, or know the quality and range of European art from the example of Paris alone."[29] For Hunter, the new art had "taken on a more distinctly international character." The New York art critic Bennett Schiff

28 José Miguel Ruiz Morales, *13 peintres espagnols actuels*, exhibition catalog, Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, May-June 1959.

29 Sam Hunter, foreward, *European Art Today*, exhibition catalog, The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, September 23 – October 25, 1959.

agreed. Reviewing the New York presentation of the Minneapolis exhibition and the Guggenheim show, he reflected upon the state of contemporary European art:

> It is not that they all look alike but that they do not look geographically different. They are imperatively and implacably individually expressive comments. They represent an artist and a style. They do not represent a country.
>
> What is evident is that, within the elastic borders of subjective painting the individual artist exploring his own consciousness has become predominant in the past decade in the Western world.
>
> The borders that outlined it 10 years ago are being obliterated and it is time for us to begin to think in terms of an international style of abstraction and not of new American art – it is no longer new – or European art or any other kind of arbitrary distinction.[30]

Thus for Schiff, the new work produced in Europe and America was characterized by an abstract ideal of individual freedom that corresponded to the one-world principle in art and politics: a collapse of national borders.

It was, however, precisely the implications of cultural imperialism and domination within this one-world principle, in contradistinction to an idealized autonomy, which alarmed Emily Genauer, the critic for *The Herald Tribune*. Reviewing a host of exhibitions dedicated to European art (including the Millares show at the Matisse Gallery) in a polemical essay entitled "One World in Art, But is that Good?," Genauer challenged the cliché of "international understanding" in an (art) world without borders:

> It appears that artists aren't so much exchanging ideas as a result of the busy international traffic, as they are gladly imitating the ideas that have won the quickest official approval. (…) In art the exchange appears up to now to have resulted in the domination of the international art world by one aspect of one specific idea, the abstract-expressionist style.
>
> (…) Within the past few years something has happened and the international shows in Venice and elsewhere, and the intense activity of the Modern Museum's International Council, are largely responsible. (…) It is a fact (…) that art officialdom directing them has used them as showcases not for many kinds of art but primarily for the kind that, apparently, it categorically believes to be the most vital art of our time.[31]

30 Bennett Schiff, "In the Art Galleries," *The New York Post*, June 26, 1960.

31 Emily Genauer, "One World in Art, But is that Good?," *The Herald Tribune*, New York, April 17, 1960. The other exhibitions to which Genauer was responding included: Luis Feito at Grace Borgenicht; the Polish artist Kobzdej at French & Company; contemporary Dutch art at Graham Gallery; and MoMA's show of Italian art from private and public collections in America, assembled under the auspices of the museum's International Program for travel to Milan and Rome.

Implicit in Genauer's remarks was an attack on the economic opportunism of the international art market within the framework of American cultural hegemony. Although she did not draw direct parallels among political, economic and cultural domination, the implications of this conjunction for the critical reception of Spanish painters like Millares are clear enough. Employing a somewhat veiled language she then addressed the very complicity of foreign artists in the unchecked colonization of their work on the international art market:

> Art officialdom may turn out to have been right. But in the meantime it isn't surprising that artists all over Europe and the world are jumping on the bandwagon which has the most powerful horses and the loudest calliope. Once aboard, most of them are waving the same banner, too. It's made of rags.[32]

* * *

"Made of rags": the reference to Millares (with a nod perhaps to Italian artist Alberto Burri), who worked with burlap, is unmistakable. Although Genauer presented the painter as an exception to the rule that "the machinery of the art world – is ironing out of art its national character," her analysis of his "Spanishness" resurrected familiar tropes of a "desperate, brutal, violent, anguished art." Aligning these characteristics with the Spanish tradition, she continued:

> It may make you think of blood and sand, or Goya's late black satanic murals in the Prado, or even, in their savagery of certain of Picasso's canvasses. Each picture is a battleground, although who is fighting and who wins is hard to tell. Perhaps what Millares says is that no one wins. This may be the "authentic reality of mankind" which he says in a catalog preface he seeks to express.[33]

In so locating Millares' art in a specific national traditon, his work was once again historicized in terms that curiously restate Ruiz Morales' emphasis on the "typical traits of the profound Spanish soul." By positioning Millares within the uninterrupted flow of Spanish art history, the social reality of his art, and the geopolitical specificity of his struggle, were necessarily compromised.

Millares was acutely aware of these appropriations in both Spain and America. Writing to Pierre Matisse on November 5, 1960, he characterized the reception of the MoMA exhibition by New York critics as "quite absurd and incredibly weak in content."[34] It is likely that Genauer's review was on his mind, for in another letter to Matisse dated December 17, 1960, he mentioned, "We spent some pleasant time with Emily Genauer.

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Manuel Millares, letter to Pierre Matisse dated November 5, 1960. Pierre Matisse Gallery archives, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

I believe that this time she more fully understands the new Spanish painting. From now on I think she can say many things about us in the USA and combat the triteness and imprecision of newspaper journalism."[35] Despite these protestations, Millares shared responsibility for the ways in which his art – and this observation may be extended to his Spanish colleagues – was received in New York. In the catalog of his one-man exhibition at the Matisse Gallery in April 1960, Millares reprinted an earlier statement, with additions:

> Art today approaches the dividing line with the impossible. The impossible as an incentive for artistic creation always carries in itself a force of the greatest value.
>
> A desperate art is always an end and a beginning; a viable form with which to say things with complete freedom, brutally, without walls of contention; a continual suicide and a continual birth. Everything impossible and absurd in our world inevitably brings me to the possibility of falling into the unknown without the pretension of salvation or condemnation.[36]

It was precisely the very non-specificity of this existentialist conception of man's struggle for autonomy and freedom in the postwar world, "without pretensions of salvation or condemnation," that translated for American critics into an essential ambiguity in the form of the art itself. Whether contemporary Spanish artists were able to internalize this condition into their work and work through it critically at the formal level is another matter entirely.

The nagging question that remains is whether Spanish and American critics were able to re-inscribe this condition of ambiguity upon its concrete social base. Tomàs Llorens and Valeriano Bozal have suggested that artists like Millares, Lucio Muñoz and José Guinovart responded to the regime's co-optation of their work by metaphorically translating "violence, as the subject of painting, into physical violence inflicted on the material support of painting."[37] But as we have seen, this approach had been sufficiently commodified on the international art market by 1960 so as to significantly soften its blow. One author reviewing Millares's show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery stated the problem succinctly: "If much of the point of his convulsiveness is lost in New York, it is because anguish as a mode of cultural propriety has become virtually routine."[38] Only the reviewer for *Art News* seemed to intuit the potential for resistance that continued to register in Millares's work:

> Millares keeps his color internationally ordinary: black, white, red, the cloth color itself. But it suggests defiance rather than chic. His paintings, at their best and rawest, make a blunt and bitter

35 Manuel Millares, letter to Pierre Matisse dated December 17, 1960. Pierre Matisse Gallery archives, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

36 Statement by Manuel Millares in *Manolo Millares: Recent Paintings*, exhibition catalog, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1960.

37 Valeriano Bozal and Tomàs Llorens, "Introduction," in Valeriano Bozal, Angel Gonzàlez, et al., *España: Vanguardia artística y realidad social*, 1937-1976 (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1976), p. xvii.

38 S.T., "Manolo Millares," *Arts* 34 (June 1960), p. 55.

> comment on the difference between elegance and the appearance of elegance. They imply that between the two there is the often hard truth of reality.[39]

Remarking on the "irony of the 'freedom'" that the Spanish government allowed abstract painters, the author described Millares's art as a moral stragegy for working through a false consciousness.

* * *

Resistence in the political and social spheres has long been a leitmotif of Millares criticism. Writing in 1962 José Ayllón, one of the founding members of El Paso, defined the abstract language used by Millares and his contemporaries as a moral imperative in the struggle for freedom:

> What presents itself today as a new esthetic can be reduced to a common feeling among the artists the we are concerned with – i.e. the taking of a moral position that is dedicated to fight against the immobility of the conscious, the torpor that engulfs a technological civilization in which we have lost human references and, therefore, our spiritual dimension.[40]

Sixteen years later José-Augusto França, the artist's biographer, attempted to forge a specifically dialectical relationship between the form of Millares's art and its social content:

> The body that man is now in the process of losing (which he has already lost in the concentration camps or in the Holocaust of Hiroshima) (…) and the body art can give him or return to him, are inseparable. This simply repeats the statement that "content and form are inseparable," a statement which, to the artist, is of particular significance.[41]

Emphasizing the violence, immediacy and fatality of Millares's creative act, França suggested the ways in which Millares attempted to work content into form. Yet, for an art that of necessity developed under adverse social and political conditions, its margin for action was limited from the start precisely because its meanings could never be internally assured. Millares and his contemporaries risked co-optation by the Spanish regime, by the American government and cultural establishment, and, perhaps most decisively, by the international art market. These four spheres shared a network of relationships that collided in New York in 1960 as Millares and his contemporaries presented their work to the American public for the first time. The doubts that continually registered in the critical press in New York were conditions of the art itself and of the conflicting interests it was called upon to serve.

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39 J.S., "Manolo Millares," *Art News* 59 (May 1960), p. 19.

40 José Ayllon, *Millares* (Paris: Galerie Daniel Cordier; New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery; Madrid, Galería Biosca, 1962).

41 José-Augusto França, *Millares* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1978), p. 172.

The Ultimate Politics of Action Painting

Robert Slifkin

What can a painting do? Harold Rosenberg asked this question in one of the many notebook pages he filled addressing the central theme of his intellectual life: namely, the concept of action. In the same passage the critic declares that the "Spirit of Action Painting" was "summed up" by Claes Oldenburg's statement[1], "I am for art that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum."[2] Yet by the end of the 1960s, when Rosenberg wrote these words and was in the midst of preparing a manuscript on his signature idea, the agency of painting seemed especially endangered (as opposed to the more general "art" espoused by Oldenburg, a term that had come to encompass such categorically dynamic practices as happenings, performance, and the flow of information). If the question of art's social relevancy, let alone agency, became critical amidst the political and social upheavals of the 1960s, it was painting in particular, with its traditional connotations and its deep-seated representational functions that seemed most obsolete and impotent, the most likely to "sit on its ass in a museum."

Such doubt was not always so present in Rosenberg's conception of artistic agency. While a painting like Willem De Kooning's *Excavation* [Fig. 1] – a work the art critic named on several occasions "the masterpiece of Action Painting" – might represent what Rosenberg called an "anxious object," one that expressed the fraught state of modern subjectivity within an increasingly bureaucratic and commercial world, it nonetheless had the potential to affect viewers through the enactment of anxiety, and in turn inspire viewers to act in the world.[3] That is to say, if the literal canvas of *Excavation* sat on its ass, as Oldenburg would have it, the same could not be said for the ideal viewer of the work, nor the depicted forms upon the canvas.

A canvas, according to Rosenberg's famous essay from 1952, "The American Action Painters," that "began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act – rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or 'express' an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event."[4] These words have become art history boilerplate. For many viewers it is probably

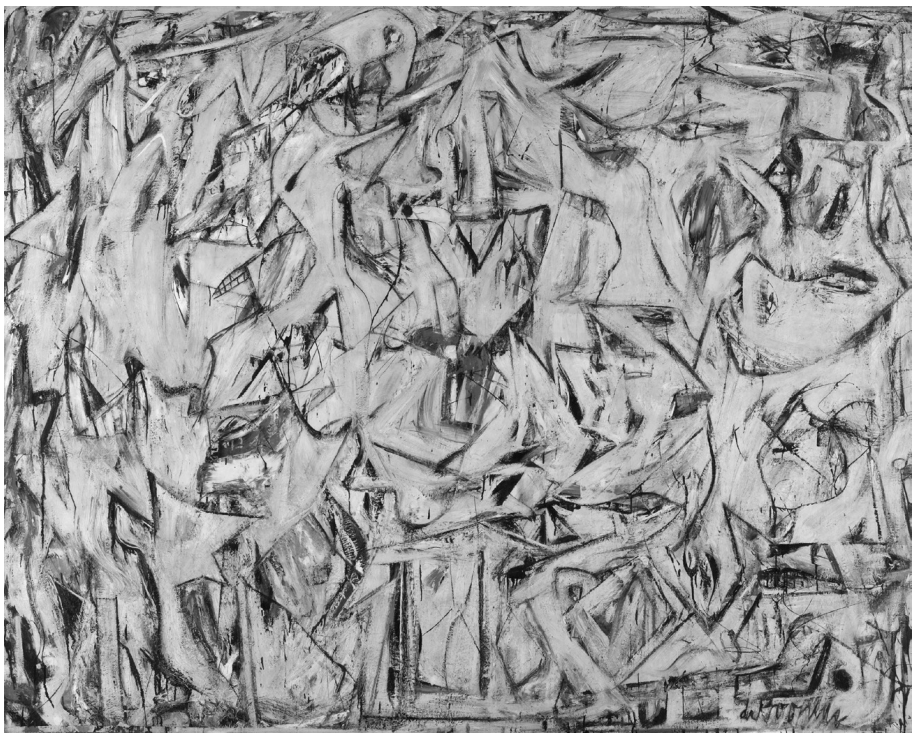
Robert Slifkin

1 Editor's note: Claes Oldenburg statement "I am for art...", was published in *Environments, Situations, Spaces* (New York: Martha Jackson Galleries, 1961). It is reprinted in an expanded version in Oldenburg and Emmett Williams eds.: *Store Days: Documents from the Store, 1961, and Ray Gun Theatre, 1962.* (New York,: Something Else Press, 1967), p. 39-42.

2 Harold Rosenberg Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA (hereafter GRI), Box 25 Folder 14. In the manuscript Rosenberg asks in response to Oldenburg's statement, "but can a painting do?"

3 Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Audience* (New York: Horizon, 1964).

4 Harold Rosenberg," The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51 (December 1952), pp 22-23, 48-50, reprinted in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon, 1959), p. 25.



1.
Willem de Kooning, *Excavation*, 1950, oil on canvas, 81 x 100 1/4 in. (205.7 x 254.6 cm), The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Purchase Prize Fund, gift of Mrs. Noah Goldowsky and Edgar Kaufman, Jr. © 2013 The William de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

difficult to look at a painting like *Excavation* and not see the blurred passages of bold colors and the variously jagged and sinewy black lines which brace the frieze-like composition as indices of the creative process and the painting itself as the gestural residue of the artist's physical performance upon the canvas. Brusque, if yet elegant, slashes as well as partial erasures and aberrant drips of paint all seem to signify the immediate expression of the artist. And it hardly needs to be suggested that the expression of the artist was (and often continues to be) typically seen as being anxious and angst-ridden, feelings shared by many postwar artists and intellectuals who, in the wake of two world wars and the looming threat of nuclear apocalypse, deemed the fate of western civilization and humankind more generally in serious crisis if not inexorably doomed. Such operatic sentiment seems foreign and bewildering to a contemporary postmodern sense of ironic detachment and cultural relativism and it is not surprising that many of the most influential recent interpretations of postwar art in the United States have essentially adopted an apologetic tone when discussing Abstract Expressionism, either implicating the works with their rhetoric of unbridled individual expression as ciphers of social indifference and unwitting dupes to the U.S. Cold War propaganda machine or reading their bombastic gesticulations as a form of artistic resignation in the face of a complacent and increasingly commercialized art world.[5]

Yet this reading of Abstract Expressionism, predicated on considering the painterly gesture as inherently expressive, was quite foreign to Rosenberg's conception of Action Painting. In fact when the essay was republished in his popular anthology *The Tradition of the New* in 1959, the au-

5 For the former, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); for the latter see T. J. Clark's concept of 'vulgarity' in "In Defense of Abstract Expressionism," *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 371-403.

thor included a long footnote in which he argued that the term Abstract Expressionism, which was at the time Action Painting's main rival for the naming rights of the movement, was inaccurate because of the former designation's "associations of ego and personal *Schmertz*." Despite his insistence on the individual artist's central role in the meaning of such paintings, Rosenberg stressed that Action Painting "is not 'personal'" and because "it has to do with self-creation… this disassociates it from "self-expression."[6] Such statements complicate the conventional (and to a certain degree accurate) understanding of Action Painting as a declaration of individualism in the face of mass-cultural conformity and political authoritarianism in which the "arena" of art was a last vestige of personal authenticity (a conception whose preservative instincts are perhaps surprisingly in alignment with Rosenberg's critical nemesis Clement Greenberg's model of the avant-garde as the last bastion of authentic culture within a degraded world of commercial and political manipulation).[7]

The recent interest in the ways in which postwar painting (particularly in the United States) may have been used by the state to further ideological positions has possibly diminished our ability to consider the works' pictorial qualities. Yet this retrospective political revision nonetheless indicates a fundamental characteristic of many of the works themselves, namely their attempt to forge a visual experience that could have a real effect on viewers, an art that might produce an audience whose experience in front of the work of art might produce a public and might in turn lead to real change, whether of the mind or of the body politic. Rather than seeing the CIA's use of these paintings as proof of their ideological vacancy, it might be more worthwhile to stop and consider the strangeness from our current perspective of a governmental entity even considering modern art as a viable ideological weapon. (A gesture that if we are to find contemporaneous analogues might be something like sending Jeff Koons's *Puppy* to Afghanistan or uploading Ryan Trecartin videos to the laptops of Egypt.). In other words, what would it mean to consider how the works' rhetoric of universal humanism, which according to many revisionist accounts, made them the ideal ideological vehicles of Marshall Plan policies that aligned unfettered individualism with the free market and naturalized a hegemonic white, male, heterosexual subjectivity, might have operated in less malicious ways? Which is not to discount these latter day critiques but rather to complicate them by understanding the works within the terms set by their original creators and critics and in particular by Harold Rosenberg in his well-known but generally misunderstood Action Painters essay.

Ultimately this reconsideration might allow us to recognize a less overt but perhaps more authentic political aspect within them. Authentic both in terms of a historically specific understanding of their political ambitions but also to suggest how this understanding of politics entailed a degree of collective engagement, a politics of the *polis,* the people rather than the

6 Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New,* p. 28.

7 This aspect of Rosenberg's theory is perhaps most clearly stated in a passage from his essay "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion," *Art News* 61 (December 1962), p. 42: "Only the blank canvas, however, offered the opportunity for a doing that would not be seized upon in mid-motion by the depersonalizing machine of capitalist society, or of the depersonalizing machine of world-wide opposition to that society."

personal, a decidedly non-personal, which is perhaps to say, non postmodern, understanding of politics. A politics based on an ideal of public address, an address to a collective public of beholders rather than an audience of individuals. This requires that we reconsider some of the central modernist and postmodernist myths about New York School painting: its purity as well as its baseness, its immanence as well as its indeterminacy, its apolitical stance as well as its distasteful personal politics of heroic individualism. Correspondingly we will have to address some of the more embarrassing aspects of the works that both Greenbergian modernism and its equally decorous successors have willfully chosen to ignore.

Rather than the literal objects whose medium specificity ensured its authenticity espoused by modernist critics like Greenberg and Michael Fried (who in the 1960s set the terms by which the retrospective canonization of Abstract Expressionism has generally been understood), paintings such as *Excavation* were first and foremost works of the imagination: fictive, artificial, dramatic, theatrical, and consequently, fundamentally figurative. The goal of painters like De Kooning, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock was not an outright defiance of recognizable imagery as much as its perpetual deferral; a figural potential which is implied but ultimately never achieved whether through a veiling or incompletion of the image. While Pollock would declare in a 1949 interview that "I try to stay away from any recognizable image; if it creeps in, I try to do away with it," he nonetheless acknowledged that "Recognizable images are always there in the end."[8] The art historian Michael Leja has argued that Pollock in his classic drip paintings from the late 1940s expressly invoked the possibility of recognizable imagery as a means to invest his work with a potent sense of primal and masculine unbridledness. According to Leja Pollock's serpentine line always "hovers at the edge of referentiality."[9]

Similarly the critic Robert Melville, writing about the paintings of Philip Guston (an artist who was a close friend to Rosenberg and titled his 1958 suite of gouaches *The Actors*) noticed "something about these complexes of brush-strokes which suggest that a configuration other than what we see is seeking to be defined – it could be a human head – and although nothing specific ever does get defined, they so strongly convey an atmosphere of expectancy that I found myself *waiting* in front of one of them." [Fig. 2][10] The critic Lawrence Alloway aptly summarized this evocative and, temporally speaking, anticipative power of Guston's paintings, noting their "iconography of suspended references which can neither be converted into one-to-one references nor dispensed with."[11]

The challenge for such artists was to depict allusive forms in a decided unresolved condition, suggesting a figural potential which is implied but never achieved, what I will call a middling aesthetics, by which I mean a mode of image making that depicts forms in morphological states that

8 Jackson Pollock interview for *Life* Magazine, *Time/Life* Archives, 18 July 1949, cited in Steven Naifeh, and Gregory White Smith. *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1989), p. 591.

9 Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expression: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 306. Stephen Polcari also recognizes how in paintings such as *Attic* and *Excavation* "De Kooning's forms oscillate between abstract pictorial forms and 'real object.'" In *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 280.

10 Robert Melville, "Exhibitions" *Architectural Review* 133 (April 1963), p. 289.

11 Lawrence Alloway, "Notes on Guston," *Art Journal* 22 (Fall 1962), p. 9-10.

2.
Philip Guston, *The Actors V*, 1960, oil on Strathmore paperboard on masonite
30 x 40 inches, 76.2 x 101.6 cm.
Private Collection.

suggest both past and future conditions of possibility. I use this term 'middling' purposefully for I know that to argue that abstract forms are somehow unresolved and incomplete is to suggest that abstraction is predicated on some type of recognizable figurative potential and consequently open oneself up to the charge of invoking a simple minded, vulgar reading of abstraction – like Polonius seeing camels in the clouds.

Or, like the so-called 'portmanteau words' created by James Joyce in his novels *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* – books that were aesthetic touchstones for many members of the New York School – in which two or more words, often from different languages, were conjoined to produce a suggestive neologism, the allusive 'thingly' forms placed upon the canvas of an Action Painting would often hover between multiple possible references, creating what was seen as a new visual language with presumably universal potential.[12] The suspended figuration of works like *Excavation* and *The Actors*, like the wordplay of Joyce, encourages the viewer to take an active role in producing a signifying system, one which, if we take Joyce's project as a comparative example, would use the detritus of Western (and to a smaller extent non-western) culture as the building blocks for a new language, and with it new models of subjectivity. The underlying figural (and correlated temporal) aspect of such potential is perhaps most overtly articulated in an essay from 1942 by the artist and writer Wolgang Paalen that appeared in *Dyn*, a small magazine associated with Abstract Expressionism, in which the author states that "The true value of the artistic image does not depend upon its capacity to *represent*, but upon its capacity to *prefigure*, i.e., upon its capacity to express potentially a *new order* of things." This mode of image making that depicts forms in morphological states

12 For a discussion of the influence of Joyce upon these painters, see Evan R. Firestone, "James Joyce and the First Generation New York School" in Ellen G. Landau, ed. *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 399-414. Stephen Polcari in *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 282 notes the connection between Joyce's portmanteau words and the paintings of De Kooning.

3.
Willem de Kooning, *Attic,* 1949, Oil, enamel, and newspaper transfer on canvas, 61 7/8 x 81 in. (157.2 x 205.7cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection, Gift of Muriel Kallis Newman, in honor of her son, Glenn David Steinberg, 1982. © 2013 The William de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph: Art Resource, New York

that could suggest both past and future conditions of possibility would suspend "the need of superimposed *finalities*." In their capacity to depict what Paalen calls "the prefigurative image" these paintings were considered to be visual metaphors not of any specific object in the world but rather of possibility and change in itself.[13] This evocative and dilatory conception of the figure – an image that one not so much looked at as looked forward to – was in fact a motivating factor behind much postwar painting. Yet if such a model of suspended figuration evoked the concept of possibility and individual freedom it was a possibility that was earned through an encounter with the tragic.

In an often-cited statement, first published in the *New York Times* in 1943, Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb proclaimed, "There is no such thing as good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is crucial and only that subject-matter is valid which is tragic and timeless."[14] The theme of tragedy regularly appeared within the discussions of postwar American art and its invocation has typically been understood to suggest the pessimistic attitude towards Western civilization in the years following World War II. Yet the many references to drama, both by Rosenberg and the painters who were his friends and who certainly influenced his thinking about art, suggest a more concrete reason for the prevalence of the concept of tragedy within postwar artistic discourse, and one that explains significant formal and visual attributes of the paintings themselves.

De Kooning, an artist who relished word play and puns, must have appreciated the dramatically tragic connotations of the title he chose for his 1949 painting *Attic* [Fig. 3]. Aristotle in the *Poetics* famously defined dramatic tragedy as "the imitation of action" and in whose Attic dialect the

13 Wolfgang Paalen, "The New Image," *Dyn* 1 (April-May 1942), pp. 9, 12, 9.
14 Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, "Statement," *New York Times* (13 June 1943), reprinted in Herschel Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 545.

word drama literally meant action. For the philosopher, thinking primarily of the work of Sophocles, tragedy hinges on a reversal of fortune brought about by the tragic hero's ignorance of certain circumstances, an ignorance that the audience shares to a degree, yet is able to discern in hindsight where the tragic hero went astray. What then is Attic about a painting like De Kooning's *Attic*. I want to suggest that the specifically tragic nature of such a painting lies in its presentation of forms that allude to things in the word while never crystallizing into specific signs for any one thing. By painting such forms, De Kooning produces the conditions in which the painter/actor constructs a situation (that he – caught in the middle of the action – is unable to comprehend fully but from which the viewer/audience may still find a coherent meaning when confronted with the totality of the completed painting.

Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a text whose romantic message of affirmative pessimism made it a philosophical touchstone for many artists in the postwar years, outlined how the essence of tragedy lay in such a model of uninformed action.[15] "Knowledge kills action," he wrote, "action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion." In other words, Nietzsche insists that action and contemplation are antithetical operations and the only true form of action is one devoid of premeditation, a situation that sets one up for tragic consequences by making one unaware of the possible ramifications of one's action. This, the philosopher claims, is the "lesson of Hamlet."[16]

Shakespeare's tragic tale of the indecisive Danish prince would likewise provide Rosenberg with the foundations for his initial conception of action and his first significant intellectual statement, an essay originally published in 1932 entitled "Character Change and Drama" which the author chose to reprint in *The Tradition of the New*. In it, Rosenberg explores how Shakespeare's play reveals the revolutionary potential of a model of selfhood based on dramatic action. He writes that in the first half of the play "Hamlet has all the qualities required for action; what he lacks is the identity structure which would fit him to be a character in a drama."[17] While other characters act, Hamlet muses. For Rosenberg the genius of Shakespeare was to represent what he called an organic personality upon a stage otherwise filled with dramatic identities. As a character who stoically ruminates rather than doing anything about his concerns, Hamlet emphasizes the discrepancy between his own unconventional dramatic character and the other figures' more common dramatic identities. Hamlet in the first half of the play, according to Rosenberg, "has been exiled to a middle ground between the natural world and the dramatic."[18] By placing upon the stage a character who enacts what could be considered a 'mundane' rather than 'dramatic' model of selfhood – that is to say, one that is indecisive, unaware of the complications of his actions, and whose words and deeds do not advance the story – Shakespeare, according to Rosenberg,

15 For the influence of Nietzsche on Abstract Expressionist painting and criticism, see Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 98-104.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 40.

17 Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*, p. 146-7.

18 Ibid., p. 147.

was able to reveal this fundamentally tragic nature of the human condition. Hamlet's behavior in the second half of the play, when he escapes from his attempted deportation to England and sets out to avenge his father, provides Rosenberg with an alternate model of selfhood. Now Hamlet recognizes himself as a dramatic character and is able to invest all of his actions with a new sense of purpose and direction. "Transformed from the image of a personality into that of a dramatic identity, he has found at last his place in the play… His action hustles the play to its tragic close."[19] Writing during the height of the leftist revival spurred by the Depression, Rosenberg ends his essay suggesting that a performative model of selfhood, in which a person's actions operate within an unfolding temporal narrative, could provide a means for individuals in modern society to break free from a sense of historical alienation and develop a truly revolutionary consciousness.[20]

Rosenberg would return to the subject of Hamlet in 1947, refining his argument, this time publishing a long essay in another small magazine *Possibilities* entitled "The Stages."[21] The critic's interest in art and selfhood as a form of dramatic action found a new resonance among the writings of New York artists such as Rothko, who in his contribution to the magazine stated that "I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers."[22] As Fred Orton has shown, in Rosenberg's Action Painters essay, the critic's interest in dramatic action is transferred into painterly action, all the while maintaining a belief in a dramatic conception of action as a paradigm of selfhood with revolutionary potential. While the overall tone of the text is celebratory, announcing the arrival of a new movement, the tragic foundations of action underlie the essay's key passages: "The big moment came when it was decided to paint… just TO PAINT," the author capitalizing the last two words to emphasize the heroic significance of such a decision. By the time Rosenberg wrote his "Action Painters" essay in 1952 his identification of the verb 'to paint' as an intransitive verb found a correspondence with the way many painters were already speaking about their own artistic practice.[23] In an oft-quoted passage from his 1947 statement published in *Possibilities*, Pollock declared that "When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about."[24] Hans Hoffman expressed a similar sense of the abstract work existing in a pre-figured moment of existence: "At the time of making a picture, I want not to know what I'm doing" and James Brooks wrote that he attempted to "get as much unknown on the canvas" as possible.[25] William Baziotes stated that "Whereas certain people start with a recollection or an experience and paint that experience, to some of us the act of doing it becomes the experience, so that we are not quite clear why we are engaged on a particular work… the artist feels like a gambler. He does something on the canvas and takes a chance in the hope that something important will be

19 Ibid., 149.

20 In another early essay also reprinted in *The Tradition of the New*, "The Resurrected Romans," Rosenberg would go on to explore the revolutionary potential of such a model of selfhood, basing his argument on Marx's similar assertion of the theatrical nature of the French Revolution in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.

21 Rosenberg, "The Stages," *Possibilities* 1 (Winter 1947), reprinted in *Act and the Actor: Making the Self* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 74-103.

22 Rothko, "The Romantic were Prompted," *Possibilities* 1 (Winter 1947), reprinted in Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, p. 548.

23 Jerome Klinkowski, compares Barthes' essay "To Write: An Intransitive Verb" with Rosenberg's concept of Action Painting in *Rosenberg, Barthes, Hassan: The Postmodern Habit of Thought* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 43.

24 Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* 1 (1947), reprinted in Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, p. 548.

25 Quoted in Elaine de Kooning, "Hoffman Paints a Picture," *Art News* 48 (February 1950), p. 40; quoted in Robert Motherwell et al., *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1952), p. 18.

revealed."[26] Rothko, who would invoke specifically dramatic terms to describe the tragic content of art, seeing his "pictures as dramas" and "the shapes in the pictures [as] the performers," wrote that in his art "Neither the action nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance. They begin as an unknown adventure in an unknown space."[27] The painter Mark Tobey would describe the communicative potential of the unpremeditated painterly act, stating "I think the artist is not concerned with communication while he is in action; but after he is through, he likes to feel there is a communication from his work."[28] As these statements attest, by "acting" in such an existentially direct manner the artists sought to produce paintings whose imagery could provide the beholder with a sense of recognition of something unknown to the creator, thus imparting their 'tragic' content, investing the works with a sense of revelation, surprise, and what Rosenberg would call in a 1962 reassessment of his concept, its "crisis-content."[29]

The philosopher Stanley Cavell, in a far-reaching reading of Shakespeare's *King Lear* written in 1967 that invokes terminology remarkably similar to Rosenberg's "Action Painters" essay, argues for just this capacity of dramatic tragedy. By presenting a paradigm of action done without contemplation, tragic drama can illuminate to its audience the value of being present in the world, of acting *with* deliberation. When we, the audience, leave the theater after watching a tragedy, he writes, "we are cast into the arena of action again, crossroads again beneath our feet. Because the actors have stopped, we are freed to act again; but also compelled to." For Cavell, "a purpose of tragedy… [is] to make us practical, capable of acting" by "showing us that there is a place to act upon" the "pity and terror" we feel during the performance.[30] Similarly, in the Action Painters essay Rosenberg would transfer what he believed to be the affective power of dramatic action onto the painted forms upon canvas. If the tragic actions (and preceding inaction) of Hamlet or Lear could inspire members of the audience to invest their own lives with historically-motivated (let alone socially resonant) actions, then perhaps the tragic forms depicted on the canvas could do the same for the beholders of such paintings. Action Paintings, through their tragic, seemingly unsettled imagery, could urge viewers to see themselves in the middle of situations and consequently find it possible to act with resolution in a world where engaged action appears difficult to achieve. "Except in the artifices of the theater or the historian," wrote Rosenberg, "an act has no beginning or end." That's why, according to the critic, the best Action Paintings were "powerful middles, without beginning or ends."[31]

By producing paintings whose basic building block was the unsuspecting act, a sequence of marks whose significance could not be known to them, these artists paradoxically created highly constructed works that had an intended effect upon the viewer. While it seems like a truism to state

26 Motherwell, et. al, *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951), p. 15. In 1955 William Seitz would write that "it is already plain… that the disposition of Abstract Expressionism is against predetermination." "Abstract Expressionist Painting in America," (Phd. diss. Princeton University, 1955), p. 254.

27 Rothko, "The Romantic were Prompted," in Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, 548. When this essay was republished in Chipp's anthology the editor noted: "Compare Rothko's statement that the shapes are the performers in an action that cannot be anticipated with Harold Rosenberg's 'action painting.'"

28 Mark Tobey, "Western Round Table," *Modern Artists in America*, p. 33.

29 Rosenberg, "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion," p. 62.

30 Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love," in *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 343, 347.

31 Rosenberg, "De Kooning: On the Border of the Act," *Vogue* (September 1964), reprinted in *The Anxious Object*, p. 125.

that paintings are made to be beheld, the dramatic action represented upon the canvas of a painting like *Attic* called for an active relationship between beholder and work. Just as Gottlieb and Rothko asserted how their paintings "carry some communicative power" engendered by "a consummated experience between picture and onlooker," the experience of seeing an action painting with its middling aesthetics was intended to act upon the viewer the same was as a dramatic tragedy was intended to act upon the audience.[32] Just as the tragic hero's action is done without contemplation, its tragic effects are predicated on an audience who is privy to the same information yet at the crucial moment is able recognize what the hero cannot see.

The specific agency of such empathetic beholding was expressed in a passage from Wolfgang Paalen's previously quoted essay of 1942 in which the author champions the projective power of such images that can "operate as visual symbols whose function is to bring about behavior conductive to the material realization of the ideas which are so signified."[33] As in theatrical tragedy the tragic nature of action painting is predicated on an audience who is able to recognize what the hero cannot see (or foresee). When the curtain closes or when the viewers step away from the image, they are able to unify the hero's acts into a coherent and meaningful reading that will, ideally, affect them, change them, and even change the way they act. Rather than suggesting the sort of humanistic tragedy of postwar culture, the tragedy of an action painting was more like tragic pathos (a word Rosenberg would often invoke in his writings on the subject), a means to engage the viewers' empathy and ideally, through the 'lesson' of such tragic images, to encourage action in the realm of everyday life.

In a letter to his friend the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty from 1950, Rosenberg would outline the social stakes of his concept of dramatic action. "The American, especially during the past century, does not possess a revolutionary consciousness, but rather devotes himself to eluding a revolutionary role, though this alone would give meaning to his existence… In short, there is a split between action and consciousness, the action of the American carrying him constantly forward, while his consciousness either lags behind or turns deliberately toward the past."[34] According to Rosenberg, the increased bureaucratization and technological mediation of modern life made authentic action difficult if not impossible. Action paintings, through their tragic effects, could inspire viewers to see themselves in the middle of situations and consequently find it possible to act with resolution in a world where such authentic actions, the kind that actually affect the world, are increasingly difficult to achieve.[35]

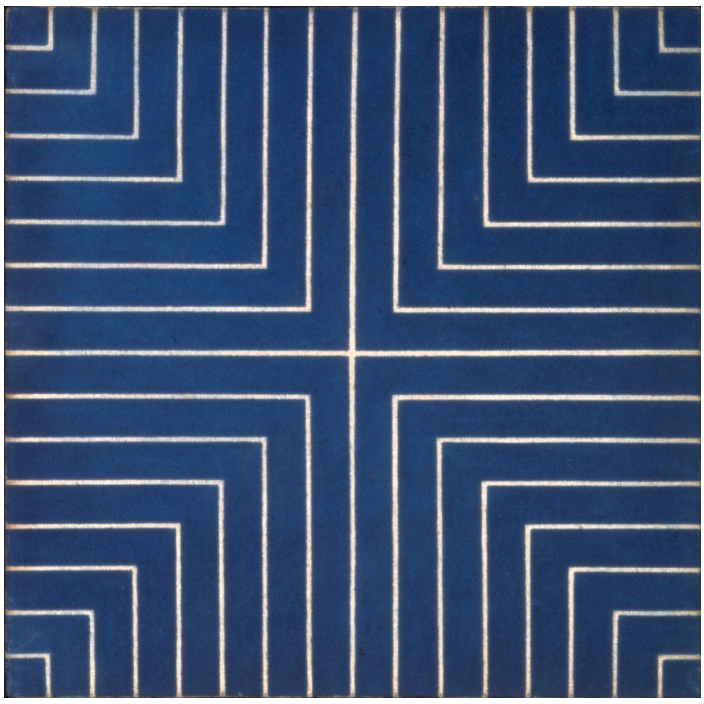
The dramatic effect of Action Painting was predicated on acknowledging a divide between the stage and the world. The audience or viewer

32 Gottlieb and Rothko, "Statement," in Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, 545. For a later articulation of this concept see Robert Motherwell, "A Painting Must Make Human Contact," [1955] in *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell*, Stephanie Terenzio, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 108.

33 Paalen, "The New Image," p. 9.

34 Rosenberg, letter to Merleau-Ponty, 31 May 1950, Rosenberg Papers, GRI, B. 1, F. 5.

35 This logic is expressed in Rosenberg's example of the Eichmann trials and Hannah Arendt's famous analysis of the how bureaucratic conditions can dissolve the validity of human actions. "Blended into world events, the acts of Eichmann tended to shrink into mere nuance of personality… Thus in the absence of a firm notion of an act, determinism can result both in a belief in 'innocent' agents of evil and in individual responsibility for morally neutral events and 'acts of God.'" *Act and Actor*, p. 5-6.



4.
Frank Stella, *Delaware Crossing,* 1962. Alkyd on raw canvas (Benjamin Moore flat wall paint), 12 1/16 x 12 1/16 in (30.6 x 30.6 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Andy Warhol, 72.167.6. © Frank Stella. Photograph: Art Resource, New York

would see the art and then could apply its lesson in their everyday lives. Yet in 1959, the same year that "The American Action Painters" was republished in Rosenberg's *The Tradition of the New*, another popular book appeared, Erving Goffman's sociological study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* which argued that such a dramaturgical conception of one's public persona was in fact normative and healthy rather than potentially revolutionary. Rosenberg's conception of dramatic action as a means to spur social change was only possible in a world where the boundary between the real and the artificial was clearly stated. But this line was believed to be dissolving by the late 1950s and would seem to grow only more indistinct as the decade wore on. Rosenberg himself acknowledged the changed state of affairs in the preface to his 1970 collection of essays *Act and the Actor,* writing that that at that moment "The United States is governed by professional illusionists… Washington acts by putting on an act."[36]

This same theme would provide the impetus behind Cavell's reading of *King Lear* (written between 1966-67). In it Cavell states that because the modern world presents ever new means to distract us from ourselves and one another, "Tragedy has moved into the world, and with it the world becomes theatrical."[37] In this situation there is no place to act upon the action-compelling feelings evoked by tragic works of art. For the next generation of critics, people like Michael Fried who would apply Cavell's essay to his own critical testaments of American Modernism, the answer to this problem was to produce works that were anti-tragic, whole unto themselves, offering the viewer a paradigm of self-reflexive presentness rather than theatrical middlingness. A painting like Frank Stella's *Delaware Crossing* from 1962 [Fig. 4] which Fried praised for what he called its "deductive

36 Rosenberg, *Act and Actor*, XXII.
37 Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say*, p. 344.

structure" whose self-reflexive composition was consonant with the shape of its stretcher, did not need a spectator to complete their meaning.[38] Rather than the dilatory theatricality of Action Painting, these paintings, according to Cavell, "acknowledge that no matter how much work goes into the making of a work, at some point the work must be *done*, given over, the object declared separate from its maker, autonomous."[39]

In light of the increasingly dominant aesthetics of literalism, credibility and "presentness" of the 1960s, the theatricality of Action Painting (with its attendant fictiveness) had begun to seem increasingly out of date to various – and sometimes opposed – factions of the art world.[40] The 'period eye,' which may have led postwar viewers to regard a work like *Excavation* as a drama, no longer seemed tenable in a world increasingly suspicious of the manipulative powers of images.[41] The "suggestive power" recognized by some of the original viewers of these paintings was adamantly repressed by the formalist reception (and subsequent canonization) of the movement in the 1960s, with its emphasis on medium specificity and immanence and its aversion to anything which would connect the aesthetic realm to what was seen as an increasingly mediated if not theatrical world.[42] By 1964 an artist like Jules Olitski would berate the earlier generation of Abstract Expressionists as inauthentic narcissists, calling them "mostly actors" whose "only audience in the studio was themselves."[43] At a moment when many critics and artists were championing a conception of the art work as an autonomous, material thing in the world they found ways to talk about and look at Abstract Expressionist paintings that did not require acknowledging their underlying figurative operations and the viewer's presence necessary to engage them, aspects that seemed embarrassingly romantic if not ideologically corrupt.

While modernists like Fried championed a decidedly anti-tragic, almost heroic art, postmodernists like Robert Smithson were equally suspicious of the tragic, crisis-ridden aesthetic associated with Abstract Expressionism. In an unpublished essay from 1966, Smithson would make the connection between the concept of action, tragedy, and humanism (which he decries because it "poisons all consciousness of art by opposing art to life.") As Smithson's words encapsulate many of the major themes of not only Action Painting but also its relation to the larger social and intellectual crisis that made such a model expression problematic, the passage deserves to quoted at length:

> Action is the source of all misery, but how many people will accept that? Tragedy is a cheap trick, or at best the classical illusion… Back in the 1950s much was said about 'action.' Artists and critics, out of some kind of mutual guilt, made excuses for their art and criticism by saying that art was involved in 'action,' or that 'art is life' or that 'art is self-evident'… The act of artistic innocence is

38 Fried, "Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons," [1966] in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 77-99.

39 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 111.

40 The term "presentness" comes from Michael Fried's influential essay "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 (Summer 1967), pp. 12-23.

41 Michael Baxandall outlines his concept of how historically specific social conventions affect the act of beholding in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 29-108. David Joselit, in "Toward a Genealogy of Flatness," *Art History* 23 (March 2000), p. 23, argues that the connection between a model of non-figurative indexical abstraction and its expressive capabilities was predicated upon "a particular historically specific link between form and emotion."

42 Howard Devree, "By Contemporaries," *New York Times* (2 December 1951), sec. 2, p. 11.

43 Quoted in "Some Excerpts from a Conversation at Bennington, Vermont, USA," *Monad* (January 1964), p. 21.

> no longer very convincing… Artists should be conscious of the roles they are playing… The artist should be an actor who refuses to act. His art should be empty and inert. Self-expression must be voided. Art should eliminate value, and not add to it. 'Value' is just another word for 'Humanism.'[44]

It is, certainly, critiques like Smithson's that make Barnett Newman's equally strident remark that if people "read [his paintings] properly… it would mean the end of state capitalism and totalitarianism" seem ridiculous and embarrassing to many a contemporary reader.[45] For artists like Newman, Rothko, De Kooning, and Pollock the proper understanding of their art was an inherently affective and dramatic (and specifically participatory) experience. Already in the early 1940s Rothko would outline such a model of artistic agency in an unpublished notebook, writing that "Art is not only a form of action, it is a form of *social* action. For art is a type of communication, and when it enters the environment it produces its effects just as any other form of action does."[46] When the artist wrote in 1952 that "the life of my pictures will lead out in the world" he was articulating the desire that his art might encourage social action if only viewers would contemplate the unresolved and anxious forms of the work empathetically.[47] If today the dramatic substance of Action Painting is no longer apparent to us or its tragic rhetoric appears embarrassingly farcical, perhaps it is only because of the distance that separates us from the historical moment in which the works were produced, that we no longer possess the "period eye" for the art in question. Yet our misrecognition may also be accounted for by a much more troubling thought: our own unwillingness to accept the possibility that a work of art could act, that it could act upon us, and that we could act through it.[48]

44 Robert Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," [1966-67] in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), p. 336. In his essay "Donald Judd," (*Collected Writings*, 5) Smithson recommends what he saw as Judd's "crystalline state of mind" for being "removed from the organic floods of 'action painting'" and consequently able to translate "his concepts into artifacts of fact, without any illusionistic representations."

45 Barnett Newman in Dorothy Gees Seckler, "Frontiers of Space", *Art in America* 50 (Summer 1962), p. 87. Newman prefaces this remark by stating "Almost 15 years ago Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possible mean to the world."

46 Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, ed. Christopher Rothko (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 10.

47 Mark Rothko, letter to Lloyd Goodrich, 20 December 1952, Whitney Museum of American Art, cited in James Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 304.

48 Despite the increasing suspicion towards theatricality in art and life, the question of how to be an active agent within a highly mediated world has remained vital and a reconsideration of a similar model of spectatorship has lately been undertaken by the philosopher Jacques Ranciere who in a series of essays has explored the long tradition of denigrating theatricality as a sphere of illusion and passivity. See Ranciere, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009).

Equipo Crónica: Art History, Narrative Figuration, and Critical Realism[1]

Miriam M. Basilio

Introduction

Miriam M. Basilio

Equipo Crónica's artistic and critical project challenges common assumptions about their visual production as a kind of Spanish "Pop Art."[2] The complex political and social messages encoded in their paintings refer to specific events in the Spanish context, as the group used art as a weapon to denounce Franco's Dictatorship. Responding to the writings of Spanish critics who theorized realism as a political strategy, and who wrote about cartoons and comics as potential tools of propaganda, Equipo Crónica participated in exhibitions alongside the French Figuration Narrative group, through which their understanding of American Pop Art was mediated.[3] The artists of Equipo Crónica and Figuration Narrative, alongside figures like Eduardo Arroyo (b. 1937), who was then working in Paris, aligned themselves against common enemies: American capitalism, the Vietnam War, and in the case of Equipo, the Spanish regime. In a highly politicized context in which Pop Art was seen as a manifestation of American economic and cultural hegemony, Spanish and French artists sought to invert the strategies deployed by their counterparts across the Atlantic.

In the catalog of the exhibition *Figuration Narrative dans l'art contemporain*, held in Paris at the galerie Creuze from October 1 to 29, 1965, critic Gérard Gassiot-Talabot defined the key features of the new artistic tendency in Europe: to re-think narrative painting in the face of "cinema and comic strips" in such a way that "anecdotal narration" would be structured around a series of "scenes" and "the juxtaposition of temporal planes within a single composition." For Gassiot-Talabot, the new figurative painting accepted "mutation and metamorphosis of personages and objects"[4] as its *modus operandus*, incorporating citations of art-historical and mass cultural imagery to engage the viewer in a critical dialogue. Two years later, Equipo Crónica was included in the exhibition *Bande desinée et figuration narrative – Histoire/esthétique/production et sociologie de la bande desinée mondiale, procédés narratifs et structure de l'image dans la peinture contemporain*, held at the Musée des arts décoratifs in Paris. Although the members of Equipo and Figuration Narrative worked in a variety of figu-

1 This text is drawn in part from a presentation that I developed with Romy Golan, which we delivered at the Contemporary Transatlantic Dialogues conference in April 2011. I am grateful for her insights and suggestions related to the Equipo's relationship to the artistic and political positions of the Figuration Narrative artists. I also thank her for sharing important references regarding the Figuration Narrative artists, their engagement with Pop art, as well as contemporary critical debates in Paris about their work.

2 See for example the exhibiton catalog *El Pop español. Los años sesenta. El tiempo reencontrado* (Segovia: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, 2004).

3 The relationship between the Equipo and the European artists has been discussed by a number of scholars. The Spaniards showed with the French Figuration Narrative group in various European exhibitions beginning in 1965. See Jean-Paul Ameline, "Aux sources de la Figuration Narrative," in Jean – Paul Ameline and Bénédicte Ajac, eds., *Figuration Narrative Paris 1960-1972* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux/Centre Georges Pompidou, 2008), pp. 17-32 and Fernando Castro Flórez, "[…] y un cierto valor como cliché simbólico [Bombardeo de citas en torno a Guer-

rative styles, they all adopted narrative realism as a political and didactic strategy. Their artistic exchange constituted a European axis that challenged the centrality of America as a primary artistic model. In what follows, I will examine three paintings by Equipo Crónica in order to explore the ways in which its members drew upon citations of canonical art historical works, comic strips, and political propaganda to assert their role as participants within a specifically European artistic and political context. Their position as artists living in Franco's Spain lent their work a particular power amidst debates concerning narrative figuration's political efficacy.

Equipo Crónica's Stylistic Arsenal

Equipo Crónica, established by Manolo Valdés (b. 1942), Rafael Solbes (1940-81) and Juan Antonio Toledo (1940-95) in the winter of 1964 (Toledo left the group the following year) was active until the untimely death of Solbes in 1981. Group work was fundamental to their practice as a challenge to the cult of genius and artistic individualism. As they stated in their foundational manifesto:

> Equipo Crónica has formed as a collaborative, experimental working group. Teamwork does not have to exclude formalist tendencies… Realism in accordance with our circumstances can also demand…a radical overcoming of the myth of individualism… as the aim of artistic activity.[5]

The artists belonged to a group of critics and painters in València who debated the role of realism as a tool to denounce Franco's Dictatorship. In a 1985 interview, Toledo described the meetings he attended once every fifteen days with art historians Tomàs Llorens and Valeriano Bozal in which they discussed films, literature, tourism "with a dash of Lukács and a pinch of pepper from Brecht."[6] Another catalyst in the early formation of Equipo Crónica was the exhibition *España Libre* organized by art historian Vicente Aguilera Cerni, which toured various Italian cities in 1964-5 and included work by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Julio González (1876-1942) and Oscar Domínguez (1906-1957) alongside that of Solbes, Valdés, Eduardo Arroyo, Equipo 57, Antoni Tàpies and Manolo Millares. In the catalog essay, dedicated to the political prisoners Agustín Ibarrola (b. 1930, an artist member of Equipo 57 and Estampa Popular) and labor lawyer Antonio Gimenez Pericás, Aguilera wrote that artists had a "moral duty" to refuse to cooperate with official exhibitions that sought to create the illusion that there was artistic freedom in Franco's Spain.[7] To reinforce their message of resistance to the regime, the second sheet of Picasso's 1937 engraving *Sueño y mentira de Franco* was reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalog. The nascent group saw in Picasso a Spanish

nica 69 del Equipo Crónica]," in *Crónica del Guernica* (Valencia: IVAM/Centro Julio González, 2006), pp. 43-79.

4 Gérard Gassiot-Talabot, "La figuration narrative dans l'art contemporain," (1965), excerpted in Jean-Paul Ameline, Bénédicte Ajac, and Anne-Sophie Chevalier, "Chronologie/Anthologie 1960-1972," in *Figuration Narrative Paris 1960-1972*, p. 91.

5 Ricardo Martí Viadel: *Equipo Crónica: Pintura, Cultura, Sociedad* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 2002), p. 24. The three artists were not the first to use the term "Equipo" – Equipo 57 produced abstract paintings, sculptures, and designed household objects. The latter's utopian goal, to reach wide sectors of the population through their art and design, was in consonance with their Marxist politics. See Valerie L. Hillings "Experimental Artists' Groups in Europe, 1951-1968: Abstraction, Interaction, and Internationalism," Ph.D., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2002, and Exhibition Catalogue *Equipo 57* (Madrid: Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1993). Another Valencian group, Equipo Realidad, exhibited with Equipo Crónica and created large canvases in thematic narrative series drawing from sources such as newspaper photographs, Old Master and modern art, comics, and advertising. See *Equipo Realidad* (Valencia: IVAM/Centro Julio González, 1993). For debates about group formation in Spain in the 1960s, see Paula Barreiro López, "`Contra viento y marea': El arte normativo en la encrucijada," in Pablo Ramírez and Angel Llorente Hernández, *Arte Normativo: 50 aniversari de la Primera exposició conjunta d'art normatiu espanyol* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 2010), pp. 64-77.

6 *Estampa Popular* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González, 1996), Interview with Joan Antoni Toledo, p. 193. English translation by Tomàs Belaire and Karel Clapshaw. Lukacs' writings were a subject of interest to Bozal, who in 1966 published two seminal histories of Spanish realism, and to Terenci Moix. See below for a discussion of these books.

precedent for the comic strip as tool to raise awareness about the nature of the regime.[8]

The choice of Picasso's iconic print was important, since Solbes, Toledo and Valdés also collaborated with Estampa Popular, a Valencian printmaking cooperative that was active between 1964 and 1968.[9] The artists associated with Estampa Popular produced prints in diverse styles, incorporating references to American comics and consumer products, as well as contemporary design and typography. In their calendar for 1968, a running Superman figure appears three times, his uniform adapted to feature the banned red and yellow Valencian flag. The comic book heroes each hold out an edition of the calendar, a reference to the reproducible nature of the publication medium itself. The calendar echoed another image of Superman that appeared on the cover of the December 1967 issue of *Opus International*. There, a pair of Superman figures stood side by side. The only variation between them was the legends on their costumes: one reads "CCCP," the other "USA."[10] Here we already see two key features that would be adopted by the Equipo group: citations of images from mass culture, particularly from the Spanish and American comics; and the incorporation of self-referential nods to their practice of appropriation and re-contextualization (and in some cases to their Valencian artistic origins). In an attempt to emphasize the rhetorical address to their audiences in the imagery they selected, here and elsewhere Equipo Crónica employed a realist style that emulated the slick surface of posters, comic strips, and advertising.[11]

Facundo Tomás and others have noted the critical role played by art historians, particularly Llorens and Bozal, in articulating the Equipo's theoretical project.[12] The two art historians understood the group's formal technique and practice of citation as inherently politically progressive. Bozal, writing in 1967, argued that their negation of facture in favor of a flat appearance akin to that of comic books and advertising in posters and magazines demonstrated that they had "dispensed with quality" and created "a popular art of the new industrial society."[13] By 1966, Llorens established the key aspects of their production.[14] Like Bozal, he stressed the group's renunciation of authorship and with it the auratic aspect of painting, as well as their use of montage, which he described as a visual equivalent of Brechtian distancing.[15] Through a series of narrative visual citations drawn from high art and mass culture, the Equipo sought to prompt their viewers to reflect on contemporary society.[16] These characteristics were for Llorens evidence that they were not a "local variant of the general Pop phenomenon."[17] In contrast to the Equipo, Llorens argued, the American Pop artists' approach to comics was mediated by their highly subjective response to mass cultural imagery and the artists' own signature styles, both calling attention to authorship.[18]

In his 1968 sociological and semiotic study *Història social del còmic*, Terenci Moix explored the critical appeal of the comic strip to wide

7 Vicente Aguilera Cerni, *España Libre: Esposizione d'arte spagnola contemporanea* (Rimini, Italy: [No editor listed], 1964), n.p. For discussion of the exhibition. See Paula Barreiro López, "La invención de la vanguardia en la España franquista: Estrategias políticas y realidades aparentes," in Víctor Bergasa, Miguel Cabañas, Manuel Lucena Giraldo and Idoia Murga, Eds. *¿Verdades cansadas? Acerca del mundo hispánico en Europa.* (Madrid: CSIC, 2009), pp. 347-362, 358-361.

8 This understanding of the prints as a kind of comic strip was the subject of a recent exhibition curated by Salvador Haro and Inocente Soto. See *Picasso: Viñetas en el Frente* (Barcelona: Museu Picasso y Málaga: Museo Picasso, 2011).

9 There were Estampa Popular groups in other cities in Spain including Madrid, Barcelona and Córdoba, see *Estampa Popular*, 1996, *op. cit.*

10 The cover is reproduced on page 115 of the catalog *Figuration Narrative Paris 1960-1972*. I thank Romy Golan for bringing this to my attention.

11 Michel Dalmace distinguishes between four strategies used by the artists, "citation," "intertextuality," "interplasticity," and "transplasticity." See "De la cita a la transplasticidad," in *Equipo Crónica: Catálogo Razonado* (Valencia: IVAM/Centro Julio González, 2001), pp. 23-38.

12 Facundo Tomás, "El Equipo Crónica cuarenta años después," in *Equipo Crónica en la colección del IVAM* (Valencia: IVAM/Centro Julio González, 2005), pp. 23-63, 28 and 31.

13 Cited in Facundo Tomás, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

14 Ricardo Marín Viadel, *Equipo Crónica: Pintura, Cultura, Sociedad* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, Diputació de Valencia, 2002), pp. 44-46.

15 Tomás Llorens, *Equipo Crónica* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1972), pp. 22-23, 28. See also Castro Flórez, p. 33-39.

16 F. Tomás, pp. 31-33.

17 T. Llorens, 1972, p. 23, for his discussion of the differences between American Pop and the Equipo, see pp. 14-24

18 In fact the strategies used by American Pop artists had much in common with the Spanish group's. See F. Tomás, pp. 39-41 and Robert Rosenblum's 1963 article "Roy Lichtenstein and the Realist Revolt," reprinted in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, Steven Henry Madoff, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 189-193.

audiences. He praised the Equipo for its "intellectual view" of comics, and illustrated the 1968 Estampa Popular calendar in the book.[19] As did Llorens, Moix drew distinctions between the Equipo's citation of comic strips and American Pop artists' use of such imagery. He discussed Spanish comics within a broader international history of the genre. Moix cited the call for a rigorous intellectual and aesthetic analysis of the comic in the "avant propos" of the catalog for the *Bande dessinée et Figuration Narrative* exhibition in Paris which, as we have seen, included work by Equipo Crónica.[20] In this way and from a local vantage point, Moix referred to discussions about art and comics abroad, analyzing examples from the US, Spain, and the rest of Europe.

In 1967, the Equipo began to create a series of thematic paintings in which visual citations appeared as elements of the narrative. After they came into contact with the Figuration Narrative artists there was an important shift in their practice of citation. They juxtaposed images taken from mass culture and art history to suggest visual analogies between the past and the present that slyly evoked the political situation in Franco's Spain. Rather than introducing variations of images within a grid format, they expanded their narratives into groups of discrete, interrelated works. They further complicated this practice by citing their own works in successive series of paintings. Like the Figuration Narrative artists, the Equipo Crónica incorporated imagery drawn from the work of US Pop artists, particularly Lichtenstein and Warhol, in order to critique Franco's regime in relation to US government foreign policy, targeting American Pop art as a form of cultural imperialism.[21] One particularly important source for their citations was Spanish art history, particularly the work of Goya, El Greco and Velázquez. They began to introduce these art-historical citations in 1965, although Solbes had already incorporated related references in prints produced under the auspices Estampa Popular. References to canonical Spanish artists had also appeared in the work of Arroyo and the Icelandic artist Erró (b. 1932), promoted by Gassiot-Talabot and defended in Paris as standard bearers of the new political narrative painting.[22]

Debates regarding realism, politics and art are at the center of *El intruso* (Collection of the Diputación de València) [Fig. 1], a work from the *Guernica* series of 1969. As Ricardo Marín and Fernando Castro Flórez have pointed out, it was produced at a time when Franco's government was attempting to broker the return of the painting to Spain, a perverse attempt to appropriate and transform Picasso's statement of political defiance against the regime[23] Picasso's wartime appointment by the Republican Government as Director of the Prado, and his explicit instructions that *Guernica* be returned to Spain upon the dictator's death, were alluded to in some works from the series in which figures that populate Picasso's masterpiece are shown in the Prado's central gallery. In this way, the Equipo artists addressed the regime's appropriation of the Spanish art-historical

19 Terenci Moix, *Historia Social del comic* [1968]. Revised and expanded edition (Barcelona: Brugera, 2007), pp. 57, 211.

20 Moix, pp. 93-94.

21 My thinking about this strategy emerged from conversations with Romy Golan as we were preparing our lecture.

22 Jean-Paul Ameline, "Aux sources de la Figuration Narrative," in *Figuration Narrative: 1960-1972*, pp. 17-32, pp. 24-25, and Castro Flórez, pp. 57, 61, and 63. The latter refers to Angel Kalenberg's notion of "metapainting" to refer to Equipo Crónica's citing of earlier paintings in their own work.

23 Marín, pp. 57, 85. See also Castro Flórez, pp. 61-62, 71-72 and Tomás, p. 48.

1.
Equipo Crónica *El intruso,* 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 140 x 200 cm. Diputació de València Collection © Equipo Crónica (Manolo Valdés) VEGAP, Madrid, 2013

canon as a "national" tradition *tout court*, and its attempts to depoliticize Picasso's biting indictment of war and fascism. For the Equipo, *Guernica*'s reappearance or "intrusion" into the Prado pointed to its glaring absence in Spain as an enduring denunciation of the Dictatorship and a source of deep international embarrassment for the regime. What is more, this act of dislocation in turn evoked *Guernica*'s prolonged sojourn at The Museum of Modern Art in New York City since the fall of the Spanish Republic in 1939. In this way, the title *El intruso* alluded to a series of playful displacements enacted within the work itself. Two distinct parties were constituted as "intruders" within a specific historical process; both MoMA and the Franco regime attempted to appropriate the painting to advance their own political and social agendas.[24]

In the painting the Spanish comic book character El Guerrero del Antifaz emerges from the central portion of *Guernica*. The character was popular in the 1940s and 1950s and evoked El Cid, a figure linked to the history of the Christian conquest of Muslim territories in València.[25] Through such visual plays, the contradiction between the regime's appeal to a timeless Spanish tradition and economic modernity were meant to catalyze the viewer into critical thought and action. By citing *Guernica*, the artists inserted themselves within a specifically Spanish lineage of political painting, a battle scene as iconic as Velázquez's *Rendición de Breda* of 1634-35 in the collection of the Prado. They also signaled the evolution of their own work in relation to Picasso's depictions of the Spanish Civil War. As we saw above, Picasso's *Dream and Lie of Franco* appeared on the cover of the anti-Franco exhibition España Libre, and the artists' early works echoed the prints' comic strip format. In the *Dream and Lie of Franco*, Picasso created a series of variations on themes in which characters drawn from his

24 I thank Romy Golan for suggesting the possible reference to MoMA's role as keeper of Picasso's painting.
25 Moix, p. 164 and Castro Flórez, p. 65.

2.
Equipo Crónica
El realismo socialista y el Pop-Art en el campo de batalla, 1969.
Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 200 cm
(Manolo Valdés Collection, on temporary loan at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía)

own oeuvre, references to Goya's *Disasters of War*, and satirical interpretations of Franco's propaganda imagery appeared as vignettes in the narrative format of a comic strip or popular broadsheet.[26]

By citing *Guernica*, the Equipo team signaled the centrality of Picasso's oeuvre for their artistic practice and political militancy, asserting the legitimacy of painting as a medium through which to denounce injustice, just as Estampa Popular had insisted upon the efficacy of print media for political ends. By incorporating the figure of the Guerrero del Antifaz, Equipo Crónica in turn ironically referenced Franco's own self-fashioning as a new El Cid and crusader against Communism, a rhetorical strategy Picasso had himself satirized in the *Dream and Lie of Franco*. In this way, the Equipo alluded to Franco's strategy during the Cold War. In one of their many ironic inversions, they adapted a ubiquitous comic book character created by the Valencian illustrator Manolo Gago (1925-1980), in order to suggest parallels between themselves and Picasso as anti-Franco crusaders.

Also in 1969 the group completed *El realismo socialista y el Pop-Art en el campo de batalla* [Fig. 2], a kind of visual manifesto in which they referred to debates regarding Figuration Narrative and Socialist Realism in Paris as well as to the political situation in Spain.[27] An example of the controversy generated by these painters' exhibitions is Pierre Restany's scathing attack published in the Parisian journal *Combat* in December

26 For a discussion of Picasso's response to Franco's propaganda in relation to the prints, see Miriam Basilio, "`Serial Effects': Picasso's Response to Franco's Propaganda and Atrocities" in *Picasso, Viñetas en el frente*, pp. 103-110.
27 Ameline, "Aux sources de la figuration narrative" *op. cit.*, for an overview of the critical debates in France in the 1950s and 60s. See also Paula Barreiro López, "Hacia la izquierda, el acomodo de una vanguardia 'sans rivages' en el discurso estético marxista de los años sesenta," unpulished lecture, *Encuentros Transatlánticos: discursos vanguardistas en España y Latinoamérica*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, July 13, 2013 and her forthcoming book *Constructing an avant-garde: art, politics and cultural interchange during Spanish late francoism.*

1967. Its title, "L'internationale de la mediocrité," clearly referred to the Communist International and the aesthetic political commitment of art and propaganda in general. Specifically, Restany focused on ideological contradictions he observed between the group's political platform and their recuperation of painting as a medium. "There is no Salon de la Jeune Peinture that does not include examples of propaganda murals from Peking or Cuba," he insisted, satirizing the Equipo Crónica as the "the pseudo-Utrillos" of the comic, the "pseudo-Meissoniers" of the Vietnam War.[28]

Indeed, in this painting from the series *La recuperación* (Coll. Manolo Valdés, Madrid, currently on long term loan to the Museo Reina Sofía), the group cited a range of sources culled from American and Spanish comics, Vietnamese and Chinese propaganda posters, Spanish art history and American Pop art. Executing their works in acrylic on panel (later they preferred canvas) in order to evoke the slick surfaces of movie posters and magazine advertisements, they erased all traces of facture. Through startling and often humorous combinations, the artists sought to attract viewers, who would recognize both the cited images and the style used to depict them. Significantly, they used the alternate title *El Bocadillo*, or word bubble, when the painting was reproduced in the Leftist journal *Triunfo* in 1969 in an article by Alonso de los Ríos which followed an exhibition of the *Recuperación* series at València's Val i 30 gallery in December 1968. Created between 1967 and 1969, the series cited Velázquez's Spanish royal portraits and iconic paintings by El Greco that were placed in incongruous contemporary settings alluding to the regime's military powerbase, its nascent consumer culture, its drive toward technological and infrastructural modernization, and the everyday pleasures of bourgeois leisure under Franco. References to Cold War politics appeared throughout the series in various guises, alongside references to Old Masters and modern works. Comic book characters and fragments taken from paintings by Léger and Picasso appear in two of the paintings, and one of the works, titled *The Death of Che*, relocated a well-known press photograph of the Marxist revolutionary's corpse to a field of colorful lush foliage.

The seemingly innocent title of the article, "La recuperación de la història, del Greco al Pop," engaged the group's views on the history of art.[29] The Equipo Crónica members distinguished their work from Spanish Informalismo, Expressionism, "populist realism," and American Pop, citing the Americans' "irrationality."[30] In contrast, they "sought a kind of repulsion that obliges spectators to distance themselves and permits them to take a critical attitude."[31] The viewers would reflect on their current situation as Spaniards. By using the term "distancing" they elliptically alluded to Llorens' characterization of their practice as a visual analogue to Brecht's "epic theater" through which the actors (and by extension the painters of the Equipo) addressed their audience. In *El realismo socialista y el Pop-Art en el campo de batalla*, Velázquez's *El infante don Carlos* of 1626-27 is

28 Pierre Restany, "L'Internationale de la mediocrité," *Combat*, Paris, December 4, 1967, excepted in Ameline and Chevallier, "Chronologie/anthologie 1960-72," *op. cit.*, p. 126.
29 C. Alonso de los Ríos, "La recuperación de la historia, del Greco al Pop," *Triunfo*, Num. 345, Año XXIII, January 11, 1969, pp. 12-17.
30 *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
31 *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

shown at the bottom left while the remainder of the composition is contained within a cartoon bubble, a veiled reference to Franco's July 1969 decree appointing Juan Carlos de Borbón-Dos Sicilias as his successor.[32] Through the substitution of one royal portrait for another, the Equipo played on the new successor's pledge of allegiance to Franco and his designated role as a mouthpiece for the regime. The figure of Victory in turn pointed to the regime's appropriation of classical culture to portray itself as an anti-Communist defender of Western civilization, just as allegorical figures had earlier been used in propaganda posters and sculptures commemorating Franco's defeat of the Republic.[33] The reference to Don Juan Carlos called attention to the problem of Franco's succession, and ultimately to the survival of the regime.

The composition also included a number of references to international political events. A photograph of US President Lyndon Baines Johnson on the telephone, and figures taken from Chinese and Vietnamese posters, pointed to American military intervention abroad. This was a subject the Equipo had explicitly addressed in earlier works, such as *Vietnam* of 1966, which included in separate registers images based on press photographs of Vietnamese citizens and American soldiers. The group's aim was to refer elliptically to US government Cold War policies that were the basis for Western democracies' support for the Dictatorship. A rendering of the American cartoon character, police inspector Dick Tracy (created by Chester Gould in 1931 and appropriated for WWII era propaganda) further advanced analogies between American and Francoist militarism. It is interesting to note that in his study of comic books Moix had suggested that cartoons could be subversively appropriated to critique US intervention in Vietnam.[34] Illustrations on facing pages of Moix's book paired the Spanish military comic book *Hazañas Bélicas* with a work by Lichtenstein. Captioned "Lichtenstein, the war and the assimilation of comics into the New Narrative Figuration," the pairing included an ironic juxtaposition of local and American comics, a tactic employed by both the Equipo and their European counterparts.[35] The artists were clearly aware of Moix's book. In the article, De los Ríos noted that Moix mentioned Valencian artists' groups' interest in comics.[36]

Also worthy of note is the design of the poster advertising the 1967 Paris exhibition, in which a character from the Tintin comic book series is reading a newspaper. The shock and surprise on his face is echoed by his cap, which pops out from his head. An enlarged comic strip in three registers appears above the character's head in the form of a thought bubble, containing scenes from Milton Caniff's *Steve Canyon* series, Lichtenstein's *Edie Diptych* (1963), and Bernard Rancillac's painting *La fin tragique d'un apôtre* (1967). Visually, this may be read as a dialectical narrative in which the comic strip source is contrasted with the Pop image, resulting in the political message that is transmitted through Figuration Narrative's own amalgam of two types of imagery. The Equipo Crónica's encapsulation of

32 This is a subject to which they returned in two works of the same title, the print La pincelada and a painting, both of 1971. In both, one of Lichtenstein's characteristic brushstrokes was layered over a royal portrait, in the former of Philip IV and in the latter two figures in contemporary dress, most likely Juan Carlos and his wife Sofia. For the print, see Marín, p. 9-10, who links it to the decree naming Juan Carlos head of state.

33 I discuss varied aspects of Franco's propaganda in my book *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (forthcoming, Ashgate).

34 Moix, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

35 Moix, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.

36 Alonso de los Ríos, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

their own painting within a word bubble may be a subtle reference to their participation in this exhibition. According to Michel Dalmace, some of their paintings were shown in controversial 1967 exhibitions including the Figuration Narrative artists such as the XVIII Salon de la Jeune Peinture and Le Monde en Question.[37] Through their citations, Equipo signaled their complicity with the Figuration Narrative group's political and artistic positions, and their stake in critical debates about the role of realism, painting, and propaganda.

The comic strip as a political cartoon chronicling events of the day points to the painting's content. Details from Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol's works are shorthand for the establishment of American military bases in Spain in exchange for American economic aid. Such links were explicitly made in editorials and vignettes that appeared in the clandestine Valencian Communist Party newspaper *La Verdad*.[38] At this time, the Equipo maintained contacts with members of the Party, as did numerous artists and intellectuals in Spain and abroad.[39] In *El realismo socialista y el Pop-Art en el campo de batalla* a rendering of the iconic photograph of the raising of the US flag at Iwo Jima is encapsulated within a word bubble that emanates from Tracy's mouth. This strategy underscores the Equipo's goal to establish political analogies through reference to comics and press photographs that serve propagandistic functions.[40] In addition, the larger word bubble emerging from the Infante's mouth is a pun on the elliptical language the artists and those living in Spain used to discuss the political situation in the country. Although by this time press censorship had been abolished, self-censorship was still necessary, as journals like *Triunfo* were sometimes shut down, and issues confiscated or destroyed. By encapsulating most of the painting within a word bubble, the Equipo slyly indicated their omission of text from the comic strip. In so doing, they may also have alluded to the magazine's substitution of the politically controversial title *El realismo socialista y el Pop-Art en el campo de batalla* for another, *El Bocadillo*.

In this way, the Equipo substituted the relation between text and image for a visual narrative that they articulated through strategies of citation, montage, juxtaposition, incongruous pairings, as well as through visual and historical analogies. They also playfully alluded to the self-referential operations they performed, and to their multilayered practice of citation. In their series they often recycled the same images with variations, and in more than one they referred to their own work as producers. In this case, the Infante may stand in for Juan Carlos and the Equipo simultaneously. This is suggested by the fact that the group included self-portraits and visual allusions to their authorship in their next series, *Autopsia de un oficio* of 1970-1971. The overall effect of the painting, a dizzying array of foliage that resembles both camouflage and a Vietnamese jungle, analogizes artistic production with guerilla warfare. The painting of Che Guevara in a similar landscape from the *Recuperación* series makes a similar point.

37 See "La recuperación," in *Equipo Crónica, Catálogo razonado*, pp. 76-77.

38 See for example *Verdad. Órgano del Comité Provincial de Valencia del Partido Comunista de España*, 2ª Época, no. 1 (July 1968).

39 Facundo Tomás, p. 33.

40 The comic book hero was described in these terms in *Bande desinée et figuration narrative*, pp. 61, 85, and Moix, pp. 283-286.

3.
Equipo Crónica
La Rendición de Torrejón, 1971.
Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 200 cm
(Josep Suñol Collection, Barcelona)
© Equipo Crónica (Manolo Valdés)
VEGAP, Madrid, 2013

If the artists functioned as guerillas in *El Realismo socialista y el Pop en el campo de batalla*, in *La Rendición de Torrejón* (1971, Private Collection, Barcelona) [Fig. 3], they presented another contemporary battle painting in which they assumed the mantle of Velázquez to satirize Franco's role as a pawn in international Cold War politics. Perhaps this was their riposte to Restany's barbed comparison of the Figuration Narrative's works with Meissonier's battle paintings in the article cited above. It may also have been intended as a reference to Arroyo's 1964 painting *La Maja de Torrejón*. In this work Arroyo interjected Goya's nude maja into a background that included a truncated image of the US flag. Once again, Solbes and Valdés layered citations from art-historical and comic book images to create veiled allusions to current events. Thus Velázquez's iconic battle painting was appropriated to refer obliquely to US military bases established in 1953 at Torrejón de Ardoz, Rota and Zaragoza. With these bases came American economic aid and support for Spain's entry into the United Nations. Negotiations to renew the American military presence took place in 1971. The bases were harshly criticized in the clandestine Communist press as evidence of US imperialism.[41] Substituting in this way current for historical events with a nod to Velázquez, Equipo Crónica depicted US soldiers in the role of magnanimous victors in battle.

41 See *Verdad. Órgano del Comité Provincial de Valencia del Partido Comunista de España*, 2ª Época, no. 1, July 1968, p. 9

To this end, in *La Rendición de Torrejón* the key of the city of Breda from Velázquez's great painting is substituted for a crusader's sword, the weapon of the Spanish comic book character El Guerrero del Antifaz. Among the American troops are helmeted soldiers culled from Milton Caniff's *Male Call,* a war cartoon created in 1942, a reference to the Allies' struggle against Fascism in light of subsequent United States support for Franco.[42] Also pictured are characters from the comic book series *Hazañas Bélicas,* in which recurring groups of soldiers fight diverse international wars. This citation may refer to the artists of the Equipo themselves as latter day cultural warriors. As we have seen, they often referred to their creation of historical parallels through combinations of varied visual sources, including their own works. Finally, the recurring characters may be viewed as playful references to the group's use of narrative and seriality for political ends. Significantly, the practice of inserting a historical image or rendering a contemporary one in a period style to reinforce historical parallels was not new in Spain. An anonymous artist paired a drawing of a Republican fighter with a figure from Goya's *Disasters of War* in a 1938 poster with the slogan, "Hoy como el 2 de mayo, el pueblo salvará la independencia de España," creating a visual analogy between the Spanish fight against Napoleon and the struggle to defeat Franco and his Nazi and Fascist allies.[43] Such posters were no doubt familiar to the Equipo artists who, as we have seen, were close to art historian Bozal, author of two groundbreaking works on the history of realism in Spain.[44]

A New "Critical Realism"

In *El realismo plástico en España*, Bozal created a nuanced historical taxonomy for figurative art. He defined discrete stylistic and political strategies for contemporary realism and distinguished artistic approaches among Spain's diverse regions. In a section on realism in the visual arts between 1931 and 1936, he included a number of references to works by Republican artists produced during the Spanish Civil War, citing critical debates about art and propaganda from that period. Bozal referred to "propagandists, cartoonists, and printmakers" whose work represented the "principal achievement of realism."[45] Discussing various approaches to "political realism," he alluded to a form of "critical realism" that had not been achieved by artists at that time.[46] As the Equipo Crónica recuperated *Guernica*, they, along with their contemporaries – artists and critics alike – invoked the truncated utopian project of Republican art and politics, which they hoped would be revived with the End of the Dictatorship. In the three paintings I have examined here, we see the ways in which the Equipo used citations as part of a stylistic arsenal to assert their ideological and political platform as they began to exhibit outside of Spain. The artists cited art-historical masterpieces, comics, films and print culture that they and their

42 This comic book was discussed in the catalog *Bande desinnée et Figuration Narrative*, *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 87. Further research is necessary to determine whether the Equipo Crónica consulted this reference as well as Moix's book in selecting some of the American characters they included in their paintings and prints.

43 I discuss this type of imagery in my forthcoming book, cited above.

44 Valeriano Bozal, *El realismo entre el desarrollo y el subdesarrollo*. Madrid: Editorial Ciencia Nueva, 1966. He discussed Estampa Popular, the Valencian Crónica de la Realidad, a broad grouping of various artists including the printmakers, Equipo Realidad and Equipo Crónica, see pp. 193-202.

45 Valeriano Bozal Fernández, *El realismo Plástico en España de 1900-1936*. Madrid: Ediciones Península, 1967. (Reprint of Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1966.), p. 153.

46 *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

contemporaries believed would be familiar to their audiences. In creating surprising and ironic combinations of imagery, they intended to provoke viewers to reflect on the state of Spanish society. At the same time, I believe that they made conscious references to artistic and political debates in Spain and Paris regarding the efficacy of painting in general and "critical realism" in particular as pedagogical tools. As artists living in Franco's Spain, the Equipo had a privileged understanding of the political situation that their artistic fellow travelers denounced in international exhibitions. Through a series of self-referential tactics and by ambitiously inserting themselves within Parisian and Spanish artistic and political debates, they took note of the preeminent role of Picasso as a model for a new kind of narrative painting. *Guernica*, Picasso's contemporary battle painting, was marked by traces of the vignettes from the *Dream and Lie of Franco*, just as the Equipo began with prints and shifted to painting to denounce the Spanish dictator. The idea of the comic strip and its narrative appeal to mass audiences when applied to painting led the Equipo Crónica to engage in a playful but highly contentious debate about contemporary realism, painting, and politics in Franco's Spain.

A Transatlantic Dialogue

John G. Hanhardt and Francesc Torres

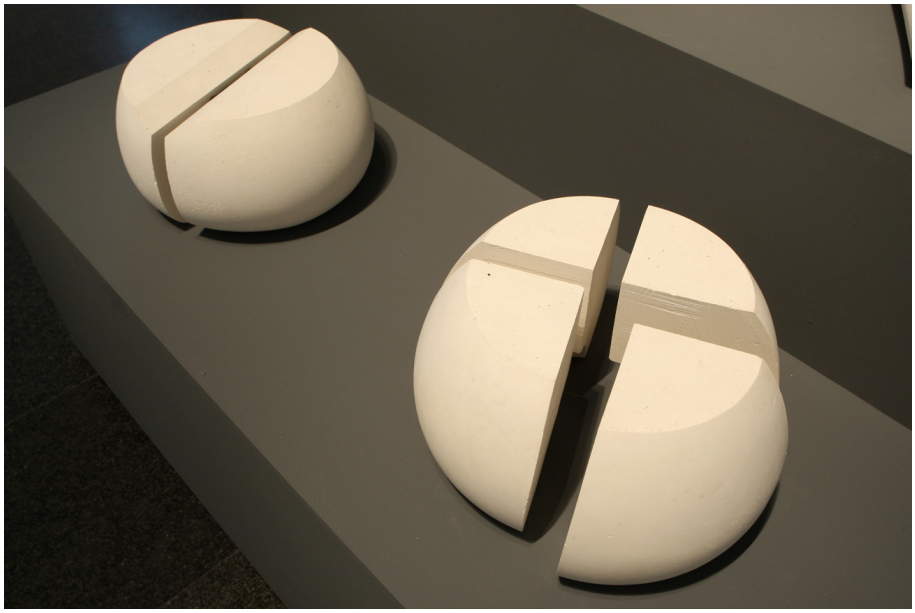
I

John G. Hanhardt

I want to begin my introduction to Francesc Torres's remarks on conceptual art during the late 1960s and early 1970s with some thoughts about his art and ideas from the perspective of a curator in the United States. I first met Torres in 1975, when I was curator and head of the Film and Video Department at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York, and over the years, I showed his work in a number of exhibitions there, including: *Image's Identity* (1974), *Residual Regions* (1976-78), *The Head of the Dragon* (1981), *Oikonomos* (1991), and *Belchite – South Bronx: A Trans-Cultural and Trans-Historical Landscape* (1987-88). In addition, I was curator of his retrospective exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, in Madrid, titled *The Head of the Dragon*, in 1991.

Through his multimedia installation projects, Torres fashioned a distinctive place in contemporary art. Born in Barcelona, he has made New York City his home since 1974. While living in Barcelona, New York, Chicago, and Paris between 1968 and 1974, he realized his desire to be an artist and discovered in the materials, processes, and ideologies of everyday life the sources for his art. The material aesthetics of minimalism, process, conceptual, and body art gave Torres the means to develop a sophisticated body of work with a cognitive aesthetic centered on the viewer. Torres explores a complex negotiation of process and ideology in the transaction between viewer and artwork. The experience of a large-scale installation project in which viewers read texts, examine drawings, watch projected films, slides, and videotapes, involves the audience in a multi-textual environment. His work engages viewers in highly charged political and psychological issues that actively elicit responses from them.

One path to negotiating the complexity of Torres's art is to consider how he articulates an aesthetic text by working with the divisions of process, materials, and ideology in contemporary art. The articulation of these issues is discernible early on, in projects from the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the first pieces created in Barcelona and Paris, Torres moves from the precise geometric forms of the *Prototype for a Series of Multiples in Poly-*



1.
Francesc Torres, *Prototype for a Series of Multiples in Polyester,* 1968

ester (1968), [Fig. 1] to geometries within nature in *Meniscuses* (1969), in which the processes of chance and nature are articulated as transitory phenomena. They exist in real time, a point in the flow of occurrences which the artist forces us to acknowledge. The perceptual and transitory nature of this work foregrounds the viewer as crucial. If you are not there, the work does not exist unless it is documented, in which case the still or video camera stands in for the spectator.

Projects such as *Uniformed Rain or More Than One Drop of Water* (1969), *Elemental Considerations* (1972), and *Occupation of a Given Space Through a Human Action* (1973) locate Torres within the process aesthetic of conceptual artists working in the United States, such as John Baldessari (b. 1939), Terry Fox (1943-2008), and Bruce Nauman (b. 1942), who worked in a variety of media and materials. They all shared an early interest in video, which was an extension of their effort to return art-making to the materials of everyday life. They were also concerned with reflecting on the way an artwork – be it a videotape, object, or performance – was fashioned. In the videotapes of these artists, the phenomenon of the camera as a recording and interpreting device is explored; they foreground the representation of recording as a phenomenological process. There is an implicit oppositional relationship to the cultural institution of television, which has been central to the reading of Nauman, Baldessari, Fox, and other artists of this period in the U.S.

This is less central to interpreting Torres's work with the medium. He employs video and uses it as a means to extend his aesthetic issues into the recorded and moving image, but television does not figure in his work until his later videotapes. In part this is because of his experience in Europe, where cable and alternative television did not exist. Primarily, however, Torres saw video as another medium to bring into his work as a means

2.
Francesc Torres,
Chicago Recognition, 1973

to communicate and deconstruct ideological systems of the political left and right.

The human body, articulated not only in terms of the spectator but in relation to the artist himself, occupies a central place in Torres's work of the 1970s. This follows a trajectory from his early conceptual work, which explored the processes of various natural phenomena, to the later works, beginning with *Chicago Recognition* (1973) [Fig. 2], which was concerned with epistemological investigations into our perceptions of the urban environment as well as our perceptions of human identity (*Image's Identity*), and his more personal investigations into his own identity (*Almost Like Sleeping* and *Personal Intersections*). However, the political subtext is critical to the reading of these works. *Chicago Recognition*, for example, explores how we construct knowledge through our presuppositions and expectations of the urban environment. Torres extends those questions inward as he examines how we assemble our perception of the self through the knowledge given to us. In Torres's performance projects, he explores his body as a complex signifier of imagined and real expectations. In *Image's Identity* (1974) the audience confronted how the real and imagined self is constructed within the other. The artist concealed himself behind a large bed sheet. Thus invisible to the audience, he spoke about himself, identifying key "facts" about his life. At the end of his spoken monologue he broke through the sheet and engaged the audience in the question of his identity, visual versus textual.

In performance installation pieces including *Almost Like Sleeping* (1975) and *Personal Intersections* (1975), Torres reexamines his life and the familial and social forces that shaped it. This work is distinguished by its conceptual rigor and by the artist's multimedia approach to examining his image and self. Unlike the work of Vito Acconci (b. 1940), Charlemagne

3.
Francesc Torres, *Accident,* 1977

Palestine (b. 1945), and William Wegman (b. 1943), who were exploring the body within narrative and performance constructs, Torres placed the social and political contexts at the center of his work. Sexual and social construction of the self come under scrutiny in work that is mediated less by its structure than by the historical and psychological forces articulated in its text.

By ideologically framing the body/self as a political being constructed and manipulated by social forces, Torres creates a distinctive place for himself in the history of body and conceptual art. This work was crucial in Torres's emergence as an artist as he used the materials of his art to search for his own identity within the changing politics of Europe. Torres's self-fashioning took place within the context of Spain's totalitarian regime, the fusion of intellectuals and workers and their subsequent suppression in the May 1968 uprising in France, and the dialectic of socialist and liberal democracies confronting the American war in Vietnam and repression in Eastern Europe. For Torres, this experience of self-discovery within a political context resulted in a profound skepticism toward utopian ideologies and their effect on the self and the body politic.

In the mid-1970s, following Franco's death, Torres began a dialectical operation that sought to explore the body as a cognitive being in relation to issues of political practice and ideological theory. This ambitious agenda was realized within the three-dimensional and multimedia spaces of a series of installations. In the 1976 Venice Biennale, Torres presented *Construction of the Matrix*, a darkened environment enclosing a mound of earth littered with bullet casings. On the mound, two open books, *The Communist Manifesto* and *The Gospel According to St. John*, were illuminated by two reading lamps. An image of a human figure in the fetal position was also projected onto the mound; over this human figure a pair of surgi-

cal scissors was suspended, further articulating the suture of birth and death within the arena of the competing ideologies of politics and religion. Torres places the fulfillment of the individual in question within the daily combat of ideas as politics. The question of whether human behavior arises from innate epistemological cognates or the particular agenda of an ideology is pursued further in later installations such as *Accident* (1977), *The Head of the Dragon* (1981), and *Tough Limo* (1983).

Torres approaches politics in his art through a non-doctrinaire and radical questioning of the power of institutions, political parties, and states as it is conveyed through the visual and linguistic rhetoric of their leaders. Torres's strategies for exploring this complex mix of history and theory are worked out through multiple layers of his multimedia installations, projects which acknowledge, once again, the viewer (and artist) as the ultimate subject and victim of the technologies of power. In *Accident* (1977) [Fig. 3], rotating film images of Russian premier Nikita Khrushchev giving a speech and a static image of a man eating bread are projected on the walls of a gallery space. The space is filled with wooden poles on which are affixed Xerox copies of a man urinating on a motorcycle; the motorcycle, painted red, sits in the center of the exhibition space. The wrecked motorcycle signifies the power of industrialization and the technological movement of goods, people, and ideas across real and perceived boundaries. The man pissing on the motorcycle recalls animal territorial behavior and reveals the powerful forces of desire and conquest that reside within us all.

Francesc Torres, *Accident,* 1977 (detail)

The fragility of human society and the primitive need for security and control are factors in the problematic advance of ideologies that are originally based on hope but are, in fact, destructive and controlling of human desires. Torres evokes the forces and destructive power of history in *Resid-*

ual Regions, from 1978. The site of a farmhouse outside of Barcelona becomes the source for objects and images in an installation that creates a materialist history of Spain. Retrieved objects (shoes, bullets, forks, etc.) from the artist's archaeological dig into the past are reframed through photographs that present images from Spain's history and films and videotapes that document the discovery of the objects and their manipulation by the artist. The idea of history is no longer a simple and safe rhetoric, but is recalled with the poignant force of actual objects being reemployed by the artist in the installation. History becomes an ideological interpretation of events as Torres exposes its reality in the materials he has retrieved.

The infusion of history and ideology into the myths and politics of daily existence and all spheres of culture and economics was articulated by Torres in his major installation projects of the 1980s. Torres has charted a position that combines a certain European cynicism with an understanding of ideologies as he saw them in Franco's Spain, in the crushing of the May 1968 revolt in De Gaulle's France, and in the failed effort to establish political art and theory as an effective oppositional force within the coopttive marketplace of American culture and politics. Torres's art is not a programmatic plan or doctrinaire position that glibly appropriates post-modern nihilism. Rather, it offers a full articulation of possibilities and ideas that the viewer can explore through the multiple combinations offered in his installation. There is no single path or simple answer in reading the projects. Instead, these works offer an open invitation to recombine knowledge in a manner that dismantles one's assumptions about art, culture, economics, and politics.

The distinctive ingredient in Torres's work is his placement of ideology within a meta-discourse relating theory to daily existence. However, rather than translating that discourse into a normative narrative, Torres leaves his project open to a continuous interpretation unlimited by rigid formalism, aestheticism, or rhetorical play, so that each installation becomes a genuine intellectual interplay among the parts that constitute the whole.

No other artist has charted a course that touches so closely on the dramatic changes that have occurred in Eastern and Central Europe. The overthrow of bureaucratic state communism and the challenge it creates for us in the capitalist and social/democratic West, have been continuously pre-figured in Torres's Euro-American biography and artworks. Torres's skeptical realism, which acknowledges the tenuous nature of human invention and societal achievement, has become the means for his quest to foreground the destructive power of confrontational politics and ideologies through his art.

While sharing with other artists certain formal issues born out of conceptual, process, and performance art, Torres has managed to place the political and ideological into his work through an operation that acknowledges the fragile position of the viewer and ultimately that of the artist in

attempting to change the wrongs and ills of society. Torres's installations become laboratories of ideas, sites for reflection and inquiry, spaces in which to challenge and confront the assumptions of what we call normal or neutral within the states – political or psychological – that we occupy. Torres asks that we keep our minds open to the lesson of the past and the questions of the present.

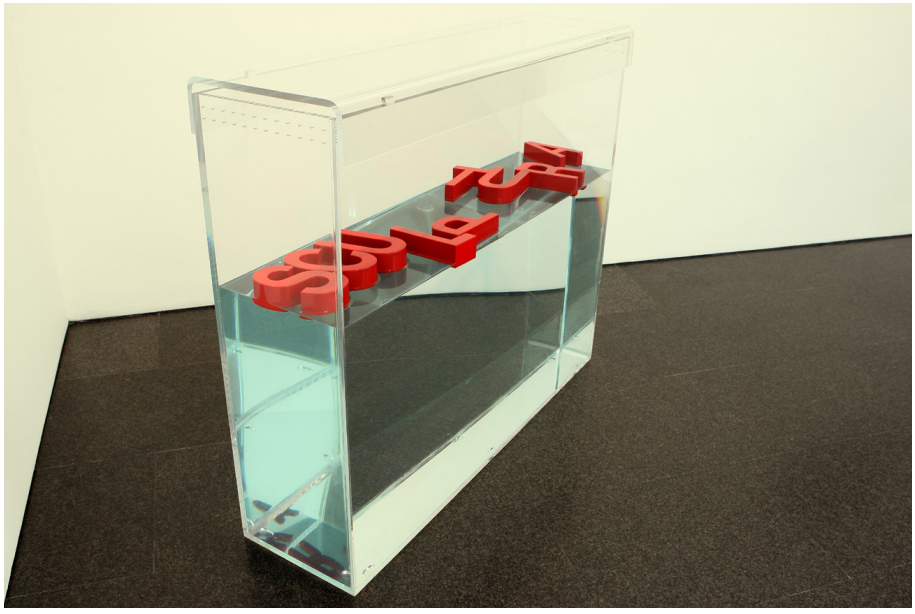
John G. Hanhardt

II

Francesc Torres

My conceptual work belongs to the beginning of my career and evolved between 1968 and 1974, when I was living between Paris, Barcelona and Chicago. The work fluctuates from conceptual sculpture to pure conceptual art and performance art. After that, and coinciding with my move to New York City, I started making multimedia installations, primarily a combination of objects, film, sound and especially video. This work was historical and political in content and had a strong connection with literature and non-linear narratives, which constitute the main body of my work to the present. It has been the only practice that allowed me to deal with different kinds of artistic fields without having to commit exclusively to any of them. Video was a significant tool that allowed me to bridge conceptual art and installation. I originally used it as I did photography, as a means of documenting conceptual performances. In *Image's Identity* from 1974, for example, a video-recorded performance in Montreal, I gave biographical information about myself (cultural, political ideological identity, etc.) while covered by a white bed sheet stapled against a gallery wall. Once finished, I emerged by ripping the fabric, as if coming out of a cocoon, and I asked the audience if the mental image they made of me while I was talking had anything to do with the person they had in front of them. A discussion developed. The piece explicitly needed an active audience. These types of ideas, which were widely present in the experimental art of the period, defined, perhaps for the first time, a deliberate intention to erase the hierarchies between art and public. These works were characterized by a non-elitist attitude informed by the general cultural and political atmosphere of the sixties and early seventies. I started using video in this manner in Chicago for the simple reason that it was very difficult to have access to the medium in Europe in the early seventies, and practically impossible in Spain until much later.

I was twenty years old when I started making art, and conceptual art represented a kind of epiphany in more ways than one, some theoretical and some practical. On the theoretical front, the discovery of the power of concrete ideas as the starting point of a process that did not need to result



4.
Francesc Torres, *Sculptura,* 1969

in a physical or permanent presence changed my idea of art forever. This realization challenged many well-established assumptions in a single blow: it questioned the "object-ness" of art and, consequently, its vulnerability – once transformed into a commodity – to the loss of meaning; it questioned the function of the museum as a repository of significant art (museums would not collect conceptual art at that time, but in addition, we were not creating the work in order for it to be collected); it questioned the gallery system, the market, everything. I don't think that it challenged the idea of authorship per se (someone thought about the artwork and created it, even if it was a collective), but it certainly challenged what constitutes the "uniqueness and originality" of a work of art. And all this could be done by simply throwing a piece of paper out the window and photographing its descent. It was mind blowing. On the practical side, it allowed the artist an enormous agility and the possibility of generating many ideas and a lot of experimental work with ease. It was light, and as we would say today, phenomenally sustainable. Of course, life – or should we say the capitalist system – has the perverse ability to turn things on their heads over time, and photographs that were only taken to document an impermanent gesture are now sold by galleries and auction houses and collected by museum and private collectors.

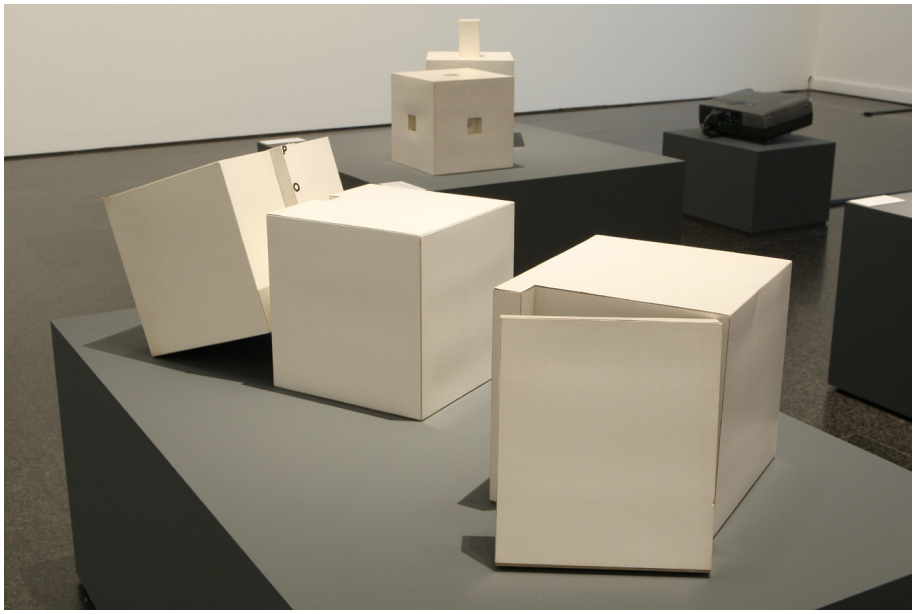
An example of work from that early conceptual period is *Sculptura*, 1969, a Plexiglas prism two-thirds filled with water, with the individual letters of the word "SCULPTURA" (a hybrid word made out of the English, French and Catalan words for sculpture) floating inside. Universal gravity moved the letters, and the original word reconfigured itself in other potential meanings [Fig. 4]. Another example is *Escultura amb estría lateral* (Sculpture with a lateral cut), 1968, consisting of a pile of standard paper sheets that had a die cut near one corner. By piling the sheets of

5.
Escultura amb estría lateral, 1968

paper, a circular indentation appeared, which was the sculptural gesture of the piece. The idea was to make a sculpture, a three-dimensional object, out of two-dimensional elements [Fig. 5]. Or the *object poem series prototypes*,1969, meant to be printed flat on cardboard and sold very cheaply, so they could be cut out and assembled by the owner [Fig. 6].

But rather than emphasizing my own work, I would rather talk about the circumstances that surrounded conceptual art-making in Spain at the time I was there, from 1969 to 1972, and the effects those circumstances had on Spanish conceptual art compared with its British, German, and American counterparts.

Franco was still alive then, but amazingly, Barcelona was steaming despite its isolation, its lack of museums and institutions, the absence of a significant gallery structure, and zero access to specialized literature, all



6.
Francesc Torres,
Object poem series prototypes, 1969

compounded by massive censorship, no civil liberties, and total political repression. However, the city had a unique relationship to 20th-century art and culture; in addition to the impact of Miró, Dalí, and Picasso, there had been a continuous interaction with the European avant-gardes, with some of its members spending time living in the city. Arnold Schomberg, for instance, spent several months working in Barcelona in 1933. The memory of that fifty-year period, from Gaudí to the end of the Civil War, and the proximity to France was a powerful antidote to the dreadful years that followed. Barcelona never looked to Spain culturally; she always looked north and the north meant Paris and, later, London. New York, too, of course, but New York was still too inaccessible for young Spanish artists. One got an idea of what was going on in New York from the bookstores of Paris and London. However, regardless of the fascist cultural landscape, there was a substantial group of young artists – some of us were barely twenty years old – engaged in conceptual art in Barcelona. The political situation made our art an act of resistance against the regime without the need to be representational. (There was no need to paint cops beating striking workers, for example.) We knew very well that what we were doing was the total antithesis of Francoism. In some cases, however, the ideology became very clear, as I will explain later.

Side by side with the contextual pressure that acted on Spanish conceptual art, there was another aspect, clearly autochthonous, that had to do with the influence of visual and concrete poetry that had been very healthy in Spain through the twentieth century. The figure with the most profound influence on us as well as on later generations of artists is Joan Brossa (1919-1998), a great textual and visual poet who started writing poetry in the trenches during the Civil War, where he was wounded. He is known in Europe but totally unknown in the U.S., which is too bad. The American poet and performance artist Emmett Williams knew him well, but probably because he was living in Berlin. Many of us in Spain, Catalan conceptualists and painters, were influenced by him. He died several years ago at age 79.

My beginnings as an artist coincided with my being in Paris in 1968. I dropped out of the École des Beaux Arts (as dormant at the time as Spanish art schools), and I managed to get accepted as an assistant by Piotr Kowalski (1927-2004), a very prominent Art & Science sculptor for whom I worked for a full year while he was preparing his participation in the upcoming Venice Biennale, representing France. He started out as a physicist in the U.S., worked at NASA, abandoned physics and became an architect specializing in tropical architecture and tensile surfaces, then abandoned his architecture career in Paris and became a sculptor. He was an M.I.T. fellow several times. I met him in 1967, shortly after arriving in Paris myself, and working with him was the best training I ever got. He emphasized the idea. The execution and its aesthetic language were the

result of the industrial technique chosen. Without being a secondary affair, the execution of the work was approached as a technical problem to be solved, more as an engineering problem than an aesthetic one – a very Anglo-Saxon approach, I felt at the time, coming from a French artist. This conception had a profound effect on me for years to come – in fact, for my entire professional life. Creating, for instance, fog inside of a bubble or producing rain inside a transparent cube produces something of a great poetic and aesthetic power, and it is beautiful, too. But the execution has more to do with physics and engineering than with art. Today, making a sculpture by phone is no big deal, but in 1967 it was a very different matter, and in Spanish art circles at the time it would have been like invoking the end of the medium. Among the many things Piotr made me aware of in 1968 was video. We remained friends until he died.

In May of that year I collaborated with the printing atelier at the École des Beaux Arts making posters (I was good at lettering, others did the art). The experience of the May events, in addition to my experience as an assistant for Kowalski, was the baggage that I took with me back to Barcelona the following year, in addition to exposure to such art magazines as *Art in America*, *ArtForum*, *Art News*, *Domus*, *Flash Art* and, more significantly for me, *Robbo*, a cutting-edge, short-lived avant-garde magazine. Shortly after returning to Spain, I became a militant in an underground extreme left party. I continued to make conceptual art, trying to convince my comrades that an avant-garde political organization had to generate avant-garde culture and aesthetics from day one. Our reference should be Russian Constructivism, not Social Realism. The canonic painting showing Francoist cops busting the heads of industrial workers was a terribly bourgeois and reactionary aesthetic language, as far as I was concerned. I wasn't even that impressed with Equipo Crónica, for example. The day I was asked to do the portrait of Stalin (!), I left the party. But there is something interesting here: the kind of art I was producing was politically and ideologically informed but it didn't look that way. It gave some of us a way to engage in experimental art that was free from both Francoism and orthodox anti-Francoism. That's why I thought conceptual art was truly revolutionary, at least in Spain.

Regardless of my views at the time, and seen in retrospect, Equipo Crónica's work stands as powerful, imaginative, and timely[1].Their particular brand of political Pop Art has no peer, and I especially remember the piece that they did for the Encuentros de Pamplona[2], Spain, in 1972, *Espectador de Espectadores/Spectator's Watcher.* Two hundred copies of a seated papier-maché, life-size figure of what appeared to be a Francoist secret agent of the political police known as "la social" (from Brigada Político-Social/Socio-Political Brigade), were left scattered in different places of the city where the art event was taking place (auditoriums, sport arenas, public parks, etc.). They were a hit. Adults and children played

1 Editor's note: See Miriam M. Basilio's essay in this volume.

2 Editor's note: The Pamplona Encounters (June 26-July 3, 1972) were a series of public cultural events about experimental artistic trends in the city of Pamplona. 350 avant-garde artists from all over the world attended.

with them and banged them up, while a few were taken away by savvy collectors. They were free! The previous year they had produced the series *Policía y Cultura*, their most emblematic, sharp, and best work in my opinion. Works such as *Pim, Pam, Pop*, where a detachment of U.S. cops in riot gear charges amid signature details of American Pop Art, or *Escuela de Paris/School of Paris*, taken from a photograph of May 1968, in which a group of CRS (Republican Security Corps) do their thing, one of them holding Van Gogh's sunflowers out of the vase, the other Cézanne's apples, all surrounded by characters straight from Manet, Léger, and Rousseau paintings, are absolutely terrific.

There is another Valencian collective, not as prominent as Equipo Crónica, but extremely interesting, known as Equipo Realidad. Their paintings from historical photographic sources, particularly from the Spanish Civil War, are very good. They recall the conceptual use of painterly historical representation of Komar and Melamid and Mark Tansey. The collective unjustifiably faded away, and I think that it deserves a long-delayed re-examination. Another noteworthy movement was Estampa Popular, often mentioned but hardly shown, that spread all over the country in the early 1960s and was devoted to the production of works that were to be inexpensive, accessible and widely distributed among workers and people with little acquisitional power. At least that was the idea. It was a social movement with certain connections with the Cuban popular art of the time, and a clear task of bringing art to the masses in Spain. Their main tool was graphics, and their work spread to several cities in the country. Manolo Valdés, one of the members of the Equipo Crónica, was one of the founders of the Valencia chapter. In spite of having been immersed with poster production in Paris in 1968, this type of work didn't interest me until much, much later.

Let me return for a moment to the *Encuentros de Pamplona* in 1972. It was a huge international gathering of visual artists, dancers, poets, performance artists and experimental musicians organized by the sculptor José Luis Alexanco (b. 1942) and the experimental musician Luis de Pablo (b. 1930), both from Madrid. It was a mess, but a very interesting mess. Franco was still around and the event was financed by the family of Felipe Huarte, a construction magnate with close ties to the regime. ETA (the Basque armed organization) went public against it because, according to them, it had nothing to do with Basque culture and a lot to do with cultural imperialism (they made their point by setting off two car bombs, but alerting the police in order to give them enough time to evacuate the areas). A sizeable chunk of the Catalan leftist intelligentsia wrote a manifesto against it with impeccable Marxist logic, arguing that the event was an act of political collaboration with the regime, barely disguising the anger over the fact that an event of that size and nature could happen in a place other than Barcelona. In spite of all this the event went on for a week. I partici-

pated and I wasn't alone, because the opportunity to meet people like John Cage, Laura Dean, Dennis Oppenheim, or Steve Reich was far more important for many artists of my generation, condemned to a diet of second-hand information, than any other consideration.

When we deal with Spanish conceptual art, we are basically talking about Catalan conceptual art. I am sure that some people in Spain may be offended by this assertion, but it can be easily proven historically. In the early seventies there were very few conceptual artists in Madrid (Valcárcel Medina, Alberto Corazón, Nacho Criado, and ZAJ come to mind) as opposed to fourteen or fifteen in Barcelona. While these numbers are modest in comparison with places like New York, I should remark that Chicago had only two conceptual artists when Angels Ribé and I arrived there in 1972, doubling the local contingent overnight (here we include a couple of images of *Chicago Recognition*). Out of those in Barcelona, twelve, at its peak, became the Grup de Treball (Working Group), which had a significant impact on Spanish art at the time. The Grup de Treball was totally forgotten for decades but it has been revived in the past few years thanks to people like Manuel Borja-Villel, then director of the Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona (MACBA) and curretly director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid; Bartomeu Marí, current director of the Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona; and Vicente Todolí, when he was still the director of the Serralves Foundation in Oporto, Portugal. Because of their influence, other institutional collections have begun to incorporate conceptual art from that period into their permanent holdings. Most of us were Marxists, like everyone else, it seemed, at the time, including abstract painters, but this group defined itself explicitly as a political entity devoted to changing the Spanish political reality in the social arena as artists making conceptual art that was not self-referential. I call it an entity rather than an organization, because its members came from different party affiliations and there was no hierarchy, although a leadership quickly developed. It had a very short life, three years (1972-1975, a lifetime when you are twenty-three), but it was an intense life. Catalan critic Victòria Combalía used to joke that the reason Catalan conceptual art was so austere was because all the avant-garde magazines we obtained with difficulty from abroad were printed in black and white. The lack of color plus the hardcore political discourse put the audience through boot camp. An episode that shook the local culture was an open confrontation between the Grup de Treball and Antoni Tàpies[3], the most internationally known Catalan artist after Miró and Dalí. The group opened fire by declaring that painting was dead and was nothing more than a commodity to feed the market and decorate the spaces of power. Tàpies, logically, was very upset, and blasted back, defending painting as long as it was abstract, and saying that what we did in particular, and conceptual art in general, was anything but art, and that if there was anything salvageable in

3 Editor's note: On this controversy see Javier Montes's essay in this volume.

it, he had done it first. The irony is that he published his response in the pages of *La Vanguardia*, Catalonia's leading newspaper. Being 1972, the paper was very conservative by political imperative and enforced censorship, so Tàpies's reactions and his choice of venue to make them public gave the Grup de Treball the moral high ground.

The event that marked the end of the Grup de Treball was its participation in the 1975 Paris Biennale. A number of circumstances intervened to make that event a particularly odd one. Franco died later that year but nobody knew it was coming by the time the Biennale opened. The number of members had dwindled by then to about half, and of those remaining, three had moved to the U.S., including myself. We continued being de facto members of the group, signing collective papers and occasionally attending meetings when we were in Barcelona. It was decided that the participation of the group would be anonymous for security reasons, and the pages of the catalog would be left blank. The subject of the work was an iconographic study of the execution of Salvador Puig Antich as it was reported in the Spanish printed media. Salvador Puig Antich, whom I had known before he became an anarchist militant, was sentenced to death by garrote in 1973 for shooting and killing a secret police agent in self-defense while he was being severely beaten by a number of agents during the melée of his arrest (he was set up). The sentence had a huge impact in Europe, with demonstrations everywhere. Even the Pope asked for clemency. There was hope for a review of the case and a switch from the death penalty to life in prison. But then ETA (the Basque armed organization fighting for independence) killed Admiral Carrero Blanco, Franco's heir apparent, and that sealed Puig Antich's fate[4]. The project presented by the Grup de Treball in Paris dealt with the printed media iconography of the case in dialogue with Goya's 19th-century drawings and prints of public executions depicting the same method used on Puig Antich, *garrote vil*. By then the three "Americans," had been expelled from the group without notification, Soviet style. To this day I still don't know the reasons, although I have my suspicions. I was invited to show at the Biennale individually, so I left it at that. After this episode, the Group de Treball quietly dissolved. It took 30 years for the group and its activities to be fished out of oblivion by some key institutional people.

I think that if there is a contemporary contribution made by Spanish conceptualism to the international conceptual movement, the Grup de Treball was it. Unless there were some similar instances in Latin America that I am not aware of, the Grup de Treball was the only conceptual proposition that saw itself as ideologically political, making little or no distinction between art making and political action. The only artist showing a direct influence by the activities of the Group de Treball working in Spain right now is Marcelo Expósito (b. 1966), who is a generation younger than us.

4 Editor's note: Puig Antich was arrested on September 15, 1973. The ETA bombing of Carrero Blanco's car took place in Madrid on December 20, 1973. Puig Antich was executed by garroting at the Modelo prison in Barcelona on March 2, 1974.
Catalan artist Joan Miró (1893-1983) responded to this action in his celebrated triptych of the same year, *The Hope of a Condemned Man* (Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona).

One can say that American conceptual art was political as well. Those artists were not complacent at all; they were against the Vietnam War; they didn't want anything to do with the system, but that position was not ideologically articulated in any cohesive and clear way. It was existential, behavioral, cultural, but not ideological as political ideology was understood at the time, especially in Europe. The big general principle was based on the erasure of the difference between art and life, an idea that has been repeated like a mantra ever since, overlooking the epistemological contradiction involved in equating an absolute all-encompassing category (life) with a relative super-structural one (art). It is obvious that nothing is politically neutral, but there is a sizeable difference between the implicitness of the act and its articulation through the lens of an ideological model set on a collision course with the established political system. This was happening in Europe and especially in Spain in the sixties, like it had happened in Russia during the early revolutionary years, but not in the U.S. It has not made much of a difference in the end, though, because everything has been filtered by the same hegemonic art historical narrative and swallowed up by the global digestive system: the market.

To further illustrate my point, I would like to talk briefly about the closest thing to the Grup de Treball that I experienced in New York between 1976 and 1977. I am referring to the AMCC meetings (Artist's Meeting for Cultural Change), a group that met at Artists' Space on Wooster Street to discuss art, political issues and, more importantly, political action in the general social arena. I won't remember every member of the group, and some of them were not consistently present, but the ones I recall are: Leon Golub (1922-2004), Nancy Spero (1926-2009), Rudolph Baranik (1920-1998), Carl Andre (b. 1935), Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945), Sarah Charlesworth (1947-2013), Lucy Lippard (b. 1937), Saul Ostrow, the Oscar winner Kathy Bigelow (b. 1951), Terry Berkowitz and myself. I never managed to get the group to register the need to link up with other non-art groups such as civil unions, labor organizations, and citizen grassroots movements in order to create a wider forum for discussion and street-level action (a matter of course in Spain). Leon Golub and Nancy Spero were among the few whose eyes didn't glaze over when I brought up the matter. Mostly, all we did was to talk about art using Marxist lingo. It became so frustrating that I left after awhile. The experience generated a piece, *Accident*, 1977, shown at 112 Greene Street Gallery in New York. Dealing with the fact that the political radical left wasn't getting anywhere, it foretold the demise of socialism thirteen years before it happened. The installation consisted of a crashed motorcycle painted red; fifty five-foot, two-by-four-inch poles with a Xerox copy stapled at the top showing the same image (a man urinating on the same motorcycle in the installation); two Super 8 film loops, one on a turntable set on a 180-degree sweep (at one point there was a superimposition of both films: one showed a close-

up of a man eating, the other Khrushchev gesticulating at the U.N.); a two-channel soundtrack, a dialogue between a stutterer stating philosophical propositions and a normal speaker talking matter-of-factly about events that happen in life. The motorcycle stands as an ideological device, a vehicle for political ideas that cannot go anywhere because of an accident, and because it is surrounded by territorial demarcations (NATO, the Warsaw Pact, war by proxy, or Vietnam, etc. [Fig. 3 and detail]

Paradoxically, in my opinion, American art became much more overtly political in the 1980s than it had been in the 1960s, perhaps because representational painting took center stage, harking back to the strategies that I was so against in my early years. The irony of this is that while artists like Leon Golub and Nancy Spero were finally recognized as the great artists that they were, their counterparts in Spain who had been explicitly political during the Franco years simultaneously dropped politics out of their work altogether, almost overnight.

Context is fundamentally important in art at the moment the work is generated. How art addresses that context is what makes it historically relevant. But it is not dependent on that context in terms of being relevant as art. Important conceptual works, American or European, continue to be so not because of the context that made them possible, but because of their capacity to resonate through time and permeate the fabric of society after that context is long gone. An artistic gesture against a dictator, for instance, is time-specific, but once time passes and the context changes, the gesture remains as an archetypical act of ethical resistance. But, of course, only if the art is good, whatever that means.

Francesc Torres

II.
MUSEUM NARRATIVES

The Empty Museum

Juan José Lahuerta

"The empty museum" is the title of this essay, because what is, in fact, the main feature of the hundreds of modern art museums built in our cities if not to be empty, totally and completely empty?[1] I will try to explain, and perhaps prove, that this emptiness is the prime condition of museums, a condition of which modern art takes full advantage. While criticizing the museum, art nonetheless makes the museum its bank, the repository where it safeguards its assets and where everything is assigned value. The museum is the "federal reserve" of modern art. Its plenitude is invisible. It represents what one cannot see; all the values of modern art revolve around its opaque emptiness, like a monolith or sphinx. And as with the monolith or sphinx, man appears as a frozen moment in the evolution from monkey to architecture:[2] for the architecture of empty museums is also architecture in and of itself, an expression of the mysterious and sinister power of emptiness.

Juan José Lahuerta

Let us begin with what is considered to be the first modern museum in the strict sense of the word; that is, the first public collection, founded in Paris in July 1793 by the Convention. Numerous authors have recalled that precisely one month later the very same Convention decided to make terror its policy, so the modern museum slightly predates the guillotine, and I think that its logic is at least partly related to that machine of beheading.[3] But for now we will pursue a different line of inquiry, that of a class with no past, the bourgeoisie, which appropriated the collections owned by the nobility and the Church and exhibited them to the public in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre, no longer the king's palace. The Grand Gallery, a kind of linear architecture – in fact, exaggeratedly linear – would become a determining factor in the spatial organization of the museum. But what came first, the linear, extremely elongated space of that gallery covered by a continuous barrel vault, or the decision to place paintings there in rows, one after the other: paintings of all genres, arranged according to size in several tiers, in several layers, mythological paintings, historical paintings, religious paintings, still lives, landscapes, poems and portraits? What came first: the gallery or the endless succession of paintings one after the other which officially ushered in the spatial distribution

1 Jean Clair, *Paradoxe sur le conservateur* (Paris: L'Échoppe, 1988); in, *Élevages de poussière* (Paris: L'Échoppe, 1992).
2 Georges Bataille, "Dictionnaire critique: Architecture," *Documents*, no. 2 (May 1929), p. 117; "Dictionnaire critique: Musée," *Documents*, no. 5 (1930), p. 300.
3 Daniel Arasse, *La guillotine et l'imaginaire de la Terreur* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987); Jean Clair, *Paradoxe…*, *op. cit.*

of the modern museum? In any event, the earliest catalogs were published soon thereafter, and in just a few years expropriations from the aristocracy and Church would be followed by vast remittances of art from all over Europe, secured through theft, looting and Napoleon's raids.[4] Yet from these acts of wartime plunder, carried out systematically in the countries conquered by the Empire, the modern criterion of national schools emerged: the Spanish school, Italian art, Dutch art, etc. Back in 1799, the decision was taken to organize the Louvre gallery chronologically and according to schools, so that through a given architecture the museum, the gallery, the linear route through the gallery, defined all the criteria for understanding, or more accurately using, works of art[5]. They were no longer viewed individually as they had been in the salon of a palace or the chapel of a church, but now formed part of a vast universal movement – of History – which had its logic and its purposes and which led to an always delayed conclusion. The museum gallery, then, was a gigantic, linear structure whose corollary was the idea of a universal history of art. In these long perspectives, things succeed one another, things that had originally been created by individuals to be enjoyed as discrete objects; that is to say, not to be part of History, to be a link in a chain, a rung on a ladder, a number in a catalog. Infinitely long and infinitely shocking perspectives: the museum eliminates the work of art and ushers in art as History. In those galleries, narration and hermeneutical analysis – allow me to paraphrase Susan Sontag – replace eroticism[6]. Similarly quantity, the orderly quantity of the gallery, replaces detail.

When we look at pictures, engravings, paintings or drawings that portray the Louvre gallery, which was initially called the Museum of the Nation and later the Napoleonic Museum, we cannot help but be impressed by the relations between people who have now become a "public" and the things on display, as well as the ways in which things are expressed in these extraordinarily long spaces of the gallery, of that "universal exposition" of the "history" that the museum is.

Let us examine, for example, a detail of a drawing by Benjamin Zix (1772-1811), which represents the guest entourage at the wedding of Napoleon and Marie-Louise[7] [Fig. 1]. The couple are walking through the Grand Gallery heading towards the Salon Carré, where their altar and throne have been installed. The draftsman chose a frontal view which enables us to see that five paintings are hung on the wall, perfectly composed according to size and subject, in addition to the progress of the masters and schools with which they are associated. Notice that the two paintings above, on either side, are by Perugino, two virgins with saints arranged symmetrically under the vaults of an architecture that defines a perfect cubic perspective. Below, on either side, are two works by Raphael, whose style can be related to his alleged lessons in Perugino's studio. Yet at the same time the paintings show how that period of ap-

4 Cecil Gould, *Trophy of Conquest. The Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965); Paul Wescher, *Kunstraub unter Napoleon* (Berlin: Mann, 1976); Jérémie Benoit (ed.), *L'Anti-Napoléon. Caricatures et satires du Consulat à l'Empire* (Malmaison: Musée national des châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois-Préau, 1996).

5 André S. Blum, *Le Louvre, du palais au musée* (París: Éditions du Milieu du Monde, 1946); Louis Armaud-Calliat, *Vivant Denon* (Châlons: Musée de Chalon-sur-Saône, 1964).

6 Editor's note: Susan Sontag's essay *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux) ends with the phrase "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."

7 Gaston Brière, "Vues de la Grande Gallerie du Musée Napoléon par Benjamin Zix,"*Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français* (1920) pp. 256-63; Hans Belting, *Le chef-d'oeuvre invisible. Un mythe moderne de l'art* (Nîmes: Rayon Art, 2003), pp. 45-46.

1.
Benjamin Zix, *Cortège nuptial de Napoléon et de Marie Louise d'Autriche* (detail), 1810.
Pen, brown ink and brown wash.
172 x 24 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

prenticeship was now behind him, as if Raphael's works had instantaneously left behind them those by Perugino that hang above them: left behind, as it were, in the time it takes to glance at them on the wall on which they are hanging; left behind in a previous, more primitive, preparatory period. The *Saint Cecilia* on the left and the *Assumption of the Virgin* on the right, with their spatial daring, with their diagonal lines, with their naturalism – or graceful grace, as Vasari would say – , with their naturalistic perfection, stem from Perugino, but they head somewhere else, a place of even greater perfection. That place is represented by the larger painting in the middle around which the others are arranged, Raphael's *Transfiguration*. History tells us this work is the culmination of Raphael's Roman period, a doorway opened onto another kind of painting that has forever left behind the *quattrocento* and even the recently arrived *cinquecento*. History here is a gallery into the future, leading towards Caravaggio, the Baroque and so forth, successively. Each of those works is no longer a discrete entity. It has become something in relation to something else, to a before or after, to a primitive model or to a development beyond that model, to a past and a future.

But that is not all. Observe how these rows of paintings, which run from the ceiling to the floorboards at the level of the public's head, are rhythmically separated along stretches of wall punctuated by busts and vases: a seemingly infinite rhythmic bridge, an endless chain, the assembly line of History. The emperor's entourage moves in a single direction along the length of the gallery towards the culmination of this history. Thus, on the ceremonial pathway of his wedding, Napoleon follows the route and rhythm of an art history that is marked by more than one thousand paintings in this gallery. Not only are some of the visitors, or guests, awed by the

2.
Albert Robida, *Le tramway du Louvre*, illustration of *Le vingtième siècle*, 1883 (see note 9)

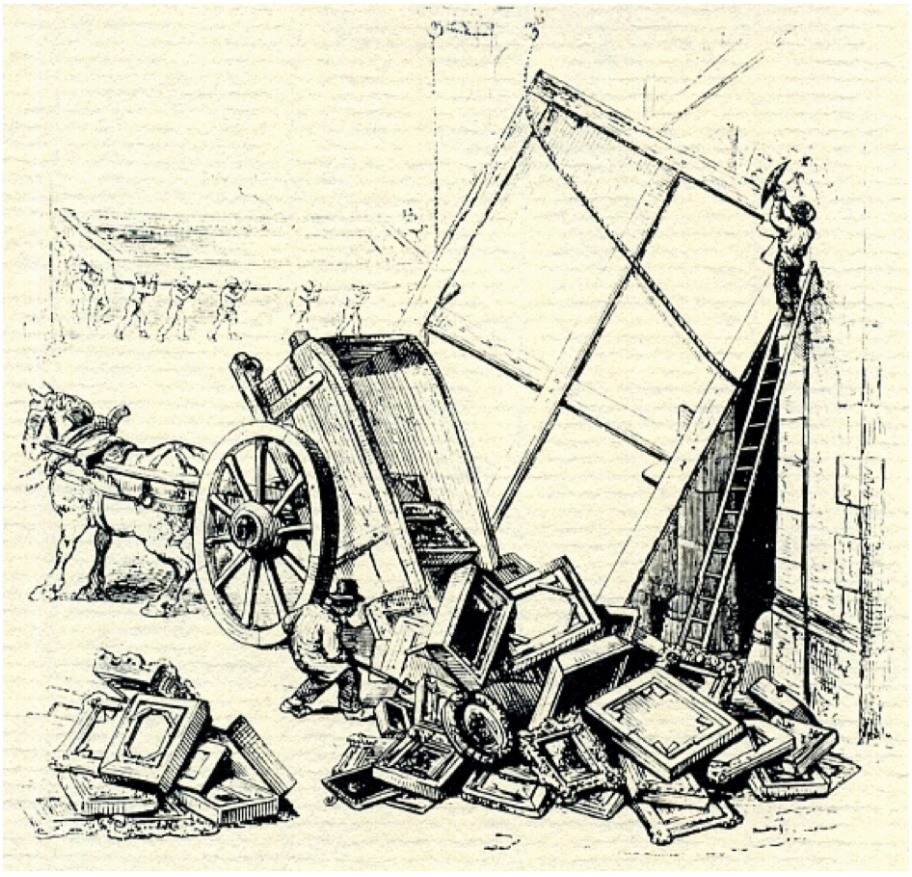
number of people in the entourage; as with Friedrich Schlegel[8] they are also awed by what attends them, by the vast entourage of paintings. Schlegel used to say that in the gallery of the Napoleon Museum one could trace the "gradual evolution of a great artistic spirit." Entourage by entourage, the gradual evolution corresponds to both. Just as in the Napoleonic Wars soldiers set the pace of the march, here the new public in the museum-gallery sets the pace, equally in unison, equally compact. The individual work of art has disappeared: the museum presents a universal art history in which each work is merely a stage in an evolutionary process. But towards what final end? The completely full museum seems to empty itself of everything solid to fill itself only with that air in which everything dissolves: History. What better image of the assembly line of art history than a tunnel?

However, the disturbing similarity between the imperial soldiers marching in unison through Europe and the guests in the emperor's wedding entourage, also marching in unison through the Louvre gallery, is not unique among images representing collections of pictures. In a drawing by Charles Bourgeois (1759-1832) depicting the Grand Gallery of the Louvre in 1791, just as it was about to be opened to the public and before the Convention officially founded the National Museum, we again find the familiar long perspective extending into the background, while in the foreground a wooden scaffolding is erected to restore and prepare the walls and vault of the gallery to hold the paintings, and perhaps also to hang them. This scaffolding seems to fit the curve of the vault and it creates a modular depth, a kind of stretch that can keep repeating throughout the entire perspective of the gallery. It is not very difficult to imagine this structure moving into depth, or more accurately sliding backwards, like a train car on rails that has morphed into a wooden structure upon which the laborers will hang the paintings, one after another, along the entire length of the gallery and in clear historical perspective. The metaphor of the "train of history" is ancient, but we should recall that Albert Robida (1846-1926), the great visionary humorist, announced that in the Paris of the future, the Louvre would be visited in tramcars[9] [Fig. 2]. It is this sense of uninterrupted depth, of flight, that is conveyed by the engravings in this National or Napoleonic Gallery. That is what we see, for example, in a drawing by Hubert Robert (1733-1808) that portrays the great banquet held in the Louvre gallery on December 20, 1797[10] [Fig. 3]. Here, the lines of the cornices and the large white surface of the table end at a very distant point, sliding through depth in what seems like a didactic representation of perspective: long, straight, parallel lines are punctuated by stretches of wall and the openings of balconies, by projecting flags, and by decorative garlands, all of which add another rhythm superimposed upon the first. That same place, permanently transformed into a painting gallery, cannot work any other way than how it did for this banquet. Another drawing by Hu-

8 Hans Belting, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
9 Albert Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (Paris: Georges Décaux Editeur, 1883).
10 Gaston Brière and Jean-Joseph Marquet, "Vues de la Grande Gallerie du Musée Napoléon par Hubert Robert," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français* (1920), pp. 241-45.

3.
Hubert Robert, *Banquet Given for Napoleon Bonaparte in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre, 20th December,* 1797. Oil on canvas.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

bert Robert from 1796 demonstrates this point: once again we see extraordinarily straight, tense cornices which meet, without interruption, in a dark, distant gap at the end of the gallery. The rhythm of the walls is broken only by the light-filled rectangles of the windows, while the vault has become a sort of immaterial sky, bereft of shape and shadows. The paintings tilt towards the centre of the gallery, just like flags, as if they are heralding the curvature of the vault that unites the two walls in a single trajectory. The paintings are projected outward to call the attention of the visitors, who, in exact symmetry with the tilt of the paintings, with their striking, gesticulating projection, will unquestionably have to crane their necks as they move back and forth through the gallery, metaphorically moving through the straight line of history. Another drawing by Charles Bourgeois of 1799 seems to emphasize further this impression. The small paintings have been placed on the lower register of the wall and the larger ones on top, as if the goal had been explicitly to defy the laws of gravity. The windows carved into the vault in the foreground heighten the feeling of inclination: they are like crouching heads that move towards us, like the empty heads of the praying people in Millet's *Angélus*, while the verticality of the four columns, now exaggerated pedestals for four small busts, further dramatizes the inclination of the paintings. Now it simply seems like the walls are caving in. In this infinite succession of portraits of kings, noblemen, martyrs and saints, in this endless succession of annunciations, ascensions, transfigurations and holy conversations in which each painting disappears among the multitude, buried in the very concept of the public



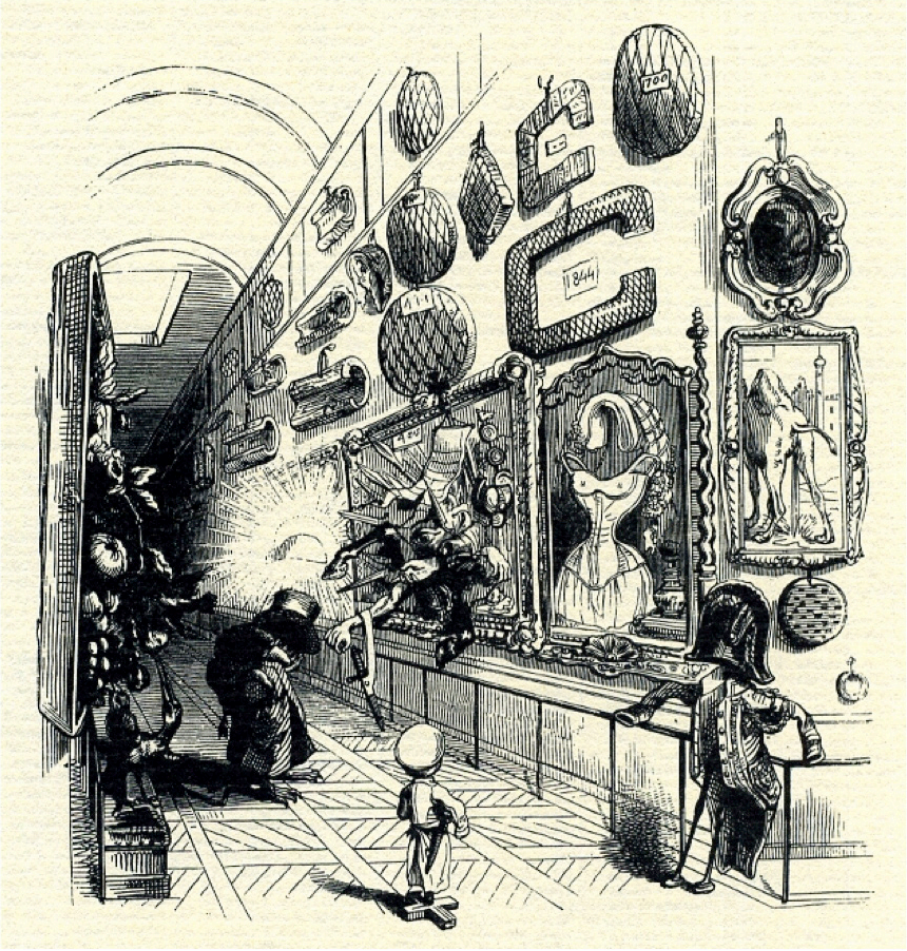
4.
Grandville, illustration of *Un Autre monde*, 1844 (see note 12)

collection, of the national gallery, the paintings tilt precariously above the visitors, bringing the walls with them. Just like goods shuttered away from use in the display window of a shop, the paintings, the masked carnival-goers of history, gesticulate and futiley call attention to their unique presence. By joining their cries to all cries, all they manage to do is ratchet up the volume, which is ultimately interchangeable with silence and absence. In the end, this collection of paintings, like so many others, is nothing other than the outcome of pillage; it is war booty. If the unique work of art might be, and often was, the outcome of love, the work of art as a link in the chain of history is nothing more than a document, as Walter Benjamin said, of barbarity.[11]

But let us discuss the danger that this gesticulating projection, this cry, unleashes for the miniscule visitor. In his great book of 1844, *Un Autre monde*, caricaturist J.J. Grandville (1803-1847) devotes a chapter to what he calls "The Louvre of the Puppets"[12]. In one of the illustrations [Fig. 4], we can see how paintings are unloaded at the doorway of the museum, which has to be torn down so that the work of one of those masters who, Grandville says, are used to measuring genius by the shovelful, can fit in. The museum, then, also seems like a house of bountiful goods. Even more famous is another illustration [Fig. 5], in which we see paintings bursting out of their frames, departing from their containers to capture the attention of empty, fleshless visitors – empty coats and hats, pure signs from the

11 Editor's note: "There is no document of culture that is not at the same time an act of barbarism," a famous sentence from Walter Benjamin's *Seventh Thesis on the Philosophy of Culture*, in *Illuminations* (Hannah Arendt ed., Harry Zohn trans., New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

12 J.J. Grandville, *Un autre monde. Transformations, visions, incarnations… et autres choses* (Paris: H. Fournier, 1844).



5.
Grandville, illustration of *Un Autre monde*, 1844
(see note 12)

kingdom of puppets, like the goods whose activities the paintings supplant. In the background, a rising sun seems ready to blind the visitors. On the left, the fruit and vegetables of a still life overflow as in the most plentiful of market stalls, pecked at by birds. On the right, we can see art *en deshabillé* and a muse in a dressing gown. And in the middle, there is a great history painting of a battle: "what a scuffle, a hurricane, a waterspout, a whirlwind!" Furious heads, threatening arms, sabres and swords, everything alive bursts forth from the canvas and fights. Grandville accurately writes that in order to avoid harm, the guards would do well to prevent visitors from coming near this painting. Ultimately, however, what else can this be but the battle of consumer goods? Are we not similarly attacked by the market every day; that is to say, by advertising? Paintings, as things, are habitually uprooted from their natural settings and reunited in a preserve that is justified for scientific reasons. This entails the deportation and concentration of unique works of art to make them speak outside themselves. By merely uttering these words – displacement, deportation, concentration, preserve – we know that we are talking about our own barbarism.

A new image of this founding gallery from 1796, also by Hubert Robert, shows us one of the many projects devised to bring light in from the

6.
Hubert Robert,
Projet d'aménagement de la Grande Galerie du Louvre, 1796.
Oil on canvas, 115 x 145 cm.
Musée du Louvre

7.
Hubert Robert, *Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie du Louvre en ruines*, 1796. Oil on canvas, 115 x 145 cm. Musée du Louvre

8.
Archibald Archer, *The Temporary Elgin Room*, 1819. Oil on canvas, 97 x 132,7 cm. British Museum

vault [Fig. 6]. But that is not all: it also shows us how there were plans to carve up the space along its length with arches that would enclose smaller spaces, creating more intimate atmospheres. The light coming in from above was not only going to provide more appropriate light for viewing the paintings – a diffused light that evokes that of the artist's studio – but it would also transform the gallery into something resembling a crypt, a pantheon illuminated by the oculus, a new *domus aurea* in which visitors could find a "grotesque" truth, yet one that history had already swept away. That very same year, 1796, Hubert Robert himself would portray his gallery design as an ancient ruin in a desperate call for prestige – that of time, that of antiquity – which by its very condition the museum gallery nullifies [Fig. 7]. History is always new; it is all progress, an endless gallery, a tunnel. History, unlike time, has no offspring, and what is more, it does not even have time. The Louvre in ruins is nothing more than the dream of prestige that the Louvre, a timeless preserve of art invested in its own history, cannot have. All art invests in its own history, and the museum is a bank of art, in effect a crypt where its values accumulate rather than its virtues. The parallel history of the Louvre gallery and retail galleries of goods, both leading to a storage area or crypt of sorts, could not be more relevant.

Another picture from 1819, a work by Archibald Archer (c. 1791-1848) entitled *The Temporary Elgin Room*, represents the first instalment of the sculptures from the pediments of the Parthenon in the British Museum [Fig. 8], where they had arrived, as everyone knows, after having been torn from their original site by Lord Elgin beginning in 1801[13]. The staff of the British Museum and the British library surrounds Benjamin West (1738-1820), the President of the Royal Academy, who is seated in the

13 William St. *Clair, Lord Elgin and the Marbles* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

centre. Some of the metopes depicting the battles of the Lapiths and Centaurs are hanging on the wall, as if they are paintings. Below we can see how the frieze of the Panathenaic processions runs along the walls, hugging their twists and turns. In the middle of the room, among the gentlemen's black suits, are the two white marbles that used to be on the pediments, illuminated and portraying the bodies of the gods. Further down, directly on the floor, is the wonderful head of the horse that pulled the Chariot of the Moon on one corner of the pediment. We might believe that this arrangement is distinct from that of other works in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre, and it unquestionably is. The light here seems to be charged with creating a more intimate atmosphere, and the familiar closeness of the gentlemen with the marbles is more reminiscent of the traditional collector's cabinet than the aggressive distance of a modern public museum, as we have described in the gallery of the Louvre. But this proves not to be the case. Those ancient marbles were placed on movable pedestals fitted with wheels that allowed them to be moved around the room to find the best lighting when artists came to copy them. What had been done to them – their removal from the Parthenon, their dismemberment and their dislocation – continued in this constant, offensive rolling about on wheels: wheels like those of the scaffolding that rolled through the gallery of the Louvre; wheels to view the marbles in their most extreme banishment, in utter, permanent exile. And this is not even to mention how they have been arranged in the Duveen Gallery of the British Museum since the late 1920s – in the end, yet another gallery. All the flesh of the Parthenon, whose bare bones remained in Athens, is turned inside out like a sock.

What interests me now is a coincidence that is actually not so strange. In 1817 Lord Elgin's marbles were displayed for the first time in the British Museum, and precisely 100 years later, in 1917, at the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) presented a work entitled *Fountain*.[14] The history of the modern museum is contained in, or contracted into, this twofold displacement, this twofold suspension. Lord Elgin uprooted the marbles from the Parthenon and took them far away to London, where, far from themselves, they are displayed as masterpieces. Duchamp purchased a urinal in a plumbing shop, called it "fountain," dated it, signed it and also exhibited it as a masterpiece, but by an artist named R. Mutt. It is not surprising that shortly thereafter, in 1920, Duchamp became the first conservator of the first modern art "museum." Nor does it come as a surprise that that museum would be called the Société Anonyme, Inc.[15] In the first case, that of Lord Elgin, we can see clearly how ancient gods are transformed into wonderful but simple sculptures; while in the second, that of Duchamp, an act of provocation is an extreme gesture that carries us beyond the limits established by the former displacement. A urinal in a modern art museum is

14 Jéan Clair, *Marcel Duchamp ou le grand fictif* (Paris: Galilée, 1975) p. 9.

15 Editor's note: An organization founded in 1920 by Katherine Dreier, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp to sponsor lectures, exhibitions and publications on modern art. The collection assembled by the Societé Anonyme has been at the Yale University Art Gallery since 1941.

both the radical exploitation and the logical continuation of the dislocated marbles from the Parthenon in the British Museum. They are an example of something taken to the limit of the fiction shared by romanticism, rationalism, and the avant-garde: an autonomous art separate from the world of the sacred, from collective, or more accurately social, morals and tastes, turned into an end in itself. There are no longer gods, nor princes, nor states, nor even what so charmed Offenbach: public opinion[16]. What, then, remains for art except the museum? The work of art enclosed within yet at the same time suspended outside of itself has only one place to go, a space in which it is consecrated by its exhibition value alone: the space of the museum.

Chosen work, proclaimed work, exhibited work: Duchamp's urinal would not exist as a work of art if there was not a place reserved for it where even aesthetic judgements have been suspended, where human values have been replaced by that which the works of the puppets in the Louvre clamoured for when they burst forth from the paintings: the value of exhibition. Much more than any painting by Perugino or Raphael that has been displaced to a museum, the urinal *needs* a museum; it cannot exist without one. Outside of this preserve it would simply be a urinal. The urinal is museum art par excellence.

But it is the art of the empty museum. If in doubt, listen to this story[17]. The urinal was purchased by a collector named Walter C. Arensberg, who wrote a blank check in the name of R. Mutt, such that Duchamp was not able to cash it immediately. During Duchamp's career, Arensberg's blank check was followed by others. In 1919, Duchamp paid his dentist Daniel Tzanck with a check written in the exquisitely painstaking hand of a swindler who was in fact the calligrapher at the Sainte Geneviève library in Paris. The check had no monetary value, so we can assume that Duchamp was paying, in effect, with a "work of art." But aesthetic judgement does not come into play in this transaction. Unlike a work of art, value and price seem to dovetail here; the check at least says that it is worth 115 dollars, the price of the dentist's services. Duchamp was not giving a work of art to a connoisseur who appreciated it beyond its price – that is to say, for its aesthetic worth – but to someone who knew the potential value of Duchamp's signature, which, as with any check, is ultimately what guarantees value. For this reason Duchamp wrote the check in the name of "the tooth lending and trust company." That trust is what enables us to appreciate the potential value of the check: its speculative nature and its exchange value. As with the urinal, we cannot talk about a work of art here, but we *can* talk about art history, or art theory, or even better, the economy of art. The years went by. Duchamp held a retrospective in 1965. It included the urinal and the check, which he himself had bought back from his dentist for considerably more than 115 dollars. Trust worked. A person passing through this exhibition, a collector named Phillip Bruno, asked

16 Editor's note: Public Opinion is one of the main characters in Jacques Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers*, an opera bouffon first performed in Paris at the Théâtre des Bouffes on October 21, 1858.

17 Thierry de Duve, "Marcel Duchamp ou le phynancier de la vie moderne," in *Cousus de fil d'or. Beuys, Warhol, Klein, Duchamp* (Villeurbanne: Art Édition, 1990), pp. 77-95.

N° 258 — LE NUMERO QUOTIDIEN : 10 Cent. — MERCREDI 30 AOUT 1911

EXCELSIOR

Journal Illustré Quotidien

Directeur : Pierre LAFITTE — 88, Champs-Elysées, PARIS

Informations - Littérature - Sciences - Arts - Sports - Théâtres - Elégances

Le Louvre a rouvert ses portes, mais la "Joconde" n'est pas rentrée

Hier le Musée du Louvre a rouvert ses portes ! Devant les quatre clous qui supportaient la « Joconde », un public nombreux s'est pressé toute la journée. Hélas ! la « Joconde » n'est pas revenue prendre sa place entre l' « Allégorie » du Titien et le « Mariage mystique » du Corrège ! En signe de deuil, une inconnue déposa devant le panneau vide une gerbe de roses.

1. — La foule cherche en vain le sourire de Monna Lisa. — 2. Une gerbe de roses en mémoire de la disparue. — 3. Une porte du Louvre gardée par les sergents de ville.

9.
Detail of the front page of *Excelsior. Journal Illustré Quotidien*, August 30, 1911.

Duchamp for an autograph, and he cleverly offered to sign a book of blank checks. Duchamp signed a check for him for an unlimited number of dollars, drawn against the Mona Lisa Bank. The financial artist that Duchamp was, the artist who does not work but who speculates – that is to say, a conceptual artist – drew all his values against the paradigmatic artisan artist, Leonardo da Vinci. The Mona Lisa Bank, of course, is the Louvre, the traditional museum, the preserve, the strong box where assets are safeguarded and which serves as a reference point when assessing other works, which can thus be deemed artistic, or not.

The architecture of the so-called modern museum, or, rather, the contemporary art museum, is thus a strange affair: a hysterical rendering, like Grandville's painting of the battle, of what museums necessarily are right now, of what they house, of what they display, of how and for whom they address themselves. It is difficult to find another more immediate and more schematic example of the distance between the work and its display, or more accurately between the work itself and the pathways of its consumption, than that represented by museums that are constantly being revamped, modernized, and extended in their emptiness. In them we can see clearly how and to what extent the work of art must be sequestered to yield some "profit." The more concealed the work is under the impenetrable security measures that ensure its conservation, the less it is seen and enjoyed and the more its image, its infinite reproduction, stretches towards the commodity: postcards, notepads, agendas, calendars, scarves, ties, pins, souvenirs, bibelots and bagatelles of all kinds. The more its illustration multiplies, the less one sees the work itself; the more its figure is consumed,

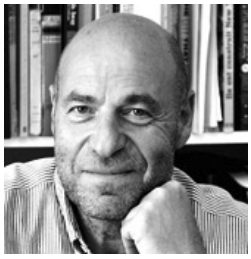
the less it is worn down; the more its replicas spread everywhere, the fewer possibilities there are to enjoy the work. Hidden in the darkness of its second seclusion, veiled by curators and conservators, the museum object is the guarantee against which all copies – that is to say, all contemporary art, beginning with the urinal – are drawn; sequestration provides limitless collateral. The "democratization" of the work of art – tourist outings, busloads of visitors, an audience that pays to be entertained – automatically entails a kind of kidnapping; their enclosure in the back of a strong box is the necessary condition for their efficacy. The cellars of the Mona Lisa Bank are brimming with treasures: reserve funds, the caves of Ali Baba.

I could discuss the consoling fiction that this typology of the modern museum – the empty museum – would be. But to conclude I would rather recall how in 1911, when *Mona Lisa* was stolen from the Louvre, people waited in long queues to see it: an empty space with several nails that used to secure the painting[18]. The empty museum is the container for a clientele that wants to be entertained, a place for vacations and rainy Sundays [Fig. 9]. This empty place is the modern museum that, in its quest for the Pantheon, finds only a cenotaph.

18 André Chastel, *L'illustre incomprise. Mona Lisa* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988); Hans Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-82.

Architecture and/of the Museum

Jean-Louis Cohen



Jean-Louis Cohen

In a compelling essay entitled "Le problème des musées," French poet Paul Valéry wrote in 1924: "I don't like museums. Many are admirable, but none are delightful. Ideas such as ordering, collecting and public utility, which are both clear and robust, have little to do with delight."[1] The author of the Socratic dialogue *Eupalinos ou l'architecte*, one of the few 20th century literary texts dealing with the art of building, whose first published piece was entitled "Le paradoxe sur l'architecte,"[2] pointed to the main issue in the shaping of permanent galleries and exhibitions; that is, the contradiction between the didactic, knowledge-based, and sometimes pedantic, dimension of these spaces and the dimension of play and pleasure inherent to the museum experience.

Furthermore, Valéry considered painting and sculpture to be "abandoned children," adding: "their mother is dead, their mother architecture. As long as she was still alive, she used to assign them their place, their purpose, their limits. Their freedom of wandering was negated. They had their space, a well-defined light, their topics, their alliances… As long as she was alive, they knew what they wanted."[3] Valéry's diffidence in respect to museums from which architecture was missing, after she had expired, should draw our attention to the problematic nature of the relationship between institutions devoted to the collection and the display of art, and the artistic discipline devoted precisely to shaping the spaces such institutions inhabit.

Edifices specifically designed to be museums are historically a recent category – the first such example being conventionally the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, built by Simon Louis du Ry between 1769 and 1779[4]. Alexandre Lenoir's Musée des Monuments français, opened to the Parisian public in 1795, in the reconverted convent of the Grands Augustins, was a promenade through a suite of rooms devoted to the sculpture of specific centuries. Since that moment, architecture seems to have found in the museum a fertile ground for its resurrection, as an unprecedented quantity of new projects have seen the light of the day since the memorable 1971 competition for the Paris Beaubourg center, when Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers became the first foreign architects to be invited by the French

1 Paul Valéry, "Le problème des musées," *Le Gaulois* (April 4, 1923). In Œuvres *I* (Paris: Gallimard/La Pléiade, 1957), p. 1290. My translation.

2 Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'architecte, dialogue des morts* (Paris, *Nouvelle revue française*, 1921); id., "Le paradoxe sur l'architecte," first published in *La Conque* (March 1891).

3 Paul Valéry, "Le problème des musées," p. 1293, my translation.

4 Nikolaus Pevsner, "Museums," in *A History of Building Types* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 111-138.

State to build a public building, three centuries after the rejection of Gianlorenzo Bernini's design for the Louvre.

It should be stated at this point that the first "effect" identified with the impact of a new museum on contemporary practice was the one Jean Baudrillard detected at Beaubourg, rechristened the Pompidou Center upon its opening to the public in 1977.[5] In the past forty years, an impressive variety of museums have been created or renovated, from the most intimate, sometimes hidden ones, to the most assertive and monumental ones. Thanks to the spectacular architecture they have often inspired, they have become large urban attractors, as in the case of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA) designed by Richard Meier, credited with almost magic powers by elected officials, cultural managers, and tour operators. Museums have become emblems for contemporary cities, indices of their accession to the status of major hubs, as shown by the frenetic building campaigns conducted in East Asia and in the Gulf.

The idea of creating museums using an architectural language that would no longer have an obvious affinity with their historical collections is a relatively new one. Such buildings appear for instance with Henry Van de Velde's Folkwang Museum in Hagen (1901). Later, Hendrik Petrus Berlage built the vast Gemeente Museum in The Hague (1935), remarkable for its concrete skeleton with brick infillings. The propagation of the new ideals was extremely slow and difficult. In the case of the United States, it is striking to realize that Eliel and Eero Saarinen's innovative project for the Smithsonian Gallery of Modern Art was rejected in 1939, exactly at the moment in which John Russell Pope's neoclassical National Gallery of Art was in construction.

In the 1930s, the problem of the museum found a most fertile ground in France, as the Third Republic undertook a series of projects in the context of the 1937 International Exposition. Auguste Perret imagined a "Cité des musées" articulating twelve different institutions on top of the Chaillot hill, connected by a grand portico, only to see his scheme sidetracked in 1934, when Pierre Laval took over the government. When the conservative palais de Chaillot replaced in 1937 Gabriel Davioud's palais du Trocadéro and its museums, Perret managed to build down the slope his Musée des travaux publics, featuring a superb forest of concrete columns and the most beautiful monumental staircase built in Paris during the entire century.

The discussion on the modernization of the museum as a building type found a concrete field of implementation with those created in 1937, including the Musée de l'Homme and the Palais de la Découverte, where innovative display strategies were deployed. At the international level, the research undertaken by the International Office of Museums allowed for fruitful confrontations. An offspring of the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, beginning in 1927 the Office published

5 Jean Baudrillard, *L'effet Beaubourg: implosion et dissuasion* (Paris: Galilée, 1977); English translation in Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

the journal *Mouséion*, featuring studies on the typology of buildings but also on the methods for the exhibition of various genres of works. These investigations found an echo in architectural magazines such as *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, which in 1938 devoted a special issue to the theme of museography, discussing the Gemeente as well as New York's Museum of Modern Art, then still in construction.[6]

Yet, the museum was not an object of consensus. It was derided by critical intellectuals such as Georges Bataille, who wrote in 1930: "The museum is the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself from all sides, and finding himself literally an object of wonder, abandons himself to the extasy expressed in art journalism."[7] For the main figures of radical modernism, the museum was certainly not an attractive project, as they tried to bann the very notion of monumentality. In this respect one could shape a parody of Lewis Mumford's famous aphorism on the impossibility of the "modern monument"[8] by saying: "if it is modern, it is not a museum; if it is a museum, it cannot be modern."

One of the most vocal critics of museums was Le Corbusier, who would later become a reader of Bataille. He had organized for the journal *L'Esprit nouveau*, which he published from 1920 to 1925 with the painter Amédée Ozenfant, a public enquiry centered on the provocative question: "Is the Louvre to be burned?"[9] In the polemics surrounding the 1925 Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, he had challenged the very concept of the museum. After having spent his youth in the collections of Vienna, Paris, Munich and Berlin, he wrote: "the museum is bad because it does not tell the whole story. It misleads, it dissimulates, it deludes. It is a liar."[10] The primary target of his diatribe was the Musée des Arts décoratifs, created in 1905 in the Pavillon de Marsan. On a more positive note he proposed: "let us imagine a true museum, one that contained everything, one that could present a complete picture after the passage of time, after the destruction by time (and how well it knows how to destroy! So well, so completely, that almost nothing remains except objects of great show, of great vanity, of great fancy)."[11]

A few years later, in 1930 he would engage in the design of such an institution, with his Musée à croissance illimitée, an idea he would implement in the 1950s in Tokyo, Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. The project derived from the ziggurat-shaped Mundaneum he had designed in 1928 for the Belgian philanthropist Paul Otlet, who had conceived a "World City" meant to contain and display all the knowledge of the world. The notion of delight was clearly missing from his design, although he had a friendly and fruitful relationship with Valéry[12]. Before its relative postwar success, the project was not lost for everyone. It is quite obvious that the "optimistic ziggurat" invoked by Frank Lloyd Wright when he finally decided on a concept for the Guggenheim museum[13] was nothing else than the Mundaneum's museum put upside down.

6 "Muséographie," *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 9, n. 6 (June 1938).

7 "Musée," *Documents* 2, n. 5 (1930): p. 300; English in *October* 36 (Spring 1986), p. 25.

8 Lewis Mumford, "The Notion of a Modern Monument," in *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, 1938), p. 438.

9 Yann Rocher, "Faut-il brûler le Louvre ? Pensées de la destruction dans une enquête de L'Esprit nouveau," in *Réévaluer l'art moderne et les avant-gardes*, ed. by Esteban Buch, Denys Riout, and Philippe Roussin (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2010), p. 137-151.

10 *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, p. 18. English: *The Decorative Art of Today*, translated by James Dunnett (London: The Architectural Press, 1987), p. 18.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

12 Niklas Maak, *Le Corbusier: The Architect on the Beach* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2011).

13 Editor's Note: See Richard Armstrong's text in this volume.

The time between the completion of the Guggenheim in 1959 and the competition for the then Centre Beaubourg in 1971 was brief, and the monumental ambition of both structures comparable in their reaction against the city in which they were built: the former faced Central Park while turning its back to the Upper East Side, and the latter faced the new Les Halles quarter while turning its back to the Marais[14]. Yet the philosophy of what would become the Pompidou Center was to put the new machine at the service of the curators, instead of inscribing the works of art as decorative props in the authoritative frame designed by the architect. The alternative between these strategies has not evaporated and has developed in more complex iterations to this day.

Paradoxically, buildings that seem to be extremely idiosyncratic and potentially difficult to use for curatorial purposes are easier to adjust to the needs of specific exhibitions than machines planned for total – and of course fictitious – flexibility. The museums installed in 18th or 19th century institutional buildings, in which large, and often longitudinal spaces are available that provide a suitable background for contemporary statements, represent in my view a sort of ideal of adaptability. The main building of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía is one such example, although it has met certain limits, as additional galleries had to be added. Buildings like the Palais de Tokyo, as transformed by Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal in a "site for contemporary art," while unquestionably lofty, raise other issues, as the exposed damages of time in the preserved structure sometimes fails to be a suitable foil to contemporary art. In the carefully edited abandonment of its *architettura povera*, its walls and ducts conjure up more the ideal of the recycled factory than the one of the palace, as if they were echoing Frank Gehry's Temporary Contemporary.

Zaha Hadid's MAXXI, or Museum of the Arts of the 21st Century, in Rome, is interesting in this context. The building seems at first glance to belong more to the realm of what one could consider as hollow sculpture than to the realm of architecture. Its galleries are conceived like long tubes; yet, if several of them end abruptly in a cul-de-sac, they are no less flexible, and thus as free of architectural constraints as the enfilades of the Louvre, the wings of former 19th century artillery barracks, or the wards of recycled hospitals. A sort of reasonable territorial division seems to have been achieved in the building, with the architect keeping the control of the exterior form and of several key features of the interior, while the curators gain a freedom of evolution within the galleries.

In contrast to the highly personal language developed for this type of museum, the work of David Chipperfield is based on a more balanced negotiation between the architect's position and that of the museum, as institution and as curatorial team. Widely different from MAXXI for obvious reasons, his reconstruction of Berlin's Neues Museum is a poetic, as well as a rational, transformation of a building ruined for more than a half

14 Jean-Louis Cohen, "Monuments for a Mass Cult," in *Rendezvous; Masterpieces from the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Guggenheim Museum*, ed. by Bernard Blistène and Lisa Dennison (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1998), p. 18-39.

century into a complex system of galleries in which the collections are displayed in a certain tension between a historical casing they had lost and modern presentation techniques. Great care has been taken by Chipperfield in order to reveal the layering of the initial building and the recent reconstruction in what has become a lesson in critical restoration.

In polar opposition to the architecture of museums, the museums of architecture might also be questioned. Much thought has been devoted to this problem in the past, for instance between 1998 and 2003, in the case of the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine in Paris' palais de Chaillot.[15] The apparent paradox of the architecture museum, as compared to the art museum, must be recalled here. It is banal to say that museums devoted to architecture are in fact showing less the works themselves than their indices, in the forms of drawings, models, films and simulations of all sorts. Fragment collections and cast collections, such as the one created in the palais du Trocadéro, after a project by Viollet-le-Duc, deploying one-to-one scale components, can convey part of the scale effect of buildings, but the spatial experience cannot be easily reproduced, despite the sophistication of contemporary media. Probably more than art museums, architecture collections give justice to Valéry's statement, as "delight" remains paradoxically difficult to achieve in their galleries, despite the recent attempts at resurrecting the "mother" of the arts in the spectacular buildings of the last decades.

15 *Une cité à Chaillot, avant-première*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cohen and Claude Eveno (Paris: Editions de l'Imprimeur, 2001).

The Museum Gallery as Narration: Rewriting Art History from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Richard Armstrong

I have taken the title and subtitle of this collection of essays literally. I speak as a relatively new director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum [Fig. 1] and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

What is obvious perhaps is the peculiarity of an inverted spiral sitting on a plinth decorated with circular shapes joined onto a 10-storey rectangular tower fenestrated with narrow bands of windows. This overall composition defines the museum's galleries as well as asserts Frank Lloyd Wright's (1867-1959) deep distaste for rectilinear Manhattan – a city he railed against for 50 years until Hilla von Rebay, through Solomon R. Guggenheim, offered Wright the ultimate commission of a lifetime filled with memorable commissions.

Richard Armstrong

1.
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
Photo: David Heald © SRGF, NY.

Wright spent the last 16 years of his life conceiving, drawing, and re-drawing this structure six complete times – a structure that Rebay described as a "temple of art" in her first letter to him in 1943. While the location for the project varied – from mid-town, to Park Avenue, to Riverdale, New York – Wright's form did not. He had been thinking of modernist parking garages since the mid-1920s when he drew a similar structure for a car museum *cum* planetarium in suburban Maryland, never realized. Bauhaus-related parking structures attracted his attention, which he would realize some twenty years later in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Rebay, a German-born painter, had first-hand experience with Bauhaus artists prior to her immigration to the United States. She had a particularly keen interest in Wassily Kandinsky's vision, an

2.
Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 24 East Fifty-fourth Street, New York, NY, 1947. Photofraph courtesy of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Archives, New York

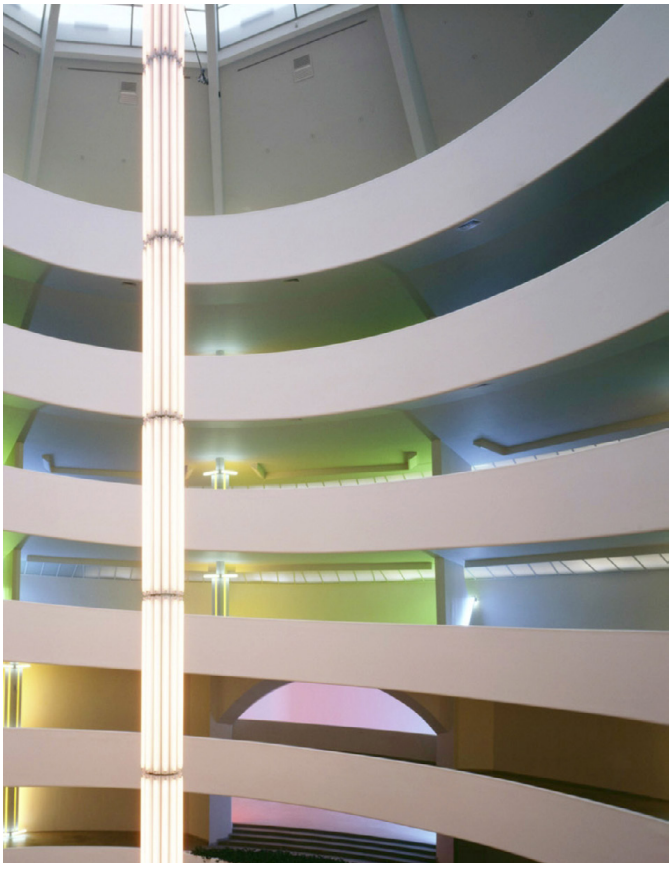
interest she acted on as an advisor to the industrialist Guggenheim, whose wife had introduced Rebay to Solomon in preparation for a portrait. Rebay converted Guggenheim and he threw over his undistinguished collection of Barbizon landscapes in favor of Rebay's messianic allegiance to what she called, awkwardly, "non-objective painting." During the Depression, she and Guggenheim purchased hundreds of such paintings – more than 100 by Vasily Kandinsky – resulting in his invitation to visitors to see some of them in the Guggenheim pied-à-terre in the Plaza Hotel.

In 1938-1939, Rebay oversaw the conversion of a two-storey car showroom in the West 50s, which became the Museum of Non-Objective Painting [Fig. 2]. Inside Rebay gave free rein to her singular taste – over-scaled frames, low hang, velvet-covered settees, also low, velour-covered walls, carpeting, and piped-in music – Bach being her favorite. Art historian Robert Rosenblum recounted going there as a young student, and even he found it eccentric! Nevertheless, Baroness Rebay organized group and one-artist shows that in effect counterbalanced the Francophilia of the new Museum of Modern Art, as well as the figurative xenophobia of Juliana Force and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's Downtown Studio Club, which eventually became the Whitney Museum of American Art.

During the 1940s Rebay and Guggenheim engaged Frank Lloyd Wright, and they eventually settled on a site for a new museum building on upper Fifth Avenue. In 1949 the museum was located in a converted apartment building mid-block between 88th and 89th Streets. Although there are no views of its interior, the galleries would be familiar to us since they resembled the white-painted rooms of any generic Upper East Side Gallery – ornate mantels, parquet floors, choked traffic flow. The muse-

um's program changed after Rebay's resignation in 1952 and the appointment of James Sweeney as the second director. Sweeney, formerly a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was an informed, empathetic, and omnivorous modernist who pushed the museum well beyond Rebay's proscriptions.

In a late if not final version of Wright's design the blocky tower (not built until 1991-92, and by the firm Gwathmey Seigel) as well as the automobile entry on Fifth Avenue with an exit on 89th Street may be noticed. Wright's attachment to the automobile survived, even in Manhattan. Construction of Wright's building began in 1957. From its earliest incarnation as a construction site we can see that the organization of the galleries would be unlike anything known in an art museum to that moment: organic, democratic, idiosyncratic.



3.
Installation view: Dan Flavin, *untitled (to Tracy, to celebrate the love of a lifetime),* 1992. Pink, green, blue, yellow, daylight, red, and ultraviolet fluorescent light, dimensiones variable. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 92.4017.

Photo: David Heald

Upon its inauguration in October 1959 (by which point both Wright and Guggenheim had died), the museum attracted widespread criticism but no little affection, as 6,000 people crowded in for opening day. The galleries were organized as a continuous ramp spiraling around a sky-lighted void. The sight was astonishing then as it remains today. Wright's canted walls and relatively low ceilings (about 9 feet 6 inches for the first half of the museum) made some artists unhappy (as it still does) and unilaterally changed the museum's form and, I might argue, visitors' expectations. Whereas previously the model had been places of varying grandeur, Wright's spiral proposed an intensely directed descent (as visits were meant to begin at the top) that incorporated both kinesthetic as well as pronounced voyeuristic opportunities into the museum visit. Instead of the grand staircase (or more recently, the grand elevator and/or escalator), we have Wright's sloping terrazzo ramps.

We all have favorite and less favored experiences in this building. On good days I see it as a coiled spring literally able to lift spirits and understanding; on bad days, it feels like a corset. About as far from the white cube as can be imagined, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and its recent incarnations in Bilbao and Abu Dhabi assert the experience of architecture as a sensate counterweight to the art on view.

Upon its re-opening in 1991 after another in a series of restorations the museum hosted a memorable Dan Flavin (1933-1996) retrospective that revealed the structure's charms and flaws as elegantly as has ever happened [Fig. 3]. Flavin's medium – light – delineated the sensual corner of

4.
Entrance to the garden of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. Photo: David Heald © SRGF, NY.

Wright's forms; the enormous floor-to-oculus tower Flavin dedicated to his new wife suffused the site in a pink glow. The galleries' narration was one of unabashed joy.

Allow me to attempt to verbally reconstruct Tino Sehgal's (b. 1976) *This Progress,* which we hosted in 2010. The artist forbids photography of any of his work, which can be described most simply as a "social choreography." In the Guggenheim's case, Sehgal trained more than 100 volunteers from ages 10 to about 85 to engage the unsuspecting visitor (as no signs announced the show or explained its meaning) in a series of conversations from the first ramp to the top of the building. A child would approach the visitor and inquire about his/her idea of progress, walk and talk with the visitor until a young person took over, guiding the visitor up (literally and metaphorically) in a sustained dialogue that concluded with a more stationary if not less intense conversation with an adult. The activity was ambulatory and discursive, meant to introduce face-to-face interaction within the gallery walls – an antithesis to today's head-phoned, solitary seekers. Tino Sehgal's show proved both immensely popular and immensely cleansing. The museum's staff felt richly rewarded by the purity of Sehgal's choreographed acts. As a new director, I came to admire the staff's willingness to experiment and I think they helped rewrite art history. Subsequently, the museum acquired *This Progress*.

I briefly want to cite other Guggenheim galleries and, by inference, their narratives, beginning with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice – seen here appropriately enough through the elaborately wrought, richly decorated gates of Claire Falkenstein (1908-1997) [Fig. 4].

Peggy Guggenheim was a noted collector, dealer, and patron of many artists. She had a taste for luxury, and this partially built palazzo on the Grand Canal (her last home) opened as a museum in 1979. It now attracts up to 500,000 visitors annually. Its collection is weighted to Surrealism and Expressionism, with an incomparable selection of paintings by Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), whose work Peggy Guggenheim had represented in the 1940s in her New York based "Art of This Century" gallery. But there are also great examples of work by many European modernists – all presented in a modified version of Guggenheim's living arrangements. For me, this is a narrative of ravenous desire and self-certain taste.

In contrast to the domestic scale and feel of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection is the Guggenheim Bilbao – now open for almost 20 years. It is a political as well as a museological phenomenon. Located in a previously industrial area of the Basque city of Bilbao, the museum was designed by Frank Gehry (b. 1929). It has been central to the revival of Bilbao out of its industrial doldrums and is regularly cited as a new civic standard – the

5.
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1977.
Photo: David Heald © SRGF, NY.

so-called "Bilbao effect." Approximately 1 million people visit the museum annually – this in a city with a population of about 1.2 million!

These visitors (two-thirds from outside Bilbao) have helped its inhabitants become proud of their city and region, while attracting considerable financial and intellectual investment. Gehry's galleries seemed hostile in their scale at their opening, I must admit, but over time such grand spaces as the100-yard long gallery featuring Richard Serra's (b. 1939) *A Matter of Time* have established a new norm for art-viewing [Fig. 5]. This has had good and bad consequences, but Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao proposed (and still proposes) a new narration: gargantuan, optimistic, baroque, and modern all at once.

The same year the museum entered into a partnership with Deutsche Bank for a 5,000 square foot exhibition space at its Berlin headquarters on Unter den Linden in a nineteenth century bank lobby remade by Richard Gluckman. (b. 1947). This compact and more traditional white cube space hosts 3-4 exhibitions a year, some of them specially commissioned so that the museum can collect independent work by contemporary artists it particularly desires.

Finally, the museum has returned to Frank Gehry to design a large, over 450,000 square foot museum of contemporary art for the city of Abu Dhabi [Fig. 6]. It is located on a man-made island in a cultural district anchored by a museum of national history designed by Norman Foster (b. 1935) , and a dome-shaped Louvre Abu Dhabi designed by Jean Nouvel (b. 1945). Future facilities along the shore will include a concert hall and maritime museum, with 14 hotels, a golf course, and housing for about 300,000 inhabitants.

6.
Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi. Digital rendering courtesy Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority

Gehry has envisioned an iconic conglomeration of trellis-lined "cones" punctuating galleries on four levels. The scale, somewhat like Bilbao, is unlike any we have experienced outside certain sites such as the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London or the BALTIC Center for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, United Kingdom, but it suggests vast new possibilities for art and artists.

In Abu Dhabi we foresee a global collection of work made since 1965 with a special emphasis on modernist works from the Middle East, as we seek once again to rewrite art history. Through its 75 year history the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum has embraced radicality by its support of many of each decade's most advanced artists. It has also pioneered the concept and reality of a multi-sited globally-oriented art museum, initially in the U.S. and Europe and, soon, in the Persian Gulf. At each turn our notion of globalism has evolved.

Building a Museum in the Late 20th Century. The MACBA Case

Bartomeu Marí

Bartomeu Marí

Prey of enthusiasm or victim of naivety, one of the statements I made when I was appointed director of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in 2008 was that our exhibition program would make the building look like it was made of rubber: it would be malleable, ductile and capable of adapting to different conditions of use, typologies of subject-object-space relations, and behaviors that varied with its users. But metaphors cannot be extended endlessly, and we soon experienced how restricted and incapable of admitting exception that image was. The walls were walls, the floors were floors, and the ceilings were ceilings. I have always believed that a museum is more than the building that houses it, although over the course of the 20th century – especially its second half – museums have come to be identified with their architectural containers and with the name of an architect.[1]

MACBA opened its doors to the public in November 1995. In the 1990s no one was thinking about sustainability, but rather about the ability of architecture to produce icons that would act like the monuments on pedestals of yesteryear. The MACBA building is a good example of the photogenic and ultra-modern architecture of the end of the century. The building is not only extraneous to everything around it, but its contrasts in color and volume endow it with a talismanic quality. When MACBA was built there was widespread belief in the regenerative power of culture through institutions like the museum. Culture and art would rejuvenate urban life: the public sector invested in public space and the private sector in private space. The identity of a city that had recently and successfully hosted the Olympic Games[2] was largely based on this harmony between the public and the private. After having invested in the transportation and tourism infrastructure, the Barcelona City Council (Ajuntament) and the Autonomous Government of Catalonia (Generalitat) invested in cultural institutions. In 2004, filmmaker Joaquim Jordà (1935-2006) would describe that moment in a long and delicate documentary. *De Nens* is a portrait of Barcelona society at a moment when the past was still too close at hand to be recorded and too far away to be remembered as it was. Barcelona ceased to be the port city so dear to Jean Genet, with its working-class

1 Editor's note: See Jean-Louis Cohen's essay in this volume.

2 Editor's note: The Olympic Games were held in Barcelona in 1992.

and industrial tradition, to become one of Europe's urban beaches. From industry to services, Barcelona embraced tourism as its main source of income. Culture, along with climate, gastronomy and landscape, became a crucial ally in this powerful global industry.

Spanish culture gained access to the more liberal realms of modernity in the 1980s. The industrialization of the 1950s and the economic liberalization of the 1960s, along with the development of tourism and the loosening of moral restrictions, meant that when General Franco died in 1975 Spanish society could modify its behavior. A range of aesthetic, social and political possibilities descended like a waterfall of simultaneous innovations. The recovery of democratic institutions, in the Catalonian case the Ajuntament and Generalitat, spurred contemporary art collecting – something that did not exist under Franco – and gave rise to the construction of a heritage based on works by artists from different generations. The former vacuum was absolute and what was gradually acquired gave shape to an incipient collection that was furthered, in 1987, by the founding of the Fundació MACBA. The Foundation was created to rally private efforts to provide the economic means to acquire works for the museum. At the end of the last century the MACBA collection began a process of maturation that privileged a set of principles, of lines of force that provided it with an identity more or less in keeping with its exhibition, education and publlic programs.

"A museum can either be a museum or it can be modern, but it cannot be both,"[3] declared Gertrude Stein in the early twentieth century. We might now ask whether our culture and the value we place on artistic practice are still modern. There are many reasons to think that they are, especially if we identify modernism with the avant-garde impulse to break with inherited traditions: the drama of the "tabula rasa." The continuity or rupture with tradition allows us to examine present genealogies with a critical eye. It also allows us to appreciate the change in paradigms of behavior in art and their influence on how institutions, including museums, operate. Much art from the second half of the 20th century and into the present has questioned the classical museum model in order to invent another, non-encyclopedic model: a museum that invents relationships between individuals, objects and values; a museum that constantly changes the images of the present to provide other images for the future.[4]

While museums no longer hold exclusive rights to the presentation of art, they do have a basic responsibility toward their visitors, a responsibility that is not restricted to the material preservation of their collections. Beyond that, a museum is responsible for constantly activating meanings, for rendering current the particular intentions of artifacts known as "works of art." After exhibitions like *When Attitudes Become Form*[5], we know that art becomes art through a process of institutionalization and reception, and that the history of contemporary art has to be written through its exhibitions.

3 Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 278.

4 Editor's note: See Juan José Lahuerta's essay in this volume.

One of the functions of a collection of contemporary art is to "sow" the fruits of rupture from the traditions to which that art is genealogically bound. While art is not created from art history, its various idioms are not alien to one another, nor are their meanings independent of one another. Breaks with the past are the beginnings of today's traditions. Basically, these ruptures have involved the abandonment of the aesthetics of representation as the driving force of art in favor of transformation; the center of gravity has shifted from the author to the receiver, and individual subjectivity has been abandoned for research into a certain communicative objectivity that is identified with the desire to transform. This research is born of disenchantment with the world and how it is made manifest. Art in our time flees from nature as source, looking instead to the very culture in which it wants to find a place, to the artifice that produces it and nurtures it: the city as a stage and a showcase for technologies of production and consumption.

The 2010 installation of the permanent collection – place image here – is an invention; it effects a radical change in the way that works of art relate to us, their receivers, and to one another. I will now address this change in relation to two fundamental conditions of every work of art. In terms of their material existence, works of art can be inert and unchanging over the course of time, or they can order time for us because they are based on a particular time frame. Time is just another, albeit essential, material from which art is made.

Up to a certain point in the 1960s art took the form of inert objects: objects and products; things whose physical qualities did not change over time; things that demanded, even required, that time be handled by the receiver of the work, who decided how it should be perceived. This was common to the techniques of painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, etc. The rupture from this state of things was triggered by four major sources of intrusion into the stillness of art: music, theater, dance, and cinema – all ephemeral arts, arts with a time span, arts that imposed a beginning and an end determined by their creator and beyond our control. These represent two paradigms as different as reading a poem on the page of a book and listening to it being read; in the second case, we see the poem on the lips of the reader. While the fact that a work of art decides when to start and when to finish puts us on the defensive, it also serves as a guide, as if it were taking us by the hand to share a slice of life. The tension between these two typologies runs through this long journey from the past to the future.

In 1955, Barcelona hosted an exhibition of works from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York[6] [Fig. 1]. It was housed in the galleries of the Palau de la Virreina and the Museu d'Art Modern, in the Parc de la Ciutadella. In the exhibition, which operated under the auspices of the Third Biennale of Ibero-American Art[7], works were clustered by

5 *When Attitudes Become Form* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), exhibition curated by Harald Szeemann.

6 Editor's note: *El arte moderno en los Estados Unidos. Selección de las colecciones del Museum of Modern Art de Nueva York, Tercera Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte. Instituto de Cultura Hispánica.* The exhibition was held at the Palacio de la Virreina and the Museo de Arte Moderno from September 24 to October 24, 1955.

7 Editor's note: the first Biennale of Ibero-American Art was held in Madrid in 1951 and the second in Havana, Cuba in 1954.

1.
Exhibition view *Time as Matter. MACBA Collection. New Acquisitions,* MACBA, Barcelona, 2009.
From left to right: La Vanguardia, original 09/10/1955, 1955; La Vanguardia, original 14/10/1955, 1955
Photographs from top to bottom: Anonymous, *Sculptures from the Exhibition "Modern Art in the United States" shown in the covered courtyard of the Palau de la Virreina, September 24th to October 24th 1955*; Anonymous, *Sculptures from the Exhibition "Modern Art in the United States" shown in the covered courtyard of the Palau de la Virreina, September 24th to October 24th 1955;* JOSA, *Selection of works from the Museum of Modern Art of New York from the Exhibition "Modern Art in the United States" at Palau de la Virreina (Inner Rooms) September 24th to October 24th 1955;* JOSA, *Selection of works from the Museum of Modern Art of New York from the Exhibition "Modern Art in the United States" at Palau de la Virreina (Inner Rooms) September 24th to October 24th 1955. Modern Art in the United States. Selection of works from the Museum of Modern Art of New York from the Exhibition "Modern Art in the United States", New York, 1955*
[Catalog edited on the occasion of the *III Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte* at the Palau de la Virreina and in the Museo de Arte Moderno in the Parc de la Ciutadella, Barcelona. Septiembre 24th - October 24th 1955]
Photo: Tony Coll, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona

technique (painting, sculpture, printing), but there was also a section devoted to North American architecture of the period. The show formed part of the fluid diplomatic and cultural exchanges between the United States and Franco's Spain, and it served to introduce Spain to abstract art.[8] Though Franco's regime was becoming more liberal at the time, the country was still marked by social control, police vigilance and censorship, as it struggled to forget the deprivations of the Spanish Civil War. The abandonment of the autarchy of the previous decades required powerful allies and symbolic correlations. Art would play a significant role in this scenario, and once the work of artists like Oteiza, Chillida and Tàpies had been acclaimed abroad, it would be accepted by the authorities back home.

While artists and critics had mixed reactions to this exhibition, for the local public it provided one of the first opportunities to see the aesthetic innovations of the period, albeit filtered through MoMA and sanctioned by its authority. The inclusion of paintings by Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis [Fig. 2], etc. helped consolidate the pictorial Informalism that linked Catalonia to the abstract tendencies that would dominate the art world in the following decade, and to the (then emerging) art market. This highly charged exhibition breathed new life into the old conflict between figurative and abstract art that would be played out until the end of the 20th century. The invention of abstraction, consciously understood as the rejection of reality and the constitution of a universal and timeless language, is one of the most complex equations in Western culture. In Catalonia, American Abstract Expressionism invigorated Informalism, which in turn came to be identified with local (i.e. Spanish) signs of identity.[9]

As Manuel Borja Villel, former director of MACBA, explained, "Luis González Robles, the real executor of artistic policy via his post as official

8 Jorge Luis Marzo: *Art Modern i Franquisme. Els orígens conservadors de l'avantguarda i de la política artística a L'Estat Espanyol* (Girona: Fundació Espais, 2008).

9 Editor's note: See Maria Dolores Jiménez Blanco and Robert Lubar's essays in this volume.

2.
View of the exhibition *Time as Matter. MACBA Collection. New Acquisitions,* MACBA, Barcelona, 2009.
From left to right:
Morris Louis, *Gamma Iota*, 1960, and Clifford Still, *1951 - D*, 1951
Photo: Tony Coll, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona

3.
Exhibition view *Time as Matter. MACBA Collection. New Acquisitions,* MACBA, Barcelona, 2009.
From left to right:
Manuel Millares, *Cuadro 61,* 1959
Manuel Millares, *Cuadro 85,* 1959
Eduardo Chillida, *Deseoso,* 1954
Robert Motherwell, *Wall Painting No. III,* 1953
Photo: Tony Coll, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona

curator of exhibitions, identified the essential characteristics of Spanishness in the work of Antoni Tàpies (1923-2012): 'an ethical attitude to life and a mystical view of the world, the aridity and austerity of the lands of Spain and realism [sic], the textures of the earth, the dark colors and the muffled tones of the Spanish artistic tradition.'"[10] And Gonzáles Robles would more or less say the same thing about Luis Feito (b. 1929), Josep Guinovart (1927-2007), Rafael Canogar (b. 1935), and Amadeo Gabino (1922-2004): "despite their vivid modernity, they are linked to the same old artistic tradition."[11] Similarly, the art critic Vicente Aguilera Cerni (1920-2005), who would become an outspoken voice of the artistic left, made the following comment about the Spanish delegation to the 1958 Venice Biennale, in which Tàpies and Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002) [Fig. 3] won prizes for painting and sculpture, respectively: "Spain has in-

10 Manuel J. Borja-Villel: "Los cambios de gusto. Tàpies y la crítica," *Tàpies. Els anys 80* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1988), p. 203; quoted in Jorge Luis Marzo, *op. cit.*

11 Cited by Genoveva Tusell García, "La proyección exterior del arte abstracto español en tiempos del grupo El Paso"; in *El tiempo de El Paso.* (Madrid: Centro Cultural de la Villa, 2002), p. 13; quoted in Jorge Luis Marzo, *op. cit.*

4.
View of the exhibition *Time as Matter. MACBA Collection. New Acquisitions,* MACBA, Barcelona, 2009.
On the plinth: Constant, *Construction aux plans transparents,* 1954
Videos: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting,* 1974
Gordon Matta-Clark, *City Slivers,* 1976
On the walls: Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971,* 1971
Photo: Tony Coll, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona

tervened in the polemic of the Biennale in the best way possible: by forcing recognition (as afforded by critics from all over the world) of the power and tremendous Spanishness of its young and non-conformist voices."[12]

In the current presentation of the MACBA collection we see that works of circa 1955 begin to display an initially timid awareness of what constituted an aesthetic shock in the artistic milieu of the time.[13] Though the political authorities' view of abstract art was by no means favorable, they could not help but recognize the relevance, as well as the "usefulness" to foreign policy, of artists like Tàpies, Modest Cuixart (1925-2001), Manolo Millares (1926-1972), Antonio Saura (1930-1998), Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002), Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003) and others, artists acclaimed by international critics of the period. What at first seemed to be an "anomaly" would gradually become an official art, or at least an art officially recognized and promoted. For twenty years Informalist painting would be a synonym for modernism, and its universe would contain contemporary art as a whole. Pictorial Informalism constitutes our contemporary classicism.

In 1956, a young Dutch painter who had been associated with the Co-BrA group suddenly eschewed the group's principles of free and crude abstraction and began work on a major project that would occupy him for almost twenty years. He was Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005) [Fig. 4] and *New Babylon* was the ultimate global expression of utopian thinking. Although the Marshall Plan had assisted in the reconstruction of a Europe devastated by World War Two, Constant, along with members of the Letrist International and later the Situationist International spearheaded by Guy Debord (1931-1994), offered another revolution, this one against banality, consumerism, modern city planning, and the lack of passion that an abundance of objects and information was instilling in European society. The term "Pop Art" would be coined only a few years later.[14] European Pop

12 Jorge Luis Marzo, *op. cit.*, n.p.
13 The American art exhibition combined the presence of openly realist and abstract artists in what was, from today's viewpoint, a highly eclectic vision of the American artistic scene.
14 The artist Richard Hamilton and the critic Lawrence Alloway used the term for the first time in 1958.

Art would partake of the Situationist spirit of revolt – as well as its exaggerated sense of acid humor – and reject numbness born of excess, convention and the reduction of ideas to the lowest common denominator.

While Oteiza and Chillida tackled the physical problems of form in relation to the behavior of metals, Constant affirmed a connection to the Constructivist strategies of the first decades of the 20th century and investigated new materials such as plastic. His project, however, was ideological rather than formal. Unlike Le Corbusier and the concept of a clean slate free of traditional city planning, *New Babylon* was not a project for a new city. Constant did not design a new city but built models and devised scenarios to help us imagine what a different way of communal living might look like. *New Babylon* would be built by its inhabitants through play and the disinterested pursuit of pleasure. Play and pleasure replaced functional planning; they are the antidotes to the social linearity imposed by modernism, whose risks had already been sensed.

New Babylon and Pop Art demonstrate a desire to return to the reality that Expressionism and *Informalism* had dispelled from the culture of representation. Some years later Hans Haacke (b. 1936), in an essential work in his production entitled *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971),[15] would state that the city had become a stage for speculation and that abundance was confined to a minority. As has often been observed, the 1960s' spirit of liberation dissipated in the 1970s and eventually turned into a nightmare. Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) provided an extraordinarily lucid and bitter example of what the city had become in a decade when modernity was more mechanical than ever. Although Matta-Clark's work depends on machines, he himself was a great performer, a great stage act situated in the heart of the urban setting. The artist's body appears on-stage in opposition to the facts of architecture and the conventions associated with it. Matta-Clark removes the city's make-up and exposes its guts with violence as well as surgical precision.

The spirit of *New Babylon* gave rise to two major trends that have largely provided the framework for the later works gathered in our collection today. Indeed, out of an interest in the ideology of play and the disinterested achievement of pleasure that enlivens the spirit of *New Babylon*, we have pursued works by artists who have investigated the territoriality of play and its subversive aspects in relation to traditional and authoritarian notions of education. One of the problems reflected in museums today concerns the transmission of knowledge and the ways in which works of art are linked to research and to the creation of knowledge. In 1968 the Norwegian artist Palle Nielsen (1920-2000) created a participatory work in the form of a large prototype for a playground, *Modellen: En modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle* (The model. A model for a qualitative society), which was first installed in the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, then directed by Pontus

15 Editor's note: Haacke's project, an indictment of specious real estate practices, was to be included in his 1971 retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. The exhibition was cancelled and the show's curator, Edward Fry, was fired.

5.
Matt Mullican, *M.I.T. Project*, 1990-2009.
MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation.
Photo: Gasull Fotografia
© Matt Mullican, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona

Hultén, and subsequently reinstalled on various occasions in the following decade. *Modellen* was the product of a new type of artist, one who offered structures for social action rather than aesthetic objects. (The MACBA collection has acquired from Nielsen's own archives all the documentary material relating to *The Model*.) *Modellen* had two radical features in its day: criticism of the educational system and research into models that offered alternatives to the banality of modern city planning. Heavily influenced by the sub-culture of psychedelia, the work is a microcosm of activities aimed at children, who are normally overlooked by society.

More recently, Peter Friedl (b. 1960) made a photographic inventory of playgrounds in the cities he visited for his installation *Playgrounds* (1995-2004). The images are taken from a child's eye, as if the artist had sought to capture that specific point of view. But there are no users in this deserted playground. The work is concerned with the tradition of documentary photography associated with conceptual art, which springs from the non-expressive use of the camera's objectivity. The work is also a criticism of a very specific urban typology, part and parcel of modern utopia, which is now nothing more than the leftovers of our cities' territories, stifled by safety regulations and the progressive deterioration of public space. In short, *Playgrounds* is a hypothesis for the organization of an archive insofar as it incorporates an established order of presentation, in this case as depersonalized as it is abstract – the alphabetical order of the cities in which the artist took the photos. Archival logic also inspired the research of the architect and urbanist Nils Norman (b. 1966) when he assembled and classified the remains of playgrounds around the world that are in the process disappearing. This is an archaeology project that studies and represents the object at the very moment that it is becoming rubble and ceasing to perform its functions. Nieuwenhuys sets up play as a model of coexist-

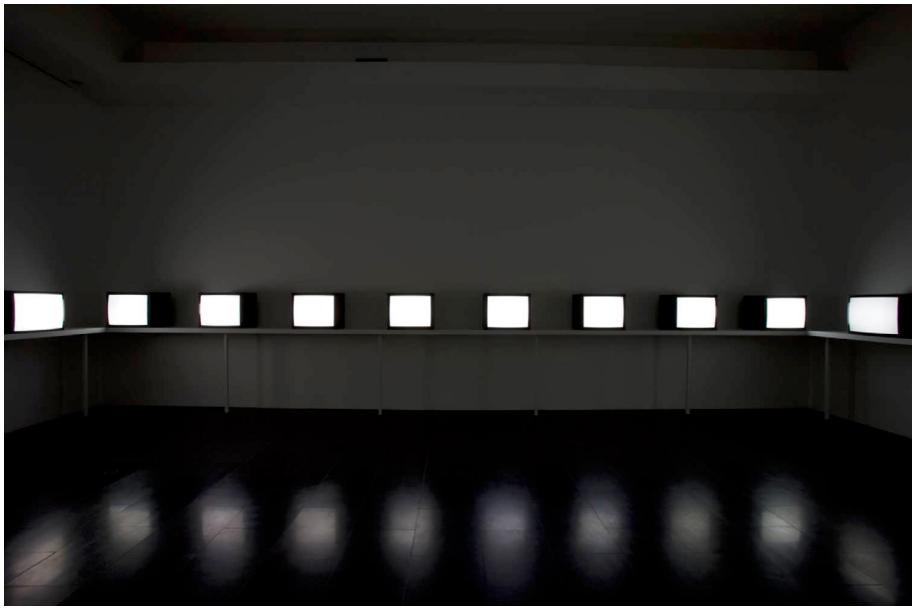
ence; Nielsen proposes it as a model of education that escapes the control of authority; Friedl proclaims its desert-like character; and Norman its demise.

The definition of a playground serves to generate the structure of Matt Mullican's *M.I.T. Project* (1990-2009) [Fig. 5]. Mullican's early experiments in virtual reality used the first macro-computers of the mid-1980s to provide an image for his personal cosmology. In this more recent work, Mullican (b. 1951) brings together two concerns that have affinities with the work of Palle Nielsen, although his materials and aesthetic choices are different. On a playing field Mullican reconstructed a series of structures that represented knowledge about the different worlds that form his cosmology, and combined them with elements from the natural sciences, biology, etc. Classifying, ordering and presenting are tasks common to the artist and the scientist. Mullican, however, places his personal cosmogony and his subjectivity above the objectivity of science. The performances in which he is under hypnosis help to explain more precisely the role of his personal and inaccessible world, which is contrasted with the exhibition of a three-dimensional global map.

Although they spring from different sources, European Pop Art and *New Babylon* both condemn the consumer society and the pleasures rooted in everyday life. Richard Hamilton (1922-2011) is an artist with a close, somewhat oblique, link to Catalonia. Attracted by the figure of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), who had spent his summers in Cadaqués, in 1963 Hamilton began to spend his summers there as well. His presence in the village is essential to understanding the evolution of the Galeria Cadaqués, a microscopic enclave of avant-garde art in the 1970s, where connections were forged between Catalan art of the 1970s and the avant-garde of the early 20th century, through the figures of Duchamp, Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) and John Cage (1912-1992). The dealer and collector Lanfranco Bombelli (1921-2008) generously bequeathed a selection of works to MACBA, including pieces produced by Hamilton himself and by Dieter Roth (1930-1998) for the 1976 exhibition *Collaborations of Ch. Rotham*. Galeria Cadaqués initiated emblematic projects such as *Cadaqués Canal Local* (1974) by Antoni Muntadas (b1942) and *Flauta i trampolí* (1981) by Antoni Miralda (b. 1942), as well as numerous exhibitions and events.[16]

Richard Hamilton is one of the most fascinating artists of the second half of the twentieth century. He and the British Pop artists played a major role in the development of the work of certain Catalan artists: Joan Rabascall (b. 1935) and Miralda, who travelled to London in the early 1960s, met both Hamilton and the art critic Lawrence Alloway, and came into contact with contemporary European art. A native of Barcelona, Rabascall is one of the great unknowns of the Catalan art scene. He and Miralda coincided in Paris with Jaume Xifra (b. 1934), Benet Rossell (b. 1937) and Dorothée Selz (b.946), whose individual and collective work from the ear-

16 *Galeria Cadaqués. Obres de la Col·lecció Bombelli* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2006).



6.
David Lamelas,
Situación de Tiempo, 1967.
MACBA Collection.
MACBA Consortium.
Photo: Tony Coll
© David Lamelas, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona

ly 1970s was already attracting the attention of art historian and critic Alexandre Cirici, the veritable intellectual father of the avant-gardes of the second half of the 20th century in Catalonia. Pop Art produced in Europe differs fundamentally from its American counterpart in its attitude to consumer society[17]. Europe had recovered from post-war hardships and a new generation was coming of age in conditions very different from those experienced by their parents: cars, electrical appliances, architecture, fashion and furniture gave shape to an everyday environment with a new aesthetic. The traditional mass media – the printed word, the cinema, the radio, etc. – ceded their dominant role to television. European artists provided a half-humorous, half-bitter view of the things that fascinated Americans. They did not celebrate the industrialization of the production of goods and objects, and they denounced the impoverishment of the urban environment that was the breeding ground for post-war modernity. In a commercial arena dominated by Abstract Expressionism and various types of Informalism, the reappropriation of the techniques, representational strategies and ethical attitudes of the early 20th century avant-gardes, as seen in the work of Berlin Dadaists John Heartfield (1891-1968), Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) and Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971), is readily apparent. The principle of collage – which the critic Brian O'Doherty saw as the origin of the paradigm of anti-Expressionist perception – [18] made a comeback. Information overload is turned into a "thirst for images."

Artists associated with the Pop movement attacked the manipulations that the (then new) media imposed on the constitution of public awareness, giving rise to a new line of work that engaged those very media. The works of the Argentine David Lamelas (b. 1946) [Fig. 6], along with collages by Joan Rabascall, confront us with an anti-spectacle of communication that evidences the indigestion of sensory and cognitive systems. In

17 Editor's note: See the text by Miriam Basilio in this volume.

18 Editor's note: See "Art versus feeling" (*New York Times*, February 1964), reproduced in Brian O'Doherty, *Object and Idea. An Art Critic's Journal, 1961-1967* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 209-211.

David Lamela's *Situación de tiempo* (1967), a battery of television sets is turned on but receives no signal; the televisions "look at us" while displaying only the classic "snow" – the unbearable noise of the machine that has nothing to say. Lamelas, who also experimented with one of the first systems for the reception of unfiltered information in *Office of Information about the Vietnam War on Three Levels: the Visual Image, Text and Audio*, presented at the 1968 Venice Biennale, participated in the trend to use information and the media as material. Political repression in Argentina in the 1970s led León Ferrari (b. 1920) to seek exile in Brazil, where he produced the series of heliographs *Nosotros no sabíamos* (1976 [2008]) that expose the numbness that takes over a society living with terror. He used newspaper reports to condemn both the barbarity of repression and the complicity of the so-called morally upright social classes. In the series "L'Osservatore Romano" (2001 [2008]), Ferrari vented his anti-clericalism in collages that made used of manipulated images from the official press, thereby criticizing the hypocritical attitudes of the Catholic hierarchy

Ideologies – political, religious or ethnic – have been the subject of violent and bloody iterations throughout history. In 1976 Francesc Torres[19] made *Construction of the Matrix* in the context of the 37th edition of the Venice Biennale. This work sheds light on how the operations and consequences of opposing ideologies (Marxism, Christianity) coincide and how they have been consumed by the planet's basic element: soil. The work also explores the evolution of the human species from ideology and religion to violence: the mirage of a new society can emerge from this matrix, as evidenced by political uncertainty in Spain at that time.

In her work Sanja Iveković (b. 1949) attempts to expose the conditioning of the media. Eugènia Balcells (1942) and Eulàlia Grau (b. 1946) address the formation of stereotypes on the basis of media images, a subject that Martha Rosler (b. 1943) also tackles in her videos. Antoni Muntadas, meanwhile, investigates the exchange structures proposed by television, which was becoming increasingly popular in Spain in the 1970s. Collectives such as the Grup de Treball, and later Videonou, experimented with new ways of producing and conveying information under conditions of censorship. Videonou can be seen as the embryo of the local television stations of the 1980s in Catalonia.

Television is mediated whereas theatre is immediate. It represents repetition as opposed to the unrepeatability of live action. Television would invent another type of time, which on the basis of spectacle and abundance configures the decline and progressive disappearance of the public stage. Theatre and cinema joined forces in the early 1960s to radically change the physiognomy of contemporary art. The birth of performance cannot be understood outside the practices of theatre and avant-garde dance, just as the emergence of the concept of the installation cannot be understood outside cinema and, later, video. The difference between thea-

19 See John Hanhardt and Francesc Torres's dialogue in this volume.

7.
Joan Jonas, *Lines in the Sand*, 2002.
MACBA Collection.
Barcelona City Council Fund.
Photo: Tony Coll
© Joan Jonas, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporàni de Barcelona

tre and performance lies in the fact that a performer is not an actor interpreting a fixed role. In performance, the artist interprets him or herself.

Fascinated by the serial nature of the minimalist art that dominated the American scene in the 1960's, Dan Graham (b. 1942) levels a criticism of the era's models for the space of artistic production. Influenced by dance and rock, Graham created performances that analyze how action can be a laboratory for perception. Crucially, the eye was the sole organ of perception in the model proposed by the critics who provided the theoretical basis for Abstract Expressionism; viewing was a pure act, an encounter uncontaminated by the painting, a space that the eye could perceive without obstacles. The model of perception presented by Graham opposes the traditional occularcentric model and reminds us of the role the entire body plays in the act of perception. As Brian O'Doherty observed:

> Some of the precise discriminations of the eye were inculcated into the viewer's other virgin senses. The eye urges the body to provide it with information: the body turns into a data collector. The traffic on this sensory road is heavy in both directions, between conceptualized sensations and updated concepts. In this unstable drawing lie the origins of the perceptive scenarios, of performance and body art.[20]

After Graham a new category of art was formulated not only on the basis of time but also on the ways an artist connects to a specific audience. Maintaining the unity of time and space would be crucial, whereas the unity of action, as exemplified by the work of Joan Jonas (b. 1936) [Fig. 7], would undergo constant alterations by means of narrative modes that now seem archaic, or at least exotic. In Jonas's work, the influence of the Japa-

20 Brian O'Doherty: *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space* [1976]. (San Francisco, CA: The Lapis Press, 1986), p. 52.

nese Kabuki and Noh theatres is grafted onto the figure of the oral narrator, also found in southern Mediterranean traditions. Whether of ancient origin or part and parcel of state-of-the-art media (as in a TV series), magic, enchantment and phantasmagoria are put into the service of readings of history that connect the author's subjectivity with the supposed objectivity of the official narrative.

The work of American artist Rita McBride (b. 1960) addresses the possibility of remaking objects and images, after artists from the 1970s like Michael Asher (b. 1943) and John Baldessari (b. 1931) – with whom McBride studied in the 1980s – had rejected the role of objects in artistic production. In situations triggered by objects, McBride acts as a kind of inventor. The structure *Arena* (1997) provides a technical alternative to the depersonalization of modular engineering, where repetition ends up creating a landscape unified by objects and forms. The utilitarian nature of the work also transforms the exhibition space by introducing rituals normally excluded from the logic of a museum.

Theatre and cinema, as we have seen, joined forces for a very short period. While cinema has become the paradigm of much of the art produced since the 1990s, we can now see its influence on work from the early 1970s. In 1972 Lamelas created *Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning)*, an installation that combined film and slide projection. The film featured a series of plausible, seemingly banal scenes, presented from different points of view in the slides. Lamelas explained: "The idea is to show how fact can be manipulated through film – because of censorship, commercial aims or political manipulation, for example."[21]

Cinema becomes a mechanism for presentation, whose very machinery goes beyond the concept of sculpture. The layout of a cinematic drama in three dimensions, and the use of sound and lighting distance us forever from the primacy and domination of the eye. We are light years away from the "platitude" of a painting and the three-dimensional inertia of traditional sculpture. In 1985 Judith Barry (b. 1954) clearly demonstrated this concern in the installation *In the Shadow of the City… Vamp r y*, a work typical of the architectural substitutions that countered the return to the pictorial model that took place in the 1980s. In this work, Barry reacted to the notion of simulation and the "set of images" that the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard characterized as the spirit of the time. Barry formulated the idea of vampirizing images and their compulsive consumption. The city still provided the backdrop for local experience, and cinema – relieved of its documentary function, as we have seen in the work of Dan Graham – reclaimed fiction as the foundation for a vision of the world that would later be fed into digital technology.

The myths and fictions of cinema also drive the work of Ignasi Aballí (b. 1958) in, for instance, his reworking of the unmade film projects of the French writer Georges Perec. Aballí made posters announcing public

21 David Lamelas: *A New Refutation of Time*. (Rotterdam and Munich: Witte de With, in collaboration with Kunstverein München and Richter Verlag, 1997), p. 86.

8.
Asier Mendizabal, *Cinema*, 1999.
MACBA Collection.
Barcelona City Council Fund.
Photo: Seber Ugarte
© Asier Mendizabal, 2013
Courtesy of MACBA, Museu d'Art
Contemporàni de Barcelona

films that never existed. This work represents precisely the time of possibility, and it projects onto history the shadows of desires that have not taken form, an echo of something that should have existed. Dutch artist Manon de Boer (b. 1966) evokes these same echoes to respond to historical events. An anti-monument, *Attica* (2008), commemorates the 1971 Attica prison riot – considered one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of the United States, after the massacres of the Native Americans and the Civil War – that took place on the outskirts of New York. In *Attica*, time is circular; the past is not behind us, but in front, and it may be the only thing we can see.

Over the course of the last century cinema became the depository of hopes for education and freedom that began to dissolve as the medium became increasingly industrialized. Cinema was seen not merely as a source of poetic experience but also as an instrument for social change and liberation. These were among the aims of the Medvedkin group, which revolved around figures like Jean-Luc Godard in the late 1960s. Asier Mendizabal (b. 1973) [Fig. 8] re-appropriated a sentence from the group's manifesto and turned it into a motto for a somewhat theatrical situation: "Cinema is not magic, it is a technique and a science, a technique born from science put into the service of desire: the workers' desire…"[22] This text can be read on a banner lying on a trestle table, but the end of the sentence, which reads "…to liberate themselves," is not visible. Industry against ideas and against action: the work recreates the atmosphere of a demonstration, the spirit of a need, and the contents of a yearning, which are ultimately the final aims of a work that uses poor but eloquent materials.

References to modernism, its origins and manifestations have been a part of this story from the beginning. One of the reasons for the renewed

22 Editor's note: After 1994 the original French phrase "c'est pas sorcier" ("this is not magic") was to become the title of a French educational television program. The phrase appears written on a wall in the film *Classe de Lutte* (1969) by Chris Marker, a member of the Medvekin Group. The group was formed by young workers and filmmakers in the French towns of Sochaux and Besançon , who were acting in the spirit of the post '68 era. Its name was chosen in homage to the Soviet filmmaker Alexander Medvedkine, who in 1932 invented the "cinema-train," a device with which, in collaboration with workers and peasants, he toured the Soviet Union making a series of films on their lives and working conditions. Similarly, the Medvekin Group's films aimed to document the condition of workers at factories like Rhodia in Besançon and Peugeot in Sochaux. Its "Nouvelle Societé" series captures de group's attempt to develop the revolutionary potential of cinema.

interest in what has been and continues to be modernism is its ongoing importance in the work of a younger generation of artists. These emerging artists question the validity of the modern over and above the post-modern discourse that has dominated intellectual and artistic debates in the West in the last three decades. Peruvian artist Armando Andrade Tudela (b. 1975) reviewed the ways in which information materializes and collides through history: "In my research, I focus on the several ways that aspects of modern and contemporary culture have been assimilated and understood in Peru. Both processes have been overshadowed by an increasing need to transform external information into concrete and ordinary actions and, at the same time, to reconsider our own historical background in the face of a constant call for adaptation."[23] The legacy of modernism as a set of ideas, beliefs, or facts that can be identified as such does not weigh on our history in the same way. The film *La Ricarda,*[24] made in 2006 by a group of artists assembled by Michel François (b. 1956) and Jean-Paul Jacquet (b. 1966) – also artists – provides a subjective portrait of one of Catalonia's domestic monuments to modernity. The residence known as La Ricarda, built in the late 1950s by the architect Antoni Bonet, is one of the few examples of our modern architectural heritage. The artists made a collective film constructed by means of the Surrealist *cadavre exquis* technique. It assembles various views of spaces that are as emblematic as they are distant. Subjective descriptions here run parallel with objectivity and the transparency of the modernist movement: the experience of life today seems to trample on the rationalism that propelled the forms and materials of a precise and fleeting moment in which spaces were being made for life.

The 2010 presentations of the MACBA collection were based on the idea that in the Spanish context the modernist aesthetic truly took hold in the 1950s, not at the beginning of the 20th century. From that moment through the early 1990s, artistic production was tightly bound to architecture and design. A reading of history from this perspective must concede a crucial role to poetic experience: the figure of the visual poet and playwright Joan Brossa (1919-1998) serves to explain many of the changes and mutations that, by affinity or antagonism, several generations of artists, from Antoni Tàpies to Francesc Torres, and from Josep Maria Mestres Quadreny (b. 1929) to Antoni Llena (b. 1943), have been able to effect.

23 Unpublished statement by the artist.

24 Editor's note: *La Ricarda* was presented at the Capella MACBA from July to December 2011.

The Age of the Container

Rafael Doctor

Rafael Doctor

The first decade of this new millennium has been the accelerated continuation of a dynamic that first emerged in the Spanish contemporary art establishment in the mid-1980s. Over the course of these years, a rash of art centers and museums has spread across Spain, as if a cultural fever had broken out in the needs of the citizenry. I myself was at the helm of one of these new museums for nearly seven years, and my perspective is therefore inevitably biased by my protracted professional involvement with the system.

In order to examine this issue properly, we must rewind to the 1970s and step back in time to visit a very different Spain: a country entirely devoid of institutions devoted to contemporary art[1], with the sole exception of the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español (1966) in the Hanging Houses of Cuenca, a small private museum supported by a group of artists with ties to the El Paso movement.[2] That same year the Museu Picasso appeared in Barcelona, thanks to a major donation of works by that artist made to the city. In 1975, while Franco was still in power, the Spanish Ministry of Culture inaugurated the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo (MEAC) in the Ciudad Universitaria district of Madrid, and a few foundations made their debut, including the Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation in Cadaqués and the Museo Vostell in Malpartida. Although the MEAC represented officialdom's first foray into a world that had hitherto been virtually ignored, both the public and private sectors were guilty of having cultivated a relationship with contemporary art that was anodyne at best and dusted off on a few signal occasions, such as the Venice and São Paulo biennials, where traditionalists temporarily donned the guise of "moderns" for a few short days because it suited their interests.

The scene has changed dramatically since the all-too-recent days when this situation was the norm, at least in terms of spaces and institutions for contemporary art. Today, the Spanish state boasts one of the world's largest networks of contemporary art centers and museums, giving the impression that the country's rapid economic growth and social progress in recent years was accompanied by a boom in the arts. In the entire world, only Germany and France possess a similar geography of contemporary art venues, but unlike those countries, where it has developed gradually, in Spain

1 Editor's note: In 1951 the National Museum of Contemporary Art was founded in Madrid at the inciative of the Minister of Education, Joaquín Ruiz Giménez. Architect José Luis Fernández del Amo was appointed director. However, the museum did not succeed in gathering a collection of Spanish contemporary art.

2 Editor's note: El Paso is a group of informalist artists founded in 1957. It included Antonio Saura, Manuel Millares, Luis Feito, and Manuel Rivera among others. See the essays by Robert Lubar, María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco and Bartomeu Marí in this volume.

everything sprang up quite suddenly, practically tripping over itself in its haste, and circumventing the necessary intellectual protocols which dictate that cultural projects must first be accepted by the society where they are to be implemented.

It all happened so quickly that it is still too soon to draw conclusions, for we are now in the process of consolidating our own contradiction on a day-to-day basis. Yet we cannot feign surprise, because in one way or another we have all had a hand in bringing this about; and all the while we knew full well that it was more imposture than reality and that, despite our knack for constructing foundations, organizations, and entities of every kind – and Spanish contemporary art is a perfectly constructed, well-buttressed entity – what was initially planned has always outgrown its original intentions.

What really happened here? We might say that there was a need for an institution capable of supporting and championing the cause of Spanish contemporary art, and that this explains the emergence of the MEAC and its subsequent transformation into the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 1986 as part of the national arts policy introduced by Javier Solana (then the Minister of Culture). After being cut off from the cultural debates of the 20th century and having exiled many of our homegrown creative geniuses in one way or another, Spain, while still in the throes of its transition from dictatorship to democracy, received one of the world's most celebrated contemporary artworks, Picasso's *Guernica*, and was suddenly faced with the pressing need to protect this treasure and construct a history around it. The need was undoubtedly real – the need for a space capable of housing a collection and, above all, of illustrating a process of growth and development that was already perfectly defined by a specific, thoroughly established history. This gave Spanish art a museum to support it and give it the institutional respect it had been lacking. But afterwards, what was the catalyst for the sudden flurry of plans for contemporary art projects across the country? The obvious answer is the then-fledgling political system of regional and municipal government institutions, which favored the proliferation of new spaces for art because these became the perfect pretext for newly minted political authorities eager to mark their territory and buy a slice of modernity at a reasonable price. Consequently, most of the projects that have emerged since then have been motivated, first, by political interests, and secondly, by cultural and social interests. This is the reality we must assimilate and accept if we want to have an accurate picture of the past and present of new cultural institutions in Spain. If we overlook this fact, we are ignoring a fundamental situation whose very existence says a great deal about the nature and significance of these organizations in our particular context. We cannot honestly say that Spain became a country with a passion for promoting the arts overnight; rather, our politicians – in other words, all of us – somehow saw the creation of cultural spaces as a

successful form of ostentation, good publicity, and, in the best-case scenario, a way to promote tourism by establishing a dialogue between contemporaneity and historical heritage.

If Spain wanted to be modern it would have to embrace everything that goes with modernity, and in a society of the spectacle – which ours undoubtedly is – putting on spectacular shows is the necessary and sensible thing to do. In a medieval society dominated by the clergy, building cathedrals served a purpose that went much deeper than mere religion; in the same way, in this society, the appendages and associated components of museums and art centers far outnumber their strictly cultural elements, which are ultimately more of an excuse than an end. And so we build spaces for culture, forgetting to stop and ask ourselves if we really need them and overlooking culture itself in the process. It is important to recall that, throughout this period, the highest-ranking positions in the cultural departments of Spain's different government administrations have usually been filled by people entirely unrelated to the culture industry who, being incapable of planning or enforcing a bold arts policy, have taken the easy route of supplying the outer shell – the container – and forgetting all about the need to endow it with contents. Millions upon millions of euros have been spent erecting these new cathedrals where we are not at all sure to which god we should be praying.

While the Reina Sofía Museum set the pace of this first stage in the development of containers for contemporary art, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was destined to spearhead a second stage that culminated at the end of 2008 with the opening of the Tenerife Espacio de las Artes (TEA) and other centers like the C4 in Córdoba or the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo in Cádiz which are either about to open or have been tentatively unveiled.

When the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was born in October 1997, it marked the launch of an ambitious political and city-planning scheme that capitalized on the contemporary world's spectacular use of culture and used it to refloat an entire city. The planners were determined to have spectacle at any cost, and to get it they convinced Frank Gehry to become the adventure's principal backer. In what closely resembled a commercial franchise deal, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation negotiated with the local authorities on three levels – city hall, provincial council, and Basque Regional Government – to work out the terms of this enterprise, which aimed to use the museum project to catapult the city of Bilbao into the international spotlight.

There was never a project with a solid cultural basis for implementing this initiative; in fact, from the moment the museum opened to the present day, no one has ever managed to quantify the degree to which this great American brand name has contributed to European culture, aside from its ability to move masses through the purifying fire that art seems to be for the economy.

The great economic and political success of the Guggenheim enterprise, coupled with its tremendous media impact, made many government authorities who had not yet succumbed to the siren call of the cultural containers generation want to jump on the bandwagon of this phenomenon that was yielding such excellent results. Taking advantage of the booming economy of those years, plans were made for new institutions. The magical year in which the majority of these projects came into the world was 2002, which witnessed the birth of Artium in Álava, an outgrowth of the Provincial Council of Álava's pre-existing penchant for collecting works of art, CaixaForum in Barcelona, which also served to showcase this institution's significant efforts to popularize and collect contemporary art over the previous two decades, and other centers and museums in cities that had no connection with contemporary art: the Museo de Arte Contemporánea (MARCO) in Vigo; the Patio Herreriano in Valladolid, which became the temporary custodian of a contemporary art collection begun by different companies years earlier with the support of the Reina Sofía; the Centro de Arte de Salamanca (CASA), now Domus Artium, established to commemorate Salamanca's status as European Capital of Culture that same year; and the Centro Párraga in Murcia.

The following year, 2003, we saw the appearance of the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo (CAC) in Málaga and the Centro de Arte La Panera in Lleida; in 2004 came Es Baluard in Palma de Mallorca and the Centro de Arte de Burgos (CAB); in 2005 the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (MUSAC) in the city of León; in 2007, the Centro Huarte in Navarre; and finally the TEA in Tenerife in 2008.

Although each center was a product of its own particular background and circumstances, the majority of them were created for blatantly political reasons, and this fact was accepted by most of the powers-that-be in the communities where they emerged. Who would be bold or foolish enough to oppose the construction of a museum in his hometown? In a world riding high on speed and surplus, a museum had all kinds of positive connotations, and any plan to create a new one would never be called into question.

During the very decade that new venues for contemporary art were popping up left and right, the same authorities who were promoting the creation of these centers sat down to discuss the advisability of discontinuing the art history program at state universities – a glaring paradox for a nation that was frantically churning out big buildings and hefty budgets in an attempt to hitch its wagon to the train of modernity, or at least one that gave the appearance of modernity.

The heyday of these mega-projects for contemporary art coincided with another development: cities began creating similar hubs that tried to take that sense of spectacle inherent to museum architecture to a new and even more dramatic level. I am referring to the great auditoriums and shopping malls. The former were filled with itinerant, theatrical versions

of museum programs, and the latter with multiplex movie theaters featuring American blockbusters and retail chains perfectly adapted to the system of modern-day desires and consumerism.

Milking this movement for all it was worth, in those years a number of government authorities even dared to devise their own art biennials, modeled after the traditional biennial fairs firmly entrenched in the recent cultural-artistic unconscious. This presented us with new containers, conceptual containers that had to be filled. The same formula applied: with one bold, swift move, grab as much attention as you can and launch a movement capable of giving the city a boost via cultural channels. Thus, we went from being a country with no biennials at all, aside from the painting "biennials" which were simply competitions held every two years, to the epicenter of biennale activity: Pontevedra, Valencia, Seville, and the Canary Islands all had their own. Each and every one had a series of components that went beyond the cultural sphere, and they were generally very poorly planned and managed. As a result, they constantly oscillated between the apathy of an audience who never understood the reasoning behind those spontaneous über-events, the ephemeral and exhorbitant infusion of public funding, and effusive praise for international star curators who were clueless about the local arts scene in the places hosting their super-shows. The organization of Manifesta, the European Economic Community's travelling biennale, in San Sebastián in 2004 is a perfect example of the intellectual arrogance that fuelled these fairs, which in this case was so pronounced that the organizers actually believed they could make it an exclusively Basque event and snub the rest of Spain, under the baton of international curators whose artistic selection for the show was naïve attempt to stick their noses into the thorny political problems of the Basque Country. We would need to review each edition of these biennials one by one in order to grasp fully how minimal their cultural intent was in comparison with the element of spectacle, which aspired to be immense. In this new era of budget cuts, these blatantly propagandistic projects naturally tend to disappear. The true purpose of a biennale-type event is already being well served in our country each year by the contemporary art fair ARCO, an event that our unconscious has assimilated as a common ground whose significance goes far beyond the merely commercial aspect, which is actually its raison d'être. ARCO has consolidated itself in Spain as the most important annual showcase for contemporary art and a place that has all the components we would expect to find at a major event anywhere else. Thanks to the various initiatives organized to coincide with the fair, each year the city of Madrid celebrates a festive reunion with contemporary art; indeed, this fair has so completely conquered the hearts and minds of Madrid's citizens that its success can only be compared with that of the recently created Art Basel in Miami. In this regard, Spain has set itself apart from the rest, and it has worked out how to meet its basic needs in this area with an art fair.

On the other hand, in recent years the foundations of many contemporary artists have found their footing, and important cultural projects have grown up around them. The well-established Tàpies, Miró, and Gala-Salvador Dalí foundations have been followed by others such as those dedicated to the work of César Manrique and Chillida and monographic museums like those devoted to Esteban Vicente, Bartola, José Guerrero, and Oteiza, which operate as foundations under the aegis of municipal government corporations.

Banks and *cajas* (savings banks) have also done important work, as exemplified by the appearance of La Casa Encendida in Madrid in 2003, which introduced a new multidisciplinary model of understanding and serving through contemporary culture. Meanwhile, LaCaixa, once the leading supporter and promoter of contemporary art in our country, has chosen to pursue a more generalist, entertainment-oriented arts policy, which in the sphere of the contemporary carries little weight.

An essential link in this contextual chain of contemporary art is the fact that, in recent years, these institutions have inspired a budding interest in forming public collections, which has been accompanied by the weakening of private collecting initiatives. Aside from a few large companies, our country suffers from a paucity of true private collectors, given that most of the large fortunes in Spain were amassed recently by rapid speculation, and few of those new millionaires have glimpsed the vast universe of potential in contemporary art. Perhaps the problem is that everything is happening so quickly that it has yet to sink in; perhaps the future value of art is too uncertain; or perhaps the Spanish *nouveaux riches* simply have no interest in contemporary art.

There is no doubt that this great headlong rush will have consequences. Today, when the whole world revolves around a financial crisis of gargantuan proportions brought on by the hyperbole of our entire concept of life and society, we must certainly stop and reconsider everything that we have been doing up until now. In these adverse circumstances, it is imperative that we find a real, meaningful outlet for what is one of the largest cultural infrastructures in Europe. We need to pass new laws on patronage to make up for the lack of funding that plagues most of the centers designed to rely on government-allocated budgets that are now being slashed. This is not the time to make observations and turn over a new leaf; now is the time to review, analyze, and take action accordingly, to work out how we can make the most of everything that has been done up to this point, and to learn from our failures and successes with all that we have created in such a short span of time.

III.

EXHIBITIONS, NATIONAL REPRESENTATION AND THE ARCHIVE

Biennials: Power in a Postcolonial Context?

Estrella de Diego

Where Is One's "Place"?

Estrella de Diego

> Where is one's 'place'? This question is fundamental to the cultural impact of colonization and affects every aspect of colonized society. The issues surrounding the concept of place – how it is conceived, how it differs from 'space' or 'location', how it enters into and produces cultural consciousness, how it becomes the horizon of identity – are some of the most difficult and debated in post-colonial experience.[1]

Those were the opening remarks for Chapter Six – "Place" – of *Post-Colonial Transformation*, a book written by Bill Ashcroft and published in 2001, when postcolonial theory aimed to rewrite a different art scene. It succeeded, at least in the consciousness of cultural difference and the historial oblivion of – following Gayatri Spivak – so-called "subalterne discourses."

Possibly due to this postcolonial urge, Africa was invited to participate in the 2007 Venice Biennale[2]. The question here, as it was discussed then, is whether a "national" pavilion can represent a whole continent or if, on the contrary, it implies some neocolonial approach? In any case, I believe the context where the change took place should be taken into consideration. In fact, the Venice Biennale is – and was then – an obsolete event in terms of the global art scene, despite the succesive changes the organization has tried to incorporate in recent editions. The inclusion of an Angolan national pavilion in this year's biennale,[3] 2013, proves the indispensable necessity for change that the organization has felt after having drawn a map of the world where half of it was excluded or included under a clearly neocolonial gaze.

Where, then, is one's "place" today for the international art scene? Hasn't it changed dramatically in the last years? Hasn't it moved from Europe and even from New York to cities outside the "traditional art circuits"? Is the Venice Biennale one's "place" or has that "place" moved to cities like São Paulo or Istambul?

1 Ashcroft, William. *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 2001) p. 124.

2 http://www.nytimes.com/ref/arts/20070606_VENICE_GRAPHIC.html

3 http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/06/arts/design/venice-biennale-in-its-55th-edition.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Undoubtedly few people will question today that the Venice Bienniale is out of place in our globalized world. Even more so: the Bienniale, with its "national representations," is such an antiquated model that it is hard to justify beyond its obsolescent peculiarity, like a beautiful object from another time that is preserved for purely museological interests. One need only stroll through the Giardini, with its imposing national pavilions functioning like embassies, the property of national states – some of them very special, as is the case of Aalto's pavilion – to realize that a strange flavor pervades the whole system. It appears outmoded, as if from another era.

The question inmediately emerges: is the national concept still valid? What is necessary to represent a country: To have been born there? To live there? To feel sympathy for that country? To be "adopted" by the curator? Where is one from? Is it the place one is born, the place where one lives, or no place and every place at the same time? Where is one's place?

Venice remains obsessed with national representations. This is proved by the little advertisement for the last edition in which a continuous itinerary from the Giardini's main building to the Arsenale is mapped out. It has been remarked that this year new countries have been represented: from Dubai to the Holy See, Paraguay, Kosovo, Angola and Ivory Coast ¿But what kind of event is this, given that the peculiar character of the Venice Bienniale lies in its organization according to nationalities? Is it a kind of Eurovision Festival? In our current world, or at least in its most "reasonable" aspects, isn't it just the opposite situation that obtains: to do away with "national representations" that surely have nothing to do with the defense of the local in front of the global, but which are instead grounded in the expression of an outdated form of power that has colonial roots?

The association of "national representations" with neocolonial mannerisms is not new, although for some years every country has tried to find its own "visibility" within the city. Herein lies part of the trap, given that in many cases countries have had to locate their "national seats" outside the Giardini, although still within the Arsenale, their exhibitions disseminated through the city in secondary locations, far from the precinct where the nationalities of yesteryear have always been represented.

The Giardini

This comes as no surprise. After all, biennials – at least most biennials – are not only about art; they are also about power. What, then, is the point of such obvious political statements, given that they vary based on the actual situation of contemporary art in each country? Representational strategies change from year to year and they offer invaluable information about the Biennale, contemporary art, and the world.

Let me now draw your attention to Spain, a periferic country. This is not exclusively due to the historical situation of Franco's dictatorship, which isolated the nation from "modernity." Even today we lack "star curators," influencial museums like MoMA or the Tate Modern, or underground historical experiments like the London Institute of Contemporary Arts. Still, the country has it own pavilion at the Venice Biennale, although we are in an in-between position – exotic but not quite exotic enough in the so-called cultural imaginary, a fact that renders the visibility of Spain ambivalent.

Surely, the Venice Biennale, and especially the Spanish pavilion, carries a heavy symbolic burden for the country's art community. When I was appointed by the Spanish Foreign Office to curate the Spanish pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001 – the same year Bill Ashcroft published his book – I was both excited and terrified. The major impact was still to come and would change my point of view about the "biennale phenomenon." Curating the Spanish representation at the Venice Biennale changed my perception of contemprary art in a dramatic way. After that experince I became far more skeptical about the contemporary art scene itself and its various mascarades.

I had visited Venice many times before – how could I not, given that Venice is one of the most important cities for art lovers and one of the most touristic sites in the world? And I had also visited the Venice Biennale before. I had strolled around the Giardini; I had even had a coffee in one of the bars around Via Garibaldi, that part of town where the major portion of the Biennale took place, just before the organizers decided to spread the event around the whole city. But a visit one early November afternoon to check the state of the Spanish Pavilion before beginning my work – was a particularly memorable experience.

It was cold and damp, and the empty *vaporetto* took forever to get to the unkept ghostly landscape. The whole garden was full of imposing vegetation among which the "national pavilions" appeared as vague traces of an uncertain colonial past. What I had in front of my eyes seemed closer to a Fox Talbot photograph[4] than to the *mis-en-scène* of one of the most important – if not *the* most important – contemporary art events in the world. The Giardini appeared as an image of decay, understood in 19th century terms as an esthetic acquisition. In front of me, the unexpected sight of those beautiful modern ruins took my gaze by surprise. It was a kind of "romantic" postcard. That was the "backstage" of the Biennale. In contrast, the glamour and celebrity walk associated with the event would be reduced to a very brief moment in time: the three opening days. As in Parisian Fashion Week, there was a dark side of the moon, something that is undoubtedly part of the nature of all exhibits, museums and art events. Nevertheless, in this particular case, the comparison to Fashion Week, the Oscar ceremonies, and so on could be nothing but accurate.

4 Editor's note: William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), British pioneer of photography who invented the calotype process.

Let me first tell you first about the inside of the Spanish pavilion. It was completely destroyed: bits and pieces of the previous exhibit created, once again, the effect of a modern ruin. This was what Santiago Sierra took advantage of when creating his piece for the next biennal edition[5].

That image of decay built up an incredible feeling that shook my senses. In front of me there was something quite different from the idea I had had about the Spanish pavilion, a very authoritarian architectural piece. Suddenly, there was something fragile, even vulnerable about it all: the pavilion, the Biennale. This may be the privilege of backstage events: everything looks different when the trick is revealed.

There it was, the Spanish pavilion – a shipreck. There it was, the eternal Venice splendour and the ephemeral decadence of the Giardini. I unconciuously asked myself to what extent the Biennale was – had ever been – a real part of the city. I will try and answer this question later. For the time being let me describe what I decided to do as the curator of the Spanish representation after discovering the fragility of the place. What kind of exhibition could one curate after having discovered the split between the city and the Giardini that had, little by little, become part of an unreal stage set?

When one is appointed to curate a "national" representation one has to work within a certain frame. On that specific occasion, in 2001, Miguel Angel Cortés and José Guirao were in charge of the event at the Foreign Office, and the basic idea for that Biennale was to promote young Spanish artists, especially those artists who were gaining international recognition. In fact, for the 49th Biennale Spain decided to sponsor a second exhibit apart from the official pavilion. It was curated by Rafael Doctor and included about eight young artists[6]. They were members of the same generation as the two young artists represented in the Spanish Pavilion. That was the point: to "promote" a younger generation of Spanish artists and help them find their way on the international art scene. In fact, some of those artists would subsequently be exhibited at PS 1 in New York City in a conceptually problematic exhibition curated by Harld Szeeman, *The Real Royal Trip*. But that is part of another story.

Taking all this into consideration, I decided to exhibit two young artists who at the time seemed to be gaining momentum in the international arena. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens when you bet on young people, I was completely wrong: neither artist has done much since Venice. At that time, however, one of them was quite well known in France and the other had been chosen by Szeeman for the Aperto in the previous Biennale[7].

One useful thing to remember is that until that year the Spanish pavilion had been following a pattern: an established artist and a younger one would be shown together. My idea was to focus only on young artists, and for a while I even thought I would leave the whole pavilion to just one person, but I was too unsure to do it.

5 http://elpais.com/diario/2003/06/13/cultura/1055455206_850215.html

6 http://elpais.com/diario/2001/05/25/andalucia/990742956_850215.html. Editor's note: Rafael Doctor is the author of a text in this volume "The Age of the Container."

7 http://www.davidgtorres.net/venecia.html

It was not my first Biennale, however. In 1994 I had curated the Spanish representation at the 22nd São Paulo Bienal,[8] and that experience was instructive for my perception of cultural events in general as I tried to uncover the real significance of the Venice Biennale. On that occassion I decided to select three artists: one very established – Joan Brossa (1919-1998) – , and two young artists, Juan Luis Moraza (b. 1960) and Ana Prada (b. 1965). The three of them were close to something one could call "visual poetry" and thus far removed from what is usually understood as the "Spanish tradition": Antoni Tàpies, Antonio Saura, etc. – the strong, "macho" tradition of Spanish Informalism[9]. It is useful here to remember that at the São Paulo Bienal "national representations" were dissapearing and the three Spanish artists were placed in different parts of the Niemeyer building.

The notion of a "national representation" had worried me a lot when facing my job at the 49th Venice Biennale. In order to break the "national representation" idea I decided to propose some kind of "site specific work" to the artists. The essential thing was not that we were Spanish but that we had reached Venice; that we were *in* Venice. I called the project *A Journey to Venice*. What did it mean for us to be not at the Biennale but in Venice itself? Is the symbolic burden I described earlier related to the Biennale or to the city itself?

My idea was to open the notion of "national power," represented by the very concept of the "national pavilion" – a demure concept, indeed – into that wonderful fragility I had discovered during my first visit to the empty, decaying Giardini. And not only that: I needed to find a link between the city and the Biennale. That worried me a lot, since in São Paulo the two are so wonderfully integrated.

In order to preserve that miraculous fragility, I invited Francesco Jodice (1967), the Italian photographer, to take pictures of the whole process of restauration and later organization of the Pavillion and the show. Those photographs were published in the catalog. I also invited a number of curators, art historians and writers to contribute to the catalog: Szeeman, Cees Notebom, Robert Rosemblum, Remo Bodei, Ivo Mesquita, John Berger, Juan José Millás, Soledad Puértolas, and others. I invited them to write not about the exhibit or the artists but about their idea of Venice, what Venice meant to them, what it triggered in our collective imagination. In an efftort to combat the idea of "national power" all the texts were published in their original language with Spanish and English translations. That was my silly rebellious reaction agaist the structure of the Venice Biennale, which to me was – and still is – extremely old fashioned and colonial in essence.

The day of the opening arrived. Everthing was ready, our "national pavilion" was ready. At the opening, there were visitors from all over the world: curators, press people, museum directors, etc. And there were

8 "Mirar después de ver," in *España. 22ª Bienal de São Paulo* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1994) p. 13-28.

9 Editor's note: see the essay by María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, "Spanishness and Difference. The Reception of Spanish Informalism in 1960 New York," included in this volume.

jet-setters and celebrities: three very busy days, just as in Paris Fashion Week. The forth day, when the opening was over, I faced a totally different situation. That morning the *vaporetto* was not as crowded as it had been the previous days. The Giardini was again empty, as it would remain for the rest of the day, except for a few visitors and some collegues from other pavilions about to leave.

São Paulo

My impression was totally different from that of the São Paulo Biennal, where I stayed the day after the opening and I could see the total integration of the city into the event: lots of kids from schools – maybe the first time they visited something close to the idea of a "museum" – and lots of visitors from all over the town. In other words, it was a living event, very much alive compared with the empy Giardini, outside the tourist Grand Tour of the Rialto and San Marco and even la the Giudecca. São Paulo is not Venice.

What, then, is the Venice Biennale if not Venice itself: a tourist sight, a cultural event, a professional venue for a small number of artists, collectors, curators, museum people, and so forth? As such, is it worth the effort and the money, especially today? Is the Venice Biennale leisure, education, or just consummerism? Is it an obsolete model with its "national representations," some of the new ones squeezed into the city and others altogether excluded? Is it, in the words of John Hannigan, a "fantasy city" like Las Vegas, a typical byproduct of postindustrial societies that, frighteningly self-sufficient, do not even need us?[10] Is the Venice Biennale obsolete in a hipercommunicated world like ours in which things like international fairs and even bienials – 19th century inventions, after all – seem to be a bit out of focus? More importantly, is a political work of art still political when exhibited in this environment?

The whole consumption process associated with international big events has become very obvious when one takes into considertion the fact that Damien Hirst was chosen as a "symbol" for the London Olympics. That seems perfectly eloquent to me. But can Venice, the city itself, escape its terrible tourist destiny? The answer seems clear now with the Dogana. Who visits the Dogana and why, what does it mean for the whole life of the city? There is an even bigger question: do big artistic events have an intrinsic meaning beyond art world consummerism[11]?

I suspect it is not true that people travel more today. Rather, there are simply some people – what Martha Rosler called "people inside the group" in the late 70s [12] – who travel more. They go from São Paulo to Documenta, from Documenta to Istanbul, from Istanbul to Berlin or Basil or Sarja. If one has enough time and money, one can spend the whole year going from one artistic event to another.

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10 John Hannigan, *Fantasy City. Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

11 Mesquita, I.,"Bienales, bienales, bienales," *Revista de Occidente,* 31 (Febrero 2001), p. 238 y ss.

12 Rosler, M., "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers, Thought on Audience," in *Art after Modernism. Rethinking Representation.* Brian Wallis, ed., (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

Perhaps Venice should take São Paulo as an example: less a prestige event and tourist site like Venice and more an event that educates people in a city that is very much alive and in need of that education. Does Venice need the Biennale in the same ways that São Paulo needs it? The option of getting rid of the "national" concept is not the only difference between Venice and São Paulo. The former is a stronghold for experts and tourists often turning their backs to the city, while the latter is a place full of life, where kids explore with their teachers and people enjoy themselves, an event integrated into the city, an event that from its inception has provided a unique opportunity to see art in the city. It was that way in the fifties, when Picasso's *Guernica* arrived in the city among other works of art, and it is that way now in a capital city full of things to be seen and done.

But let's return to Venice. The Giardini turns its back to the city when the Bienale is not in session to such an extent that the director of the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation has proposed that the national pavilions be turned into artists' residences during the winter to prevent Venice from being the spectacle that it is today: an outdated model that is a prisoner of the values prevalent at the moment of its creation in 1895.

So one's "place" is not at the Giardini anymore. It may be in São Paulo or Istanbul, which are now seeing many of their classic neighbourhoods dying or destroyed in their own real estate bubbles. The General Curator of the last Istanbul Biennial, Fulya Erdemci, a woman full of energy, took poet Lala Mütür's words as a point of departure: "Mom, am I a Barbarian?" Cultural diversity, cultural roots, and cultural differences are presented by the curator as territories for reflection.

And, in the middle of the discussion, the economic crisis, civilian movements and the Arab Spring arise and present new formulas to narrate politics. There is no longer room for "national pavilions" because problems – and perhaps solutions – are now global, just like the suffering and frustration of the people addressed in the presentation of the Istanbul Biennale. This is the reason I find the Venice Bienale model to be obsolete with its "national pavilions" and its sense of time standing still. It is showcase that is no longer forceful in the new world order. Just as the world has changed so too must the Venice Biennale adapt to new circumstances. Only in this way will it find its "place."

On the Venice Biennale

Robert Storr

I will start with two political observations. The first is the famous maxim of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci[1], who said that he was a pessimist of the intellect and an optimist of the will. If you are going to be a curator in institutions these days, that is arguably the only reasonable way to approach the obvious obstacles in your path. Curators do the best they can with circumstances that they know better than anyone else are not good. My second observation follows the theorist George Washington Plunkitt[2], the famous Tammany Hall politician of New York, who used to give lectures from his shoeshine stand about how politics really works. Among them was a lecture on the difference between what he called "honest graft" and "dishonest graft." Now, the distinction he only half-jokingly makes assumes that in virtually every situation you are liable to encounter somebody making money on the side. The crucial issue is this: Does something positive result from the all the deal making or is it only a matter of winner takes all? In the case of a big institution like a Biennale or most cultural phenomena like it that we've seen in countries that are developing rapidly, or where sudden economic bursts have taken place and large amounts of money are in play where normally there is never enough, the idea of a perfectly graft-free playing field is wishful thinking in the extreme, and you will get no where whatsoever if you try to ignore the action going on all around you.

Plunkitt's explanation was roughly as follows: one day you notice in the newspaper that copper prices have gone up. Meanwhile, you've also noticed that that orphanage down the street has a beautiful copper roof. Now, if you simply strip off the copper roof to sell it to people who are buying copper at an improved price, that is dishonest graft. But if you discover that an asbestos roof would be better for the orphanage and so replace the copper with the asbestos before selling the copper off then you've done good and done well at the same time. Obviously, this example is at once based in experience and offered with great tongue-in-cheek. But if you appreciate the hard fact that there are indeed categorically different orders of conflict of interest, even different kinds of corruption – some you can work with or around, and some that are totally hopeless – then you've

Robert Storr

1 Editor's Note: The original phrase by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was: "I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will." It was written in a letter from prison dated 19 December 1929 included in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. (Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith) New York, International Publishers, 1971.

2 Editor's Note: In one of his speeches, George Washington Plunkitt (1842-1924) describes the difference between dishonest and honest graft: "for dishonest graft one worked solely for one's own interests, while for honest graft one pursued the interests of one's party, one's state,*and* one's personal interests all together." This and other speaches are quoted in *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (Riordon, William L., *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics*, Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993. Originally published in 1905)

grasped the dilemma that one faces in working in situations like those in which many international exhibitions and art projects are currently embedded.

For instance, Estrella de Diego[3] mentioned the damage to the pavilions. It is important to know that the Giardini belongs to the city and not to the individual countries that have pavilions there. It's also important to know that everything that happens in the Biennale essentially entails the reassigning of public monies to various and sundry service organizations and municipal entities, which constitute a major part of the economy of Venice. So, when I toured the spaces in the Arsenale used for the previous architectural exhibition with my Biennale colleagues – people with whom I was and am on very good working terms – we saw lots of walls that we wanted to keep. And we said very explicitly that we would like to keep these walls as well as adding some more, because retaining those walls helps alleviate some of the budgetary problems that the then President and General manager of the Biennale had been telling us existed. We thought we were playing by Plunkitt's rules. Save walls and save some money. But we were mistaken because several months later we came back and there were huge sledgehammer holes in every single one of them. Who was responsible? Not the Biennale itself, though it must have been someone with access to the low security Arsenale spaces. But, once we'd seen the damage it dawned on us that the institutional issue was not about saving money but spending it: That the tradesmen for whom this was a large part of the year's income, or the suppliers of material who looked forward to big orders, or someone else with a financial stake in the situation were not about to forego the opportunity to rebuild them. Cultural theorists who have never lived in a run-of-the-mill kleptocratic system as I have – I grew up in Boss Daley's Chicago[4] – and only read the Frankfurt School or Ernst Mandel[5] but not Plunklitt should probably refrain from making sweeping judgments about such situations since their "outrage" often sounds like Claude Rains in *Casablanca*, decrying his discovery that there is cheating at the roulette tables of Rick's Café[6].

And don't forget, this happened in Italy during the grab-all-you-can Age of Berlusconi. There is highly competent new management at the Biennale now and things in the city are generally better. They couldn't get worse. Back then, of course, one might try to contain corruption in a given area over which one had direct control – although in reality there were none in which the Director made final economic decisions – but there was never a question of stopping it altogether. At any rate as Director one has little if any power to alter the basic economic equation. Because to deprive Venice of jobs, or to deprive the institution of subsidies from the region, from the national government, and from all of the participating countries would mean that you were essentially taking away from Venice one of the city's few profit centers aside from the luxury shops, tourist hotels and

3 Editor's note: See Estrella de Diego's essay in this volume.

4 Editor's Note: Richard Joseph Daley (1902-1976) was the Mayor of Chicago for 21 years and chairman of the *Cook County* Democratic Central Committee for 23 years, holding both positions until his death in office in 1976. While many members of Mayor Daley's administration were charged with *corruption* and convicted, Daley was never formally charged with corruption.

5 Ernest Ezra Mandel (1923-1995) was a Marxist theorist and editor of the Belgian socialist newspaper *La Gauche*. His most famous text, *Marxist Economic Theory*, was published in French in 1962.

6 Editor's note: it refers to a famous dialogue in 1942 film *Casablanca*, directed by Michael Curtiz, between the owner of Rick's café (Humphrey Bogart) and captain Renault (Claude Rains), often cited as an example of cynicism:
"Rick: How can you close me up? On what grounds?
Captain Renault: I'm shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here!"
Croupier: Your winnings, sir. [a croupier hands Renault a pile of money]
Captain Renault: [sotto voce:] Oh, thank you very much. [aloud:] Everybody out at once!"

other concessions that have turned Venice into a amphibious version of Rodeo Drive.

The national pavilions pose a related set of problems. First, one of the things that struck me when I initially made a tour of the Giardini was that it resembled La Recoleta or Père Lachaise – that is to say a 19th century graveyard like those in Buenos Aires and Paris, but one in which each country (like each family) has its own mausoleum, styled to the particular notions that that country had of national identity when the pavilion/tombs were built. As absurd as some of these monuments are it is hard not to relish their tell-tale eccentricities. I love the Hungarian one; it is a prime example of Magyar Art Nouveau. Plus there are a number of impressively fascistic ones that come out of the Thirties, notably the former Italian Pavilion, a classic Beaux-Arts exhibition hall whose façade was remodeled in neo-classical Art Deco under Mussolini; and the German Pavilion by Albert Speer (1905-1981). The mini-Monticello[7] that the United States maintains is no less a period piece. So if you look hard at them, think hard about them, they are truly fascinating relics, and they add up to a kind of cultural theme park in a time warp that is still unfolding.

Unsurprisingly, the Biennale people of my time didn't think the comparison to la Recoleta and Père Lachaise was at all amusing. More importantly, though, something was brought to my attention that I had insufficiently considered and it has more serious ramifications. For nations that do not have pavilions, or have not been able to maintain rented pavilions outside the Arsenale and the Giardini on a regular basis, exclusion from this theme park and from the Biennale as a whole is a bitter pill. Against that background of unfulfilled aspirations, simply making light of the ironies in the self-definition of the upper echelons and having fun with patently antiquated nationalism risks condescension toward those at the lower end of the spectrum, the entry level countries, who look toward having a pavilion as an opportunity to see themselves as fully legitimized participants in the broader, international context.

That said, in a conversation in New York Chinese artist Cai Quo-Qiang (b. 1957) proposed a very good idea, which was that the national pavilions should play musical chairs so that one year the Korean pavilion occupies the Israeli Pavilion, the Israeli pavilion occupies the Magyar pavilion, and so on, each year such that the signifiers of nationality are separated from the real estate. That didn't go down too well either. But there's still a good deal to be said for the idea. Maybe some enterprising performance artists can organize it so that as a test all the delegations at the U.N. move one seat to the left or right in the General Assembly. It might loosen things up.

Meanwhile, in the interests of making more countries, cultures and continents feel as if they had a place, I gave over real estate that was mine to control and persuaded the Biennale not to charge regular fees to pavil-

7 Editor's note: It refers to the plantation house designed in 1772 by the third president of the United States Thomas Jefferson, a paradigmatic example of neopalladian American neoclassical architecture. It is located outside Charlottesville, Virginia.

ions from Turkey and India. As a part of that effort I traveled to New Delhi to try to convince the Ministry of Culture to seize the opportunity, although they ultimately balked at the prospect. Finally, we organized a competition for a curatorial project for an African pavilion. Twice before there had been ancillary pan-African presentations organized by two curators based in the United States, Okwui Enwezor and Salah Hassan. Nevertheless, 2007 was the first time that an African pavilion was integrated into the core of the exhibition, and that was the important thing. Despite the obvious liabilities of grouping art in national or regional clusters I realized that we could nevertheless accept the fact that there are issues of regional or national identity (and by 2007 São Paulo had given up national representations) and use them in a positive way to bring art to the center of the public's attention, art that had been previously excluded or marginalized due to prejudicial oversight or simply lack of money. To ease the way to participation for Africa as well as the others we removed or lowered the cost of all basic services and I set aside money made available to me for subsidies by MoMA's International Council. In the end we did not spend it on the African pavilion because the curators chosen by the jury elected to work primarily with material in a single Angolan collection; underwriting a private patron would not have been proper.

When we set out I had hoped that this precedent would be something that would go forward from there since I was originally hired to be curator for two consecutive Biennales. By the time the then President had gotten a taste of my practice of "institutional critique from the inside" there was no question of his keeping his promise to let me have a second tour of duty, although nothing that I did broke the budget as he later claimed – in fact I raised a lot of money for the show as a whole – and no actions were ever taken by me over which he did not have oversight and final approval. Indeed, pursuant to the Biennale's request I made extensive recommendations for how they could expand their spaces and their sources of income in ways that would not make it hard on artists or small countries and they have taken my advice in several respects, including creating new pavilions for previously unrepresented nations in the warehouses across the marine basin from the Arsenale and beyond the Corderie.

Parenthetically, I should add that there are many, many other biennials – over a hundred in 2007 – and the fixation on Venice is, I think, a terrible mistake. Another mistake is that critics generally focus on the first week of the biennale. The Biennale runs for seven months. Most of the people that come to it arrive after the summer – in September, October, and November. It is a very large audience of people with little money compared to those who attend the gala opening. This latter day public hitchhikes, takes trains, they do whatever they need to do to get there and find a place to stay. Many come from Central and Eastern Europe; this is their main chance to see what goes on in international art. Others come from other

parts of the world as well. So the real audience for the Biennale in terms of the international public consists of people who do not come for the parties and promotion of the first week; they can't afford to and don't particularly care to watch the spectacle of money being spent and egos being stroked. I went back for the end of my Biennale in bitterly cold weather and there were lots of people there. So I think it is crucial to remember that if one wants to critique the art world, fine, but no one should think that the audience they see at the art events they attend and recognize as "their crowd" is the only audience. There are many, many other audiences that use the Biennale, not least of them local ones.

In the case of Venice, there were attempts made to bring people from the industrial town of Mestre on the mainland. Meanwhile, the neighborhood in which the Biennale takes place is largely working class and one of the last strongholds of the Italian communist party. Among my favorite landmarks was a corner very near the Arsenale where the local headquarters of the Italian communist party – Marxist-Leninist – is located. It has a vintage hammer and sickle above the door with a red flag flying – on the inside men watch football under posters of Che Guevara – and next to the door is Christ in a niche. All on the same façade! It reminded me of the Don Camillo stories, where the Communist mayor and the parish priest argue amicably with each other[8]. This is Italy! As much as honest graft and dishonest graft, this kind of ideological double tracking is very Italian. Venice, despite its current makeover, is still a Leftist city. The mayor was – or had been – communist. The minister of culture with whom I met was – or had been – communist. Communists of a very late vintage in terms of European political history, but they are true Venetians and the city is not in fact the posh tourist trap that people think it is. Actually the city, like the country, is in a state of terrible crisis.

So, you work with what you've got. I'll give you another example: I invited a collective made up of young men called Morrinho[9] that does a project in the favelas – the slums – of Rio de Janiero. These men were young boys when they first banded together to play out the drama of their lives in the favelas in a kind of massive hillside doll's house that they built out of bricks left over from the construction of their parents' houses. And they use the Lego product Duplos and plastic toys and all kind of things scavenged here and there in less impoverished parts of the city. In order to join Morrinho each of them had to pledge loyalty to the group and promise not to join another gang or enter into the drug trade. In effect they have formed an alternate society – a sort of "social sculpture" to use Joseph Beuys' (1921-1986) terminology – though they had no knowledge of him or his theories when they began – and within that framework they have acted out, worked out the traumas of their existence. I was introduced to them by curator Paulo Herkenhoff (b. 1949), who is a good friend and colleague of mine and who did the 1998 São Paulo Biennale – one of the

8 Editor's note: Don Camillo is a character created by the Italian writer and journalist *Giovannino Guareschi* (1908-1968), and is based on the historical Roman Catholic priest, World War II partisan and detainee of the concentration camps of Dachau and Mauthausen, Don Camillo Valota. Don Camillo is one of two protagonists, the other being the communist mayor of the town, known to everyone as Peppone. It was the object of a French-Italian film in 1952: Le petit monde de Don Camillo, directed by Julien Divivier.

9 "Projeto Morrinho" was initiated in 1998 when local youth in the Vila Pereira da Silva favela in the Laranjeiras district of Rio de Janeiro began to construct a model city of 320 square meters in response to the conditions of violence and corruption in their neighborhood. The model is constructed with recycled materials.

very best of them for which I made a small Bruce Nauman (b. 1941) survey. São Paulo introduced me to Morrinho at the site of their first model favela in the hills above Rio and I brought them as a group to Venice to build such a thing in an open patch in the heart of the Giardini where you have all the other national pavilions. I wanted it to occupy a place in the presence of these great celebrations of nationhood, representing the slums that exist in every one of those countries (with the possible exception of Holland) that have a foothold in the Giardini. I also got permission from Nancy Spector, the curator from the Guggenheim Museum responsible for Felix Gonzalez-Torres's (1957-1996) presence in the United States pavilion, to build a favela that leaned up against it. And I got permission to put one next to the canal running through the middle of the Giardini so that it would look back to the Brazilian pavilion. In short, I wanted Morrinho to infiltrate the established order of the exhibition and crop up in exactly the way that great poverty appears side-by-side with great wealth in the world as a whole.

The reason I tell this little anecdote before going on to other things is that the Giardini itself inhabits such a marginalized neighborhood, although not one as desperate as one finds in Rio. On opening day during much fanfare and myriad events – including an extended rap-session in front of their "sculpture" by one of the Morrinho group – a kid from the neighborhood snuck in, came up to the hillside of houses Morrinho had built, and started playing with the cars they had left there. He didn't know what Morrinho was, and I suspect he didn't know Brazil except for the fact that it has a premier soccer team, but he knew what cars were and he knew how much fun playing with them could be. So he did. And in the process he animated the piece with his own desire, his own fantasy -desire and fantasy issuing from many of the same factors that prompted the collective to create the work in Rio in the first place.

Thus Biennales force us to recognize that the thing we love to hate is actually the superstructure for something that does in practice allow for modifications, for change, for intervention, for doing things that could exist by no other means. Most of the countries that have hosted biennials that flourished offer at best very precarious support to other, more permanent art institutions. Most have very limited budgets for the museums that they have. Few of those museums boast an active contemporary component. Accordingly, while one can make the argument that promotion of a biennial risks sucking money away from more substantial and enduring entities, it is unlikely that the situation for them would in fact improve much were the money not used for a temporary extravaganza of the type we're discussing. What they do guarantee is that every two years an injection of world visual culture, literary culture, dance and music actually happens. Such showcases enliven those cities. They animate the places they occur and the larger context of the country, and they leave a memory. It is

what makes biennials worth most of the compromises one must accept in order to bring them into being. If you want to think in Sartre's terms: if you're going to get dirty hands, the crucial question is what do you get in return for soiling yourself; what does the city or country or wider art community get? And whether you're talking about international exhibitions mounted in the developing world, or in developed nations, or even in the geriatric setting of Venice, biennials can and do on the whole accomplish something important.

In general, though, it must be said that "institutional critique" as practiced in seminar rooms and editorial offices has become highly masturbatory. Too often it merely consists of "art worldlings" looking at themselves and their situation and disliking what they see but doing little to change it. And often it means not looking at anybody else and not really dealing with the other parties to the larger social dynamic of which the art world is a part. I'm interested instead in how one can use whatever guile, whatever leverage one has to make the most out of a bad situation. Unless of course you think you simply shouldn't get involved at any level, and take a principled position apart from it all, a position I recognize and honor. It's not the one I care to take because I think there are things left to be done, albeit under admittedly imperfect conditions. But I don't think one can take a position apart and at the same time not be interested in the subtleties of what others who get involved are dealing with while indulging in blanket criticism.

Now, let me say something about "star curators" – I guess I am one, or was one. But I worked very hard not to be one, and my refusal to assume that role drove quite a few people crazy, especially colleagues who wanted nothing more than to have their name above the title. There's no denying that I have my professional pride and ambition; nevertheless I said over and over and over again "this show is not about my choices," and I meant it. The Biennale – like all my exhibitions – was about the art that was in it. It was not about branding a critique or a discourse, even though questions about the project usually devolved into issues of, "what is that Storr up to?" and "Isn't he on a massive ego trip?" and so on. People like that kind of story, but if somebody explicitly moves away from personifying their project and opens up space for the art to be discussed first and last when the only thing people seem to want to talk about is "curatorship" it is not the fault of the curator but it is an utterly wasted opportunity to speak of other matters and at a higher level.

In the '80s and '90s the artist was taken off the pedestal he – and sometimes she – had occupied for generations. But it turned out that once the pedestal cleared curators and their critical champions were only too happy to fill the void. Thus the discourse of the curator has superseded the discourse of the artist. Frankly, I am interested in the art, in its interactions with its audience, in its audience's interactions with it, and not with the

artist as hero, nor with the curator as super-critiquer, Uber-intellectual or what have you. People flock to these events for a host of reasons – none of them pure either, though why should they be? But they come primarily to see things they would not see otherwise. If "aura," as Walter Benjamin defined it, exists anyplace in our world – that is to say, if a viewer can have a direct experience of a work of art in time and space and make meaning from that encounter – then the crowds attending the Biennale records the phenomenon of aura happening, of aura being created. Yet we don't talk about that, not nearly enough. We don't talk enough about the ways in which such flawed encounters can still be sufficient. We don't talk enough about the ways in which they are sometimes marvelous.

We really don't talk about it, but I'll give you one key example that was consequential. It's an art history story. It concerns a young East German painter named Gerhard Richter (b. 1932) whose reward for being a successful young socialist realist was being given the occasion, a car, and some money to go to documenta 2[10]. And at documenta 2 he saw for the first time what Western art had to offer. He resisted much of it. He was baffled by what he didn't resist and he remembers or claims to remember only two things: Pollock and Fontana. When Richter went back to Dresden with this experience of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and Lucio Fontana (1899-1968), when he returned home as a sought after young artist with an income and a car and a wife and all the things that would have made him settle down, he still remained troubled by all that he had seen. He didn't like it but knew that he could no longer do what he had been doing. And he left East Germany for West Germany to start over from scratch, going back to school at 30 and becoming a graduate student again after having already graduated from the academy once before. It was the effect that art had had on him that made him do this.

Of course documenta had been located in Kassel precisely because of the impact it might have on a hinterland reaching into the East. Its place and program were undeniably a part of Cold War politics so that the public in the East could see what they would not otherwise have seen. And it was a comparatively large public before walls and the fences and so on went up. So you can focus on the top of the superstructure and take an utterly jaded view of what goes on – by all means be my guest because it's mostly bad comedy – but if you look at the middle and lower echelons of that same structure where experiences such as Richter's are actually possible then it seems to me you're less likely to miss the real opportunities these exhibitions occasion.

I want to add another dimension to this, and that is ethics. It is incumbent on curators to play straight in these situations – especially in those which are inherently compromised – because unless they do, nobody will believe that what curators say about the art is true, nobody will believe that their motives for choosing this or that are on the level. Once people smell

10 Editor's note: documenta is a festival of modern and contemporary art founded in 1955 by german curator, artist and teacher Arnold Bode with the aim of opening German art to international modern trends. It takes place in the German town of Kassel every five years.

a rat over there they're more inclined to think they smell one over here. As I said at the final award ceremony in 2007, the Venice Biennale has been living off the kindness of strangers for decades. In considerable measure the national pavilions subsidize the overall exhibition since national participation by governments is underwritten at a premium. And when their own countries balk, the artists and their galleries are put in a position where they must pay for the shows. One particular artist who had been given a national pavilion the year that I was Director said that when push came to shove s/he had to go deeply into dept personally to a gallery to cover costs, and afterward faced the prospect of having to produce art of a certain readily saleable kind in order to pay the gallery back. Proving sculptor David Smith's (1906-1965) adage that "art is a luxury artists pay for."[11]

There are many other horror stories. Biennales where sponsors didn't pay bills or owed artists for projects they commissioned -this happened to one major artist I know after the first New Orleans biennial, and I've heard that it happened to others. It happens quite a lot when curators get careless with budgets or fail to hold patrons to account. And there have been biennials where work disappeared and nobody quite knows where it went. Or where work vanished into extortionary storage and had to be ransomed. There have been biennials where a host of shenanigans have occurred at the curatorial and institutional level that are totally inexcusable and where the excuses offered are so implausible that it renders the people who give them implausible in other domains when they start to talk about the higher values of art or engage in high flown social critique. If you go into a poor place and do an expensive biennale and then leave a financial and logistical mess behind you, you have not aided in the social critique of institutions in that place – let's say Johannesburg where a new biennale died from curatorial mismanagement at the end of its second installment. If you go into a place where there is a whole host of other tensions and you simply hit raw nerves, but don't stick around to have the dialogue that should follow and might conceivably help resolve some of those tensions, you have not done anybody any good whatsoever. There are examples of this as well.

I tend to agree that the time of national representations is probably over, with Venice being the exception that proves the rule. First, for the reason that I've already given: that there are nations that still wish to be a participant in that format and their desire deserves respect. Second, because the Venice Biennale is structured around them whereas in São Paulo Bienal it is not. São Paulo doesn't have freestanding pavilions a La Ricoleta; it has an omnibus modern pavilion by Oscar Niemeyer, which can be sliced and diced in a variety of ways. But, it strikes me overall that the idea of nationality will not be the future predicate of these shows. Although some of the people who have recently engaged with it – Santiago Sierra (b. 1966) being one, Ilya Kabakov (b. 1933) being another, Hans Haacke (b. 1936) in Germany being yet a third – took assumptions about nation-

11 Editor's Note: Many of David Smith's speeches, articles and other writings are collected in three publications: Cleve Gray, ed.: *David Smith by David Smith*. New York, Chicago, and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968; Garnett McCoy, ed.: *David Smith*. New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1973; and *Écrits et discours: David Smith*. [*Writings and Lectures: David Smith*]. Compilation and introductory essay by Susan J. Cooke; translations by Jeanne Bouniort, Simon Duran, Laurent Penisson, Delphine Perru and Christine Piot. Paris: École national supérieure des beaux-arts, 2007.

al identity as the fulcrum to leverage a conversation about nationalism, as an historical and juridical concept that could not have taken place without national pavilions as its site.

But an example of just how tenuous a proposition "national identity" has become given the flux of the contemporary world – although essentialist notions of a unitary nation, culture, people or folk have always been suspect given comparable flux in previous eras – is provided by one of the artists in my Venice exhibition: Tatiana Trouvé (b. 1968). Tatiana Trové was born in Italy. Her father is Senegalese. She lives in France. Now, of whom or of what is she a representative? She's not "global." She doesn't speak Esperanto. She speaks Italian and French but her first language is Wolof. Her art is identifiably rooted in a number of factors from her background but she is first and foremost a cosmopolitan artist of a kind that is steadily increasing in numbers because we are living in an increasingly cosmopolitan world.

I loathe the term "global;" I don't think it has any place whatsoever in the discussion of art, except to a limited degree in the discussion of the art market and the attempts by some to create "branded" commodities masquerading as art that can be sold everywhere. By contrast cosmopolitanism has a place in conversations about art, as does internationalism. The shadings and intonations one can give to each of these terms are extremely various, and nuanced disagreements about their import helps to move the conversation along. So if we are going to get rid of "nationalisms" we have to recognize nonetheless that there are deciding factors in the contexts of the artists, in the assumptions of the audiences that they usually address, in the assumptions of the audiences that they address through these exhibitions, and all of that is working material for them. In the catalog of Marina Abramovic's (b. 1946) exhibition in the 1997 Biennale she quoted the Portuguese writer Miquel Torga[12], who once said "the universal is the local without walls." That seems to me a rather good starting point for doing shows of this kind.

12 Miquel Torga is the pseudonym of Adolfo Correia de Rocha (1907-1995), one of the most celebrated Portuguese writers of the 20th century.

Recovering the Mexican Suitcase*

Brian Wallis

Brian Wallis

History is constructed from what survives. The happenstance memories, the tattered ephemera, the scratchy recordings, and the weather beaten potsherds are the building blocks of historical analysis. Yet all are vulnerable and fortunate survivals that by their relative scarcity suggest how much of the past has been obliterated or lost or simply forgotten. From these fragile fragments, our sense of history and its meaning are formed. On this bare scaffolding, the architecture of the past is erected, embellished by new interpretations and occasionally transformed by new discoveries. But overall, our understandings of the past, both near and distant history, are little more than piecemeal. Each new discovery or chance escape from historical eradication – especially if unexpected and significant – is therefore something of a miracle. The task – the responsibility – of any such historical recovery is to ensure that the artifacts are preserved for future generations and that new interpretations amplify their meanings.

This essay concerns one such recovery, the so-called Mexican Suitcase, a cache of long-lost negatives of the Spanish Civil War taken by three of the greatest photojournalists of the twentieth century: Robert Capa (1913-1954), Gerda Taro (1910-1927), and Chim (David Seymour, 1911-1956). It is undoubtedly one of the most important discoveries in the history of photography in recent decades, not only because it adds to our knowledge of the work of these three photographers but also because it restores vivid detail to the complex image they tried to build: of a war, a people, and a struggle for truth and freedom. These negatives are important because they offer a comprehensive overview of the work of these photographers at the very moment when they virtually invented war photography, and, with it, the concept of modern photojournalism. For Capa, Taro, and Chim, photo reportage meant three things: first, that the pictures themselves had to be wrenchingly dramatic and tell a human story; second, that the photographs – and the photographer – had to be part of that story or action; and third, that the photographer had to be engaged, had to have judged the political stakes in that story, and had to have taken sides. Lacking these qualities, photographs had no purpose, no meaning

* Editor's note: An earlier version of this essay appeared in the catalog of the exhibition "The Mexican Suitcase: The Rediscovered Spanish Civil War Negatives by Capa, Chim, and Taro," held at the International Center of Photography, New York, September 2010 - May 2011.

Certainly, these photographers created extraordinary individual images, some of which are contained among the newfound negatives, and some of which became great iconic symbols of the Spanish Civil War. But of all the achievements of their photographic coverage of that war, it is their development of the photo essay that has had the greatest lasting effect. Through a series or sequence of images these photographers tried to construct a narrative of events, much like a film scenario or newsreel. This required images of not just the climactic moments but also the quiet ones, the obscure ones, the moments of death and silence. These sequences of small events then became the basis for photographic news stories, selected and laid out by ingenious photo editors at the newly popular photo weeklies in France and across the world. This new medium or form of expression was not the invention of a single photographer or even of photographers alone but the answer to a complex demand by audiences, magazines, and editors striving to describe emerging histories in a new and different way.

The 126 rolls of film that comprise the Mexican Suitcase contain dozens of such photo narratives and hundreds of human dramas, large and small. Taken throughout the Spanish Civil War, from 1936 to 1939, the negatives show Spanish Republican soldiers and Spanish civilians in moments of everyday life, in battle and in domestic situations. They are compelling because they show the individuals affected by war, by international political maneuvers that they scarcely understand, going about the daily business of their lives – making meals, reading newspapers, protecting their families. The naturalistic images include some of the leading figures in the Spanish Civil War, as well as artists and writers, including portraits of Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), and André Malraux (1901-1976). But mainly, in frame after frame, they contain portraits of individual Spaniards, portraits of great heroism and dignity.

One iconic example of this bold new direction in photojournalism and a defining image of the Spanish Civil War formed the reason for seeking the Mexican Suitcase in the first place. A now-famous picture by Robert Capa, called the *Falling Soldier*, shows a single Republican soldier running across a battlefield and, suddenly struck by a bullet, falling backward, seemingly in death. This picture, taken in September 1936, on the Córdoba front, has become a symbol for the war and for the martyred Spanish Republican cause, perhaps for all wars and for the futility of war itself. This picture has also become the subject of considerable controversy in the face of claims that it was somehow faked or staged. It was in an effort to answer such charges – or at least just understand that photograph more fully – that Capa scholar Richard Whelan and I set out in 2006 to try to find the picture's missing negative. In pursuing Capa's lost Spanish Civil War negatives, we hoped to learn more about this important picture – how and why it was taken – and perhaps to solve its enduring mystery.

For years, rumors had circulated about the existence of the lost negatives. In 1979, Robert Capa's brother, Cornell Capa, then head of the International Center of Photography, published a request in an international photography magazine calling for any new information about the missing film. Subsequently, several other lots or caches of lost Capa photographs were unearthed – but not the crucial negatives. The search continued for years, and the trail went cold. When I began working at the International Center of Photography in 1999, the tale of the lost Spanish Civil War negatives was one of the first stories I heard. But the general conclusion was that if the negatives existed at all, they would never be found.

My own engagement with the pursuit of the Mexican suitcase began in 2002, when I first met Professor Jerald R. Green of Queens College, an authority on Spanish and Mexican art. Green reported that in 1995 he had arranged an exhibition of Spanish Civil War photography in Mexico City, and that at the reception he had been approached by a man who claimed to have negatives of similar scenes, which he believed were by Robert Capa. Subsequently, the mysterious man sent Green a typewritten letter containing a detailed list of over two thousand images that he said were included in his collection of negatives. Green showed me the letter and the description of the negatives, which named many of the key battles and events of the Spanish Civil War covered by Robert Capa and Gerda Taro. The list – if true – was astonishing and tantalizing.

The negatives were owned by a man named Benjamin Tarver, a Mexican filmmaker who had inherited them and who was seeking to find a proper home for them. As he stated in his letter to Green, Tarver had inherited the negatives from his aunt, who had received them from her relative, General Francisco Aguilar González, who had been the Mexican ambassador to the Vichy Government in France in 1941 and 1942. But exactly how they had come into the possession of General Aguilar González or why he had carried them with him to Mexico City were unknown. And, the current owner, Benjamin Tarver, proved somewhat elusive. Letters to him went unanswered and various attempts to reach him proved fruitless. By 2006 Whelan was hard at work on his landmark exhibition, "This Is War!: Robert Capa at Work,"[1] which included a comprehensive survey of the known information about the *Falling Soldier*. He and I felt that if we could find the rumored suitcase of Spanish Civil War negatives it might contain the lost negative for the *Falling Soldier*, or at least some clues regarding how and why it was made. Toward this end, we began planning a trip to Mexico City in November 2006 to get to the heart of this baffling case.

For various reasons, our trip to Mexico City was not possible. So we enlisted the efforts of our colleague Trisha Ziff, a curator living in Mexico City who had organized several exhibitions at the International Center of Photography. Ziff accepted the assignment with enthusiasm, and, after

1 Editor's note: This exhibition took place at the International Center of Photography, New York, from September 2007 to January 2008.

some doing, was able to contact Tarver. At first, he was reticent to meet with Ziff or to show her what he had. But in May 2007 Tarver arrived at a coffee shop with three contact sheets, which he had printed himself. These provided the first real evidence that the Capa negatives existed, and they gave the first hints of what the negatives might reveal. There were extraordinary unknown images of the Spanish Civil War: burning tanks, pulverized buildings, soldiers in the snow, and one magical image of Gerda Taro asleep. After several months of discussion and negotiation, Tarver elected to return the negatives to the families of the photographers. On Dec. 19, 2007, Ziff delivered the Mexican Suitcase to the International Center of Photography, and the boxes were shown, at last, to the aging Cornell Capa, who had long sought their return.

But the recovery of the boxes was only the first step. What were these boxes? How could they be preserved and printed? What did they contain? What could they tell us about the photographers and the war they documented?

If the motive for seeking the Mexican Suitcase was to find the lost negative of Robert Capa's *Falling Soldier*, then it failed. Unfortunately, when we received the boxes of negatives, the *Falling Soldier* negative was not there. The sequence of images began slightly later. But what we did find was far more exciting. There were three boxes – no suitcase after all – containing 126 rolls of film and over 4,500 negatives, covering the entire history of the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939, and giving the clearest evidence to date of the working methodologies of early modernist war photographers. The negatives are almost equally divided between Capa, Taro, and Chim. And while much of the attention had been focused on recovering the Capa images, what has proved just as valuable are the negatives by Gerda Taro – covering almost her entire body of work as a photographer, since she worked only in Spain, where she was killed in battle in 1937 – and Chim, a major photographer, the oldest and most experienced of the three, whose work in the Spanish Civil War was barely known previously.

The so-called Mexican Suitcase is actually three small boxes – one green, one red, one brown. The green box is about the size of a candy box and inside is divided into fifty squares, most containing a single roll of coiled film. The lid of the green box is inscribed with corresponding squares to identify the contents. As it turns out, all of the films in this box are by Chim. The red box is more complicated. Like the green box, the red box is divided into fifty squares with corresponding identifications on the lids. But the film rolls in this box are by a variety of photographers and have clearly been jumbled and misplaced. The third box is a reused Ilford photographic paper box containing 27 paper envelopes holding cut negatives strips. Written annotations on these sleeves indicate that the negatives are by Capa and Taro. Some of the negatives are identified by photogra-

pher with small codes on the films themselves; other attributions are based on comparison to known works by those makers.

The first task for Cynthia Young, who had taken over as curator of the Capa archive at the International Center of Photograph after the sudden death of Richard Whelan in May 2007, was to determine how best to preserve the fragile negatives. She consulted with Grant Romer, then director of the Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation at the George Eastman House and one of the world's leading photography conservators. Romer and Michael Hagar, of Museum Photographics, visited ICP on February 8, 2008, and looked at the film in the Mexican Suitcase. Romer sniffed the nitrate film to see if it smelled vinegary, which would signal decomposition. It did not. And it was pliable, not brittle. Apparently the relatively dry and stable climate of Mexico City, where the negatives had been stored for almost seventy years, had been the ideal environment to preserve the negatives. But the challenge they identified was how to unspool the hundred-foot rolls of film without causing damage.

Over several months Romer and Hagar labored to design and manufacture a custom-built film carrier that could support these various lengths of the vintage film, and allow for the individual frames to be photographed. High-resolution digital scans of the film would capture all of the information of the film piece – not just the image area – and limit future handling of the delicate negative strips. Ultimately, this arduous task was accomplished by Christopher George over the course of nearly a year. Now the boxes and films are kept in a controlled environment, and the scanned films can be reviewed by anyone on a computer. The significance of this widespread digital access is profound, and, it is already rapidly transforming the way history is viewed and interpreted.

The archive of Spanish Civil War negatives in their concentration and depth offers a concise opportunity to understand the changing dynamic of photojournalism at the precise historical moment of its genesis. Rapid transformations in the technology of printing and photography in the 1920s and early 1930s – including the high-quality halftone printing, smaller cameras, roll film – encouraged the widespread development of illustrated photo weeklies. These magazines were immensely popular in the 1920s and 1930s, with hundreds produced throughout Europe. Following the example of *VU*[2], which was founded in 1928, these illustrated weekly journals featured dramatic photographs and bold layouts. They encouraged speed, dynamism, technology, and social change. In turn they sponsored a new visual literacy on the part of photo agencies, photographers, picture editors, and readers. Collectively, they transformed the reading habits of their audience from text to image, a skill that in many ways defines the beginning of the modern era.

Take, for example, the modernist notion of proximity, or what would be called by photographers the "close up." The close-up, whether famous

2 Editor's note: *VU* was a weekly French magazine published from March 21, 1928 to May 29, 1940. It was the first large weekly to feature photographs systematically in essay form, and as such was an important precursor to the magazine format of photojournalism. *VU* was innovative in its layouts, especially in its double-page spreads. Notable contributors included Cartier-Bresson, Man Ray, Brassaï, and André Kertész. The magazine published special issues on the Soviet Union (*VU au pays des Soviets*, November 18, 1931), Germany (*L'énigme allemande*, 1932), the ascent of technology (*Fin d'une civilisation*, 1933), China (*Interrogatoire de la Chine*, 1934), and Spain (*VU en Espagne, 1936*).

faces or surprising biological specimens, was the visual design tour-de-force of the weekly photographic tabloids. But Capa, Taro, and Chim applied this idea for the first time to modern warfare. Capa famously said, "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough."[3] And this general concept seemed to dictate not only that the photographer be "embedded" with his or her subjects but also that he or she be part of the action, if not necessarily partisan. Proximity also meant dynamic and dramatic movement, action, blur; this became the hallmark for Capa and other modernist photographers. This new theory of motion, or stopped action, was undoubtedly influenced by the emergence of cinema, where the effect of a rapid sequence of still images was self-evident. But to photographers engaged in photo reportage, such techniques were an utter revelation. The cinematic sense of immersion, interrupted action, close ups, dramatic scale shifts, abrupt jump cuts, and continuous narrative structure, when applied to photo stories, all clearly signaled a new direction for photography.

As photojournalists, Capa, Taro, and Chim were not engaged in a photography of self-expression. Their photographs were not created for gallery walls or deluxe art magazines. Rather, they were part of a rapidly expanding consumer industry oriented toward providing visual news and entertainment for modern urban viewers. This was understood as a highly competitive and ephemeral business in which good pictures simply meant more sales. If the journalistic requirements of this new mass audience were stipulated by the rise of modern cinema – and, in particular, the newsreel – then the job of these new photojournalists was to apply those visual and graphic standards to the two-dimensional print media. Central to the photographers' embrace of these new modernist modes of representation was a belief in the intense power of storytelling. Certainly, in some rare instances a single photograph could capture an entire narrative. Such an example is Chim's famous photograph "Land Distribution Meeting, Estremadura, Spain" (1936), the negative of which is included in the Mexican Suitcase. Yet, such powerful individual photographs had a tendency to become singular iconic images or to be misread, as was this photograph when it became the basis for a poster showing the nursing mother looking up at photomontaged bombers flying overhead.

Such applications of photography cut both ways. For Capa, Taro, and Chim, the Spanish Civil War was primarily a political cause and they embraced the propagandistic uses of their photographs in support of the Spanish Republican cause. They understood clearly the political consequences of such pictures and, like the readers of *VU* and *Regards*[4], they regarded their photographic work as an expression of a shared political solidarity. At the same time, they fostered a more complex view of the ideological function of photojournalistic images, which viewed them essentially as documents – in this case, documents of a people's struggle for freedom. In this respect, their bold, even avant-gardist, contribution to the

3 Editor's note: Robert Capa's famous phrase eventually became a motto for photojournalism. On the context to which it responded, see the catalog of the exhibition *This is War! Rober Capa at Work*, cited in note 2.

4 Editor's Note: Created in 1932 *Regards* was a leftist newspaper that launched photojournalism in France in the years before World War II. Critic and film theorist Leon Moussinac directed the magazine, with Robert Capa and Henri Cartier-Bresson as core photographers. The magazine ceased publication in 1962.

use of photography in journalism was their precise and experimental development of the naturalistic photo essay, to show war in what could be a rapidly shifting everyday scenario. War, for them, was not heroic actions and bold proclamations, but the mundane toil of fear and anticipation, populated by eating and reading and sleeping. Life goes on and on.

If history is a search for truth, it must be understood that there is never just one truth, but many. Each new historical discovery amplifies those truths exponentially and allows for new understandings and new constructions of truth itself. The Mexican Suitcase is such a historical recovery. These are not just any negatives; they are crucial documents for an expanded view of a key moment in the history of twentieth-century culture: the origins of modern photojournalism. The links of history, once broken by political repression and human neglect, are reforged and refashioned for a new time, offering a new model of history.

Archival Excursions: Across the Atlantic and Into the Museum

Jordana Mendelson

Jordana Mendelson

Autobiographical reflections make me hesitate. For me, they are usually relegated to a specifically high-pressure genre developed for grants, job applications or promotion known as the "professional narrative." Not only do I avoid the autobiographical as often as possible, I work against it in my research and writing, orienting myself with the assistance of a database, card catalog or vertical file to the comforting strictures of the archive and the library which, as artificial as they may be, have provided me with infinite strings of association to follow in my research. My intuition is tempered by a constant turning back to a detail buried in a stack of photocopies, lingering at the edge of a microfilm or in retreat in the dusty corner of a lost shelf in a local, or highly specialized, library. Even now, with the increasing digitization of historic materials, I am still in pursuit of that fragment from history that comes down to us through its presence (digital or physical) in a public collection. Outside of the general descriptions of my field areas (art history, history of photography, and print culture) I work most frequently within the eccentric outer rings of the intersecting professional departments that I occupy: the history of art and the history of Spanish literature and culture. Though I am not interested in the relationship between my own autobiography and my scholarly choices, my approach to art history has been inextricably marked by the social experience of conducting research abroad. The scholars, curators, archivists, artists, and administrators who have facilitated my research and publishing in Spain have also become lasting friends and dedicated contributors to shared projects.

In a fundamental way, the lines of my personal and professional development, both in the United States and Spain, have been knotted together around my early interest in photography (not a disembodied idea about purity of medium or white box installations but about the every day lives and decisions of photographers about their work and their relation to the medium's history). I have been less interested in photography as a standalone practice, and more in the ways photography in Spain is present in a range of practices and spaces that allowed artists to intervene in the public sphere. Photography in print, and the discourse that emerged as a result of the medium's intrusion in art making and daily life, have guided my path

through Spain's early twentieth century. In every one of my major research projects that has resulted in an exhibition, I began in an archive, with a hunch, a lead, and the scrap of a reference related in some way to the history of photography and print culture, even when it was only part of a larger story I was investigating. More than any theoretical impulse, it has been a search for a biographical presence within the archive and the library that has encouraged me throughout my research to make curatorial activities a central part of my scholarly agenda: to make visible to as broad a public as possible the impossible task of recreating history through its material and visual traces.

If there were an evolution to my interest in finding art history within the archive, it would move from the particularities of an individual's story to the patterns discovered in layering these stories together. It has been in that tension between the potentially eccentric or exceptional and the typical that my work on the 1930s has been focused on Spain, because it has been within Spain's archives and libraries that I have seen how powerful the visual traces of modernity may be in assisting us in recreating a history of modern art that necessarily implicates us, as scholars, in its re-telling. My focus on the 1930s, a decade in which the personal and the political were inseparable, has made photography, design, and exhibition culture the main subjects of my attention, in large part because these three areas were emerging as new forms of creative expression in which professional, commercial, independent, and avant-garde artists found spaces to develop new tools and strategies for reaching increasingly differentiated audiences. It was also a decade in which the pliability, ambiguity, and uncertainty that lay imbedded within these new forms of mass communication were being investigated by artists and writers. The conceptual line that links my first experiences in Spanish archives with my most recent curatorial endeavors is one in which artist-protagonists worked within established institutional contexts while also critically examining the mechanisms and assumptions upon which these same institutions were founded; it is a paradox demonstrated to me by the first artist I studied in depth while in Spain, and it has stayed with me since.

Excursion I: Joan Fontcuberta

My interest in the ways archives both enrich and undermine history was a lesson I learned during my first in-depth research experience in Spain. During my junior year at Boston University I studied in Barcelona. The year before my advisor Kim Sichel had charged me with conducting research in preparation for my senior honors thesis. Together we chose the Catalan photographer Joan Fontcbuerta, who by that time (1990-1991) had already established himself as a notable representative of contemporary Spanish photography; he and fellow Catalan photographer Pere For-

miguera were featured in MoMA's project gallery and he curated the major exhibition *Idas & Chaos: Vanguardias fotográficas en España 1920-1945*, which had been held at the International Center of Photography in New York. When we met in spring 1991, Fontcuberta was already a canonical presence within Spain's photo-scene and had taken on a key role in promoting research into the history of photography while always maintaining a critical stance with regard to any notions of photography's inherent truth-value or institutional power. At the center of all of his endeavors has been the fundamental recognition that one of his key abilities as an artist is to reveal for his viewers the potential traps and intricate fictions that are imbedded within narratives that pretend to be non-fiction.

Coming from a family that had worked in advertising, teaching in fine art and communications departments, and authoring with Joan Costa a key text book on *Foto-Diseño* (1988), Fontcuberta emerged as a creative artist who was steeped in the double-edge of dictatorship and advertising, the political régime of General Francisco Franco and the rising tide of transition-era mass media. Producing work that was grounded in an understanding of audience, reception, and message control was key to Fontcuberta's ability to create projects that convinced viewers of their truthfulness, just as he was undermining those truths from within the project itself. By building up and then unraveling the scaffolds of truth, science, knowledge, and technology, Fontcuberta placed photography at the center of critical discourse in contemporary Spanish art. He became an ambassador for a sophisticated, theoretically informed engagement with photography that was also ludic, accessible, and historically informed.

His editorial work as co-founder of the photography magazine *Photovision,* along with his ongoing conceptual photography projects, essays, and public lectures galvanized photographers within and outside of Spain to come together to reflect on the status of photography, photographic education, and the necessary dialogue between contemporary initiatives and the medium's past. His work also coincided with an opening up of photography in Spain as a result of the increasing insistence on the part of photographers to be considered independent artists. As Fontcuberta's trajectory as an educator, historian, writer, and artist brought him greater international exposure, within Spain there was a growing insistence on the part of photographers on building an infrastructure around photography that would enable research into its past and support its young artists. Galleries, libraries, bookstores, archives, and schools emerged throughout Spain, but with special concentration in and around Barcelona. Fontcbuerta was instrumental in many of these foundational projects, including the *Jornadas catalanas de fotografia* (1979) and the *Primavera Fotografica* (1982), and was a participant in and supporter of others, including the experimental magazine *Nueva Lente* (1971) and the Institut d'Estudis Fotogràfics de Catalunya (1972). In recognition of the decades that he has

spent as an artist, critic, curator and historian, Fontcuberta was awarded the 2013 Hasselblad Prize.

In gathering information about Fontcuberta, viewing exhibitions of his work (fortunately there were shows up both in Spain and the United States during that year), and interviewing him in person, I came to understand that Fontcuberta's practice as an artist and the ways that he documented, exhibited and published his projects incorporated methods he had acquired as a historian, collector, and archivist. As an artist, his practice emulated that of a historian: he conducted extensive research, detailed his findings, created meticulous records, constructed elaborate narratives, staged reconstructions of his findings, and engaged viewers in the completion of his thesis. The connections that Fontcuberta forged in his work between history, artifact, artist, public space (exhibition or publication), and the viewer meant that he was bringing viewers into the process of locating and recreating history. Imbedded within his artistic recreations were moments of forgery, parody, humor, and history. He presented to his viewers parallel worlds that reflected back the need for and the absurdity of our shared faith in data, proofs, and documentation. His strategy was to lure viewers in through their attraction to the unknown and the newly discovered. Inserting himself as a protagonist in his elaborated fictions, Fontcuberta called upon his viewers to practice careful observation. Surely, if they looked hard enough, read the materials with enough attention, and were tuned in carefully enough to the stagecraft of the project they would come to realize that they were participant-observers in a well-crafted hoax.

Excursion II: Margaret Michaelis

In my research on Fontcuberta, I learned not only about his work and the ways it engaged with history and the archive but I also acquired an interest in early twentieth century Spanish photography. *Idas & Chaos* was a ground breaking exhibition that laid out the framework for understanding the complexity of an avant-garde that existed prior to the dictatorship of General Franco, one that was composed of photographers who were in dialogue with an international community of artists and writers but whose names did not appear in the catalogs of photographic collections or photo history books in the United States: Emili Godes, Joaquím Gomis, Josep Sala, Pere Catalá-Pic, and many others. Included in this catalog was also the work of surrealist artist Salvador Dalí, whose engagement with photography was folded into a larger narrative about the history of modern photography in Spain that engaged manifold layers of cultural and critical production. When I finished my research on Fontcuberta, I began to shift from an interest in contemporary art to an earlier moment in twentieth century Spain, which I found compelling for its overlaps with, but also divergences from, other national histories of photography and modernity.

I entered graduate school with the idea of specializing in either Latin American or Spanish art. I had an introductory knowledge of both at the time, and took seminars and independent studies that schooled me in Cuban and modern European art. In my second year of graduate school I took a seminar with Robert Lubar on "Surrealism in Spain" at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. I chose to work on Luis Buñuel's 1933 documentary *Las Hurdes: Land without Bread*. At that time, the film had been largely read within the history of cinema as an example of ethnographic surrealism, with scholars dissecting the relation between sound and image, its iconographical references to Golden Age painting, and its position within the history of documentary film. All of these readings were justified and compelling, but the one missing was rooted in understanding the film within the historical and artistic contexts of the 1930s. My research brought Buñuel's dialogue with dissident surrealism to bear on the film's style and content, but I also sought to establish that Buñuel was intentionally engaging with a subject that was already highly visualized and mediated within Spanish culture at the time (the region of Las Hurdes was a *cause célèbre* since the 1920s). My research on Buñuel extended to become first a dissertation and then a much-revised book about the value of documentary and exhibition culture in 1930s Spain. It included chapters on the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona, Dalí's writings on photography and paranoia, the Second Republic's Misiones Pedagógicas, the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris, and, of course, Buñuel's *Las Hurdes*.[1]

In researching my dissertation, I discovered that my work on photography was taking me increasingly away from galleries and museums and placing me squarely within Spain's libraries and archives. Thinking about how photography's status as document, and even more how a critical and creative discourse around the document indicated a thriving and complex visual culture in Spain, lead me through a sometimes meandering path that brought me into contact with materials that had been outside the typical realm of art historical research on high modernism: administrative papers, treatises on folklore and language, subscription files for magazines, agricultural policy, and serial publications on non-literary or artistic subjects. I found that "modern art" in Spain defied any disciplinary strongholds I may have wanted to impose. It was not unusual for me to enter an archive with a specific question, topic or artist in mind and leave with a stack of photocopies and rolls of film that demonstrated potentially new paths to follow, new artists to learn about, and more vexing questions to address.

My first exhibition in Spain, co-curated with Juan José Lahuerta, was the result of one of these archival tangents.[2] While I was researching my dissertation in the historic archive of the Col.legi Oficial d'Arquitectes de Catalunya, looking for photographs related to both the 1929 and 1937 International Expositions, I came across a stunning group of photographs;

1 Jordana Mendelson, *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939* (Pennsylvania Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2005); Jordana Mendelson, *Documentar España. Los artistas, la cultura expositiva y la nación moderna 1929-1939*, trans. Elisenda Julibert and Miguel Martínez-Lage (Barcelona: Ediciones de La Central, 2012).

2 Jordana Mendelson and Juan José Lahuerta with an essay by Helen Ennis, *Margaret Michaelis: Fotografía, Vanguardia y Política en la Barcelona de la* República, exhibition catalog (Valencia: IVAM Centro Julio Gonzàlez; Barcelona: CCCB, 1998).

one was related to Barcelona's fifth district and the poverty of its residents, while the other was striking clean-lined photographs of modern villas and apartment residences. Both series were found within the archive for the GATCPAC (Grup d'Arquitectes i Tècnics Catalans per a la Realització de l'Arquitectura Contemporània), a modern architectural collective founded in 1931 that was part of a national organization but had its strongest representation among Catalan architects, who also edited the group's magazine. Few of the photographs were signed or stamped. From what I knew about early twentieth-century photography in Spain they seemed exceptional. Although the group's magazine *A.C. Actividad Contemporànea* rarely included the authors or architects behind its content, the one commercial photographer from Barcelona who was published was granted the exception, no doubt as part of his agreement to sell his photographs to the magazine, and that was Josep Sala.[3] The unsigned photographs were just as, if not more, remarkable than Sala's. When I asked archivist Andreu Carrascal about the photographs, he informed me that a recent exhibition in Australia by a curator named Helen Ennis ascribed the photographs to a female photographer named Margaret Michaelis. The little information known about Michaelis's time in Europe before her migration to Australia appeared in an exhibition pamphlet, and the proof of her authorship could be ferreted out from a few letters, mention in the group's accounting books, and a select group of the photographs which carried the stamp "Foto-Elis." In none of the books or articles that I had read about GATCPAC was it mentioned that a foreigner, much less a woman, had taken these iconic photographs. Authorship was dissolved by content and the photographs were simply attributed to GATCPAC; no one had asked previous to Ennis's research about the stamp "Foto-Elis" or the references to her in the group's letters. In fairness, it was also a question about the status of photographs, not just about the author of these particular images. Her photographs were documents *within* an archive; they were supporting players within a larger story about architectural modernity.

Recreating Michaelis's life and work while she was in Spain required intensive research, both in the archives of the Col.legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya and the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. Whereas in the historic archive Michaelis's work was catalogd in relation to the buildings and sites she documented or the project to which she contributed (with some photographs also forming part of the group's general graphic archive), in the museum Michaelis's photographs were carefully conserved according to museological principals and her archival materials separated off into other files. In the archive we located her images by content, and in the museum it was by her name; in one it was the city itself that was the protagonist, and in the other the city disappeared behind Michaelis's identity as photographer. Comparing holdings from the two institutions allowed not only Michaelis's story to emerge (albeit incompletely), it also

3 The only other photographs to appear with attribution in *A.C.* were from the "Arxiu Mas," a commercial photographic archive in Barcelona. Like Sala's photographs, those from the Arxiu Mas would have had to have been purchased for use in the magazine.

forced us to work across two very different organizational models: if in Barcelona it was unclear which photographs were by Michaelis, in Australia there was little identification of the buildings or sites featured in Michaelis's photographs. The different lacunae and surpluses of knowledge extant in both collections were frustrating but also inspiring as we allowed ourselves to be guided principally by those traces of Michaelis that existed in print from the period. Supplementing that public, but still unrecognized, history was a small collection of personal papers and institutional records that were invaluable for establishing information about Michaelis and her time in Spain from about 1933-1937.

Michaelis arrived in Barceona with her husband Rudolf after he had been imprisoned briefly in Nazi Germany (both were Jewish and anarchists). She divorced Rudolf soon after arriving in Barcelona and achieved the formidable goal of supporting herself in a city where hiring a divorced, Jewish, anarchist female photographer was far from common. If we take the quantity and quality of her photographs conserved in the National Gallery as any indication of an even larger body of work that existed at the time, Michaelis's output was prolific. Following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and despite her work appearing in several Catalan government and GATCPAC publications during the war, Michaelis left Spain and eventually traveled to England, where she worked as a maid until securing passage to Australia.

For the exhibition, we relied on the publication of her work in the magazine *A.C.* to help us bring photographs from both archive and museum together to reassemble her photographic series. Few of the photographs were stamped or signed in Barcelona, but all of the ones in Australia had come to the museum directly from Michaelis herself and in each series at least one of the images carried her signature or stamp. Manuscripts, correspondence, accounting books, business cards, maps, and personal photographs complimented the strict selection of photographs related to *A.C.* The exhibition represented the first acknowledgement of Michaelis's authorship to appear in Spain, and since then her photographs have been located in Barcelona's city archive as well as in some private collections. During our research for the exhibition, we located examples of her advertising designs in several magazines and newspapers, and photographs by Michaelis that appeared in the press during and after the Civil War were also identified. Michaelis's photographic practice while in Spain was diverse and not limited to any single genre or venue. While it is clear that the GATCPAC gave her steady commissions, it also became evident that her practice as a female photographer in Barcelona during the 1930s was far more extensive and diverse than scholars could ever have imagined. Her singular case brought new attention to the significant roles that photography and print culture played in creating vibrant and multi-layered images of modernity in Spain.[4]

4 Jordana Mendelson, "Architecture, Photography and (Gendered) Modernities in 1930s Barcelona," *Modernism/Modernity* 10: 1 (January 2003): 141-164.

Excursion III: Magazines and War

I had learned from making my way through Spain's archives and libraries that so many of the leads I found into the history of 1930s visual culture came from letting myself move just slightly over from my original target project. Instead of following a research map of what Spanish modern art *should* look like, I tried to dig into the paper trail behind what some of its artists were doing during the 1930s. By allowing an intentional scholarly drift to take place while I was making inventories of magazines, correspondence and books published from about 1929 to 1939, I had accumulated a fairly vast parallel collection of photocopies and slides from historic collections and had acquired first editions and serials from local flea markets and book stores. Paper, in so many forms, was the vehicle through which Spain's artists and writers made compelling interventions into a far-reaching discourse about modernity and representation. The creative tools learned from experimenting with typography, montage, and scale in designing posters, post cards, magazines, broad sides and advertising campaigns were vibrant and palpable. There was nothing easy about this material; it was often through the period's magazines that a reader gained insight into the debates and anxieties that marked artists' growing sense of self and community, of Spain in relation to her international peers, and of a building dialogue around authenticity and technology. Artists used the press and the vehicle of print culture to distribute manifestos and mark territory for themselves within (and often undermining) the institutions they critiqued. Though artists like Dalí and Miró practiced a form of "revolution from within," other artists saw in the declaration of the Second Republic and the increasing political demands of the times an opportunity to use the press to launch powerful social critiques and calls for action.

In moving my attention to ephemeral, serialized publications as locations for understanding the production and distribution of modern art in early twentieth-century Spain, I was not alone. In addition to a rising international bibliography on the intersection of visual and print cultures, and growing attention to the digitization of archival material as part of an archeology of mass culture and modernism, there was a concrete awareness (through research and exhibitions) that the contents of libraries and historic archives were just as important to understanding modern Spanish art as the paintings hanging in the nation's museums. The divide between page and wall, readers and viewers, modern art in Spain and what was happening internationally was opening up, and new stories were beginning to emerge. One of the most compelling of these was the 1997 exhibition held at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía on *Arte moderno y revistas españolas 1898-1936*. Co-curated by Juan José Lahuerta and Eugenio Carmona, the show demonstrated the depth and reach of artists' use of literary magazines to create a dynamic, inter-connected print arena for the

experimentation of new ideas and the promotion of art across Spain, from its capital cities to its provinces. Posed during the press conference for the exhibition was the question of what happened to the production of magazines, and the involvement of artists in them, with the outbreak of Spain's Civil War? I was approached by Juanjo Lahuerta, who had co-curated the Michaelis show with me, to work on what would be conceived as a continuation of this first exhibition, with a focus on 1936-1939. As the project evolved, it required repeat trips to Spain to visit specialized collections and archives, those related to the War and others dedicated to conserving periodical literature. While there is a robust bibliography on Civil War periodicals, and some published inventories and searchable guides exist for specialized collections, few of these resources and even fewer mainstream history books included reproductions of the covers or internal visual material from the hundreds of magazines that were published across Spain during the War.

The relative absence of Civil War print culture (with the exception of the war's highly visible posters) in the art historical literature was no doubt due in large part to the fact that there is no centralized catalog or archive of the magazines published during the War. Serials from both sides of the war, and from the different political parties, trade unions, battalions, women's organizations and children's colonies are scattered, often only partially catalogd, and there is little to no reference in catalog entries, when they did exist, to the artists who were involved in these publications. To access these publications in person, to hold and handle their different appearances, one has to make a concerted effort to move beyond what at that time were poor quality microfilms. Permissions had to be obtained to view the original copies of the magazines, if one even knew what titles to request. Once brought into view, however, the value and significance of the visual content of these magazines was undeniable. Artists had infused everything from high-end, high production value, large format magazines to single handcrafted broadsides on poor quality paper with powerful, lasting images.

The project, titled *Revistas y Guerra 1936-1939*, was an exercise in recreating, at least partially, the span of magazines in which artists contributed their knowledge of design, photography, and international print culture to magazines during the war. From the databases, card catalogs, and printed inventories of wartime periodicals, we were able to assemble a robust sample of magazines that bridged the Loyalists and the Nationalists, Communists and Anarchists, well-known artists with years of training and those who were anonymous or worker-artists. In addition to locating and documenting the publications, we also searched the archives for any correspondence, subscriptions, or other records related to the production, distribution, and reception of Civil War magazines. While the historical record was inconsistent, it was possible to draw connections between the

material artifacts that we had assembled and on-the-ground wartime challenges like employment, material scarcity, censorship, and violence, as well as opportunities for creativity, humor, and personal narrative.

The project required us to think about the longevity of the research, not only the moment of the show's opening. In the time that we were working on the show there had been changes in the museum staff that required flexibility when thinking about resources and the form the research would take as an exhibition and a publication. Ultimately, by the time the show opened it had moved from a collaborative project to a single authored catalog and curated show, but behind the research, publication, and finally digitization of *Revistas y Guerra 1936-1939* there was a group of scholars, archivists, and designers who made the display of three years of wartime publications possible.[5] Over one hundred and thirty magazines were included in the show with related print (posters and postcards) and archival materials. The interactive website included thirty fully digitized magazines that could be browsed on-line, and a list of scholarly resources and web-links. The catalog contained an overview essay, bibliography, and a full inventory list of the exhibition's contents. More than summarizing three years of print culture in a simple conclusion, the show posed questions about the place of artists in wartime propaganda and required visitors to think about how issues of employment, training, style, political commitment, material resources, foreign influence, and literacy folded together to extend the experiments in publicity and print culture that marked the 1930s into the rear and front guards of the Civil War, taking messages and images about the war across and beyond Spain. Our goal was at least two-fold: to bring out into the public archival holdings that are normally difficult to consult except by specialists (because of the dispersal of the materials and their specialized content) and to do so in a way that was accessible and impactful. There could be no doubt, after assembling the materials for the show, that artists were key contributors in forging a vision of war that was serialized, wide-spread, and often highly contested. Far from being innocent documents in a supporting role, the exhibition of wartime magazines demonstrated that print culture was not simply a repository for ideas but a highly activated and deeply problematic sphere of visual and political contest.

Excursion IV: Encounters with the 1930s

After over fifteen years of research in which I pursued subjects that were on the outlying edge of canonical art history, I received a commission from the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía to be lead curator for an exhibition on international art of the 1930s. For all of my work with mass media (photography in print, magazines, postcards, film, international expositions), I was now being called to center myself within the main flow of artistic production and exchange, and with artists and movements that

5 *Magazines and War 1936-1939/Revistas y Guerra 1936-1939*, exhibition catalog (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura/Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2007).
Jordana Mendelson, ed., *Revistas, Modernidad y Guerra/Magazines, Modernity and War* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 2008). *www.magazinesandwar.com*, bi-lingual, interactive website designed by Mason Kessinger & Phillip Zelnar, POCCUO, with research and digitization assistance from Carmen Ripollés, and funding support from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, the Center for Computing in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

formed anchor points within the history of modern European and American art. How could I do this while at the same time honoring the lessons I had learned about alternative histories of early twentieth-century artistic production and exchange? How would the archive assist me in returning to the museum-based practice that an exhibition of painting and sculpture would necessitate? Would it be possible to recognize the role of the individual artist and the importance of biography – which were non-conventional and innovative when dealing with mass media – while still questioning inherited myths about the heroic 1930s?

Working with a team of invited curators, we created a model for the exhibition that would allow us to explore deeply the decade's continued emphasis on "isms" (Realism, Abstraction, and Surrealism) while also discovering axial points of intersection through sections dedicated to International Expositions, Photography, Spain's Second Republic, Civil War, and Exile. Film was incorporated when possible into the exhibition hall, and there was a parallel film series organized by the education department.[6] In the course of the exhibition's development, its final opening coincided with the 75th Anniversary of Picasso's *Guernica*, which allowed us to create an unprecedented collaboration between works on loan for the temporary exhibition and a re-organization of the area of the permanent collection that focused on the 1930s. Over two floors of the museum, visitors were taken through a breathtaking tour of some of the decade's most remarkable works of art, but they were also asked to pay attention to the ways that print culture (manifestos, magazines, postcards, pamphlets, books, and posters) created the means through which artists connected with each other and with a broader public. We also worked within each section of the exhibition to create a tension between expected, canonical voices within each movement and those that sought to introduce a counter-current or a challenge to the group's artistic and ideological identity (which was sometimes instantiated by an individual artist and other times by an event, publication or alternative medium). By interlacing group statements with individual voices, and acknowledging the force of the decade's most significant monuments along with its moments of ambivalence and disagreement, we hoped to chart a textured, open reading of a storied decade that had been celebrated previously in forcefully thematic exhibitions.[7]

The two leading concepts to emerge from the exhibition, which were also used to frame the diversity of artists and ideas included in the two-floor survey, were: encounter and eclecticism. With these two words, we hoped to communicate on the one hand that the history of modern art is one in which individual artists, the groups in which they work, and the interactions they have with each other and their viewers are fundamental to the choices they made during a period when migration, flux, and travel dominated social discourse. In these instances, print culture helped to bridge distances, provoke debates, and enable artists working in close prox-

6 The curatorial team for *Encuentros con los años 30* included: Karen Fiss, Romy Golan, Rocío Robles, and Javier Pérez Segura. The museum's director Manolo Borja and chief curator Rosario Peiro also formed part of the curatorial team for the temporary exposition, and were the lead curators in the re-organization of the permanent collection around *Guernica*. Karen Fiss curated the film series with the education department. All members of the curatorial team also contributed to the catalog, which also included select contributions from participants in the interdisciplinary pre-exhibition symposium and invited contributions and reprints.

7 See, for example: Dawn Ades, *Art and Power: Europe Under the Dictators 1930-45* (London: Thames and Hudson in association with Hayward Gallery, 1995), Jean-Paul Ameline, *Face à l'histoire: 1933-1996 : l'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), Nadine Bortolotti, *Gli annitrenta: arte e cultura in Italia* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1983), Jean Clair, *The 1930s - The Making of "The New Man"* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2008), and Suzanne Pagé, *Années 30 en Europe: le temps menaçant 1929 [-] 1939 : exposition du 20 février au 25 mai 1997, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris* (Paris: Paris Musées, 1997).

imity and at great distances from each other to share equally in the production of artistic ideas on the national and international levels. We also felt that when looking closely at the defining, manifesto-demanding moments of the 1930s, there was greater diversity and eclecticism than is typically recognized in surveys. Instead of weeding out artists whose styles or subject matter irritated more streamlined definitions of the chosen movements, we opted to offer a greater range of artists within each of the exhibition's sections. This model allowed us to offer difference as a productive force in the continuity and expansion of artistic style throughout the decade.

In the wall text for the exhibition, I tried to summarize what I felt was the big "take away" from doing this show about the 1930s. For me, it was an opportunity to thread together the different ways that I had been working between the archive and the museum, between a national history of modern art and international trends, and it was also, on a personal level, an opportunity to test out ideas about modern art with a team of colleagues (in both the exhibition and the catalog) who each brought to the table their own scholarly and curatorial trajectories. Out of that heterogeneity of approaches and interests came an exhibition that marked new territory in scholarship on the 1930s because it stepped away from hyperbole and into the rich texture of everyday artistic production. As I shared with visitors:

> This exhibition revisits the decade with an eye trained upon its moments of artistic overlap and expansion, while at the same time acknowledging the contests that brewed within the predominant artistic "isms" of the period: Realism, Surrealism, and Abstraction. The works chosen – individually and together – demonstrate that artists thought of their practice as one that was contingent, wherein their works stood for and often thematized the relationships and opportunities that sustained creativity across international borders amidst challenging political circumstances. As a whole, the exhibition proposes a demystified view into creativity during the 1930s by placing more value on the ability of artists to sustain practice through dialogue than on any exceptional, aesthetic criteria. And yet, even with the rich contextual discourse that this exhibition seeks to convey, there is no doubt that the works on exhibit were also chosen as exemplars of visual complexity, technical acumen, and conceptual depth that warrant an analysis of them as unique works within this inter-connected history.
>
> *Encounters with the 1930s* suggests that it is in the eclectic, locally-defined, and layered histories of individual artists (and their relationships to the groups that historians have used to define them) that we find the exquisite promise of the 1930s to confound, frustrate, and bully our attempts to contain it within a singular definition.

By placing ambivalence at the center of my art historical research, I have resisted projects that seek closure or restrict definitions. Instead, I have chosen artists and media to work on that place a wedge between intention and meaning, not to disconnect the two from each other, but rather to allow for a greater space in between to think about the manifold issues that come into play when any artist, at any given time, and within any national context pretends to create work that seeks to communicate to the world beyond the studio. Fortunately, the 1930s was a decade in which artists took up media that were meant to place their ideas before the public for view and debate. As I learned from curating *Encounters with the 1930s*, it was also a decade in which the parallel realms of archive and museum, group and individual, mass media and modern art bled together in often jarring, destabilizing ways that enabled artists to make work that was relevant, insistent, and demanding of viewers' attention.

IV.
ART CRITICISM

‘Tradition, a Curse’: My First 25 years of Cultural Reporting on Spain

Robin Cembalest

Robin Cembalest

For many months during 1987, whenever it was sunny, I would lug my new red portable electric typewriter on a bus down the Castellana, escaping the ambience-challenged apartment I shared with a stewardess on Calle Orense for various cafés in the Retiro. There, fueling myself with Diet Coke, green olives, and the well-spaced fino, I grappled with my biggest writing assignment so far, an obituary of Salvador Dalí (1904-1989). I had more time than I realized, since the artist, who had been badly burned in a 1984 fire at his castle in Púbol, would hang on until 1989, but obviously I didn’t know that then. I woke up every day and anxiously scanned the newsstand, only to learn one morning that Andy Warhol had died instead.

My story was for the English-language service of the Spanish wire EFE, which like most news organizations keeps obituaries of famous people on file to deploy them in a timely fashion. It was there I hoped to enact my career change, at age 26, from art-magazine underling to foreign correspondent. Armed with the name of the boss, Dwight Porter – procured by my mother after a chance encounter at a supermarket with a neighbor whose son had just returned from Madrid – I had turned up in EFE’s drab headquarters on Calle Espronceda in the fall of 1986. After my years in the coyly renovated *Artforum* offices in the Louis Sullivan building on Bleecker Street, EFE’s old-school, Old-World flora and fauna, featuring the inevitable, sputtering teletype machines and grizzled (mostly male) reporters, was tantalizingly seductive. Porter immediately saw that my Yale University art-history degree, multiple museum internships, and four-year stint as Ingrid Sischy’s assistant had left me with no discernible knowledge of real journalism. A kindly mentor, he let me do a few stories anyway.

I’m not sure if the obituary I gave him ever ran, since by the time Dalí died, I was back in New York. After a year in Madrid, I’d given up on the foreign-correspondent fantasy and returned to what I knew – the art world. But in my new job, at *ARTnews*, I was learning to report and to write for a mainstream audience. I quickly sold a Dalí obit to my friend Jeff Weinstein, who ran the art section of the *Village Voice*[1]. Over the years, I parlayed my Retiro-based research into many other stories – an *ARTnews* trav-

1 R. Cembalest, “Salvador Dalí, 1904-89,” *The Village Voice*, vol. xxxiv, 1989, pp. 85-86.

1. (Left)
R. Cembalest, "Angels with Dirty Faces," *ARTnews*, vol. 90, no. 6, Summer 1991, pp. 75-77. Copyright © 1991 ARTnews, LLC, Summer

2. (Right)
R. Cembalest, "Zumaya and Pedraza: 'The Real Spain,'" *ARTnews*, vol 95, no. 8, September 1996, pp. 95-97. Copyright © 1996 ARTnews, LLC, September

WORKING HABITS

Angels with Dirty Faces

There are just a few señoras in black silently kneeling in the pews at midday in Santa María La Mayor, a Romanesque church in Toro, a small city in north central Spain. Situated on a hilltop overlooking a rocky Castilian landscape, the church, built in the 12th century, is also known for its 16-sided tower and a curious 16th-century painting of undetermined attribution entitled *Virgin of the Fly*.

The church's most spectacular feature is accessible only through the creaky wooden doors of a side entrance, leading to a dilapidated chapel where ivy covers the crumbling stones. Hidden by heavy curtains and a maze of yellow scaffolding is the Portada de la Majestad, a towering, early Gothic portal that was originally built into the church's western wall.

José Navarro, an art historian and keeper of monuments, instigated and is now overseeing the portal's restoration. He stalks around the site like a detective in charge of a crime scene, his raincoat flapping as he scales the scaffold—past the Madonna and Child, the eight Hebrew prophets and kings standing in niches, the seven arching rows of musicians and saints and martyrs, until, 40 feet up, a tiny Christ presides over the Last Judgment, sending the saved marching into paradise and the damned to their fit punishments in hell.

Along the way Navarro stops to point out such details as the Coronation of the Virgin and the carved candelabras, which display the influence of French Gothic styles, particularly that of Notre Dame in Paris. The palm and date trees in heaven are motifs borrowed from the Muslims. He motions to the anatomically correct nudes being tortured in hell—"very realistic, very daring." He shows the little holes on lower figures, created when bright robes were tacked onto them on feast days. This custom, which survived until the last century, reflects the local passion for color in churches. While polychromy, the practice of painting on sculpture, was common for centuries throughout Europe, it endured the longest in Spain—where it still embellishes the figures carried in processions during Holy Week.

Like just about all church sculptures, Toro's sandstone portal was painted—not just when it was erected, around 1240, but many times. That's because it had a very short life as a door. Soon after it was completed, the chapel was added, so the portal was suddenly inside the church, where it became an altarpiece. Microscope studies, along with inscriptions on the portal itself and documents that Navarro has unearthed in local archives, show that it was repainted on at least six occasions—in 1408, 1506, 1547, 1566, 1774, and during the 19th century.

Why so many repaintings? Sometimes it needed to be touched up. Sometimes the church was celebrating a patron's donation. And sometimes it just looked ugly and out-of-date as tastes changed. (By the time Neoclassicism came along in the late 18th century, everything looked better if it was painted to look like stone, and the fact that earlier generations—including the Greeks—had polychromed their sculptures was forgotten.)

The early Gothic portal, built in 1240, of Santa María La Mayor, a church in Toro, Spain. Beneath several later layers of polychromy, the portal retains a largely intact example of medieval polychromy. INSET A view of the church's facade.

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artful traveler

Zumaya and Pedraza
"The Real Spain"

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Zuloaga's collection of Spanish painting in the museum in Zumaya; Pedraza Castle; exterior of the museum in Zumaya; Zuloaga's own paintings; Zuloaga (inset), still a cult figure.

In 1910, when Ignacio Zuloaga bought the farmhouse that would become his studio and personal museum, he was 40 years old and one of the most famous artists in the world.

The year before, his exhibition at the Hispanic Society of America in New York had attracted 23,000 visitors. He showed—and sold—in countless other venues, from Dresden to Venice to Buenos Aires.

Zuloaga (1870-1945) had maintained studios in the most scenic parts of Paris, Madrid, Seville, and Segovia. But the place he chose to settle down in was Zumaya, a small Basque town not far from his birthplace, Eibar. It sits on the Cantabrian Sea, a 60-minute drive west from San Sebastián, in a verdant region dotted with chalet-like houses with pitched roofs and cobalt blue shutters. In 1913 the painter built his family a home that fit in perfectly with the local esthetic.

Dealing with the architecture already on the property took more time. The main building was a medieval farmhouse, made of great gray stone blocks, that had once been an inn for pilgrims traveling to Santiago de Compostela. It was attached to a Romanesque chapel that had fallen into disrepair and been used as a stable.

Zuloaga renovated and resanctified the chapel, and transformed the farmhouse into a studio and museum for his personal collection, an eclectic selection of works ranging from 13th-century polychrome sculpture to canvases by Utrillo. In 1923 he opened it to the public once a week, and it became required viewing for French and Spanish art-loving travelers. "When visits are ordinary Zuloaga opens only his private collection," wrote one visitor. "But when the visit is special he opens his heart along with his museum, and he shows the nudes and Rodin's drawings."

Such hospitality "is uncommon in

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el piece on the "Dalí Triangle[2]," for one, and my news coverage of the tension between Madrid and Barcelona over the disposition of his estate[3]. When Ian Gibson's biography *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* came out in 1998, I traveled to the author's home in Restábal, near Granada, to interview him for *The New York Times*[4]. I was staying with friends in Coín, near Málaga, at the time, so they gave me a lift to "the house that Lorca built," as Gibson, who was also the poet's biographer, called it.

By then, I had become expert at weaving interviews into my vacation itinerary. It wasn't hard to get assignments in Spain: everyone wanted something on the exploding cultural scene in Europe's newest democracy – or, conversely, on its efforts to reclaim its glorious heritage. I knew about art, I spoke the language, and I didn't require travel expenses, since I was going to be there anyway. Staging my trips around my social life, I managed to traverse the country on assignment. I wrote about the sherry towns of southern Spain for the *Times*[5]; the castles of Catalonia for *Town & Country*[6], and the multiculturalism of Melilla for the *Forward*[7] and the *New Leader*[8]. For *ARTnews*, I traveled to Toro to cover the restoration of a medieval polychromatic portal in Santa María La Mayor[9] [Fig. 1]; and later to Zumaya and Pedraza to reacquaint our readership with Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945)[10]. [Fig. 2]

In 1990 I snagged an assignment from *Harper's Bazaar* about a subject I knew little about – bullfighting. So after the Cádiz portion of my vacation, at the house Chema Cobo (b. 1952) shared with Mar Villaspesa in Tarifa, where Andalusia's artistic elite desperately tutored me on the duende, I traveled with a photo crew – none of whom spoke Spanish – to La Mancha, to the finca of Rafi Camino, bullfighting scion. The editors evidently picked him because he was known as the "yuppie torero." My

2 R. Cembalest, "Playing All the Time," *ARTnews*, vol. 96, no. 11, December 1997, pp. 82-84.
3 R. Cembalest, "The Great Divide," *ARTnews*, vol. 89, no. 5, May 1990, p. 89.
4 R. Cembalest, "Getting the Low-down on a Serial Showoff," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1998, pp. 44, 48.
5 R. Cembalest, "Spanish Cities Where Sherry Rules," *The New York Times* travel section, January 6, 1991, pp. 9, 26.
6 R. Cembalest, "Castles in Spain," *Town & Country*, January 1999, p. 93.
7 R. Cembalest, "Letter from Melilla," *Forward*, March 21, 1997, p. 1, 11.
8 R. Cembalest, "Spain's African Enclave," *The New Leader*, August 11-25, 1997, p. 9
9 R. Cembalest, "Angels with Dirty Faces," *ARTnews*, vol. 90, no. 6, Summer 1991, pp. 75-77.
10 R. Cembalest, "Zumaya and Pedraza: 'The Real Spain,'" *ARTnews*, vol. 95, no. 8, September 1996, pp. 95-97.

story, five paragraphs long, shared a page – and a headline – with a two-paragraph story on another Spaniard in the news, whose museum was opening in Barcelona. "Matadorable bullfighter Rafael Camino and abstract painter Antoni Tàpies are artful maestros of spectacular illusion," the items were titled[11].

The huge outlay for the front-of-the-book section reflects a bygone day not only of American magazine publishing but American magazines' interest in Spanish art. By 2007, when El Bulli[12] was invited to Documenta – to the outrage of some in the Spanish art establishment – [13] it was too late. By then, if mainstream-magazine editors were talking about covering Spain's avant-garde, they most likely meant the chefs. It is not necessarily a bad thing for Spanish artists to have matured beyond the flavor-of-the-moment phase.

The rise and fall of interest in Spanish art is hardly new, of course. As I learned when I wrote my 1993 exposé on the Hispanic Society of America[14], Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923) and Ignacio Zuloaga, two of the early 20th century's top draws, are the most famous Spanish artists no one here ever heard of today. But the post-*movida*, pre-recession era of expansion in the Spanish art world was more than a series of media events – it was a cultural phenomenon, reflecting rapid transformations in attitudes toward democracy, fascism, capitalism, modernism, creativity, national and regional identity, and much more. While Spain had a long history of avant-garde art, its experience with supporting venues to preserve and promote that heritage was extremely limited. I watched as a spectacular parade of museums, galleries, alternative spaces, fairs, festivals, magazines, urban projects, and other enterprises burgeoned, evolved, and in too many cases fizzled, usually as victims of planning, circumstances, and politics.

My first trip to Spain was in June 1985. I went for three weeks by myself. Through a series of chance encounters, I ended up at a *Peor Imposible*[15] concert during the Feria de Córdoba, and then at the Izquierda Unida *caseta*[16], and then, after a few hours' drive, at the Corpus Christi procession in Priego de Córdoba, where I was pretty sure I was the first Jew to set foot in some time. The next year, after I quit my job and moved to Madrid, more chance encounters brought me back to my old friends in Priego, where I spent all my vacations and, being the only American around, managed to get my high-school Spanish to the next level.

While I was trying to get my journalism career underway, I supplemented my income doing odd jobs for people from my old life. I worked for Brooke Alexander gallery and *Artforum* at ARCO, the nascent art fair that was gaining a reputation as an economical and festive alternative to its venerable counterparts in Cologne and Basel.

Art from the United States was starting to trickle into other venues, too. Dan Cameron's exhibition "El arte y su doble"[17] arrived in Barcelona and then Madrid in 1987, launching a wave of Spanish appropriation art

11 R. Cembalest and M. Etherington-Smith, "Matadorable bullfighter Rafael Camino and abstract painter Antoni Tàpies are artful maestros of spectacular illusion," *Harper's Bazaar*, August 1990, p. 78.

12 Editor's note: El Bulli was a restuarant operating in Cala Montjoi, Roses, Girona, between 1994 and 2011, in which chef Ferrán Adriá (b. 1962) launched and developped his internationally recognised "experimental cuisine."

13 G. Keeley, "Is food art? El Bulli chef creates a stir," *The Independent*, May 16, 2007.

14 R. Cembalest, "Change the Board and Get Rid of the Director," *ARTnews*, vol. 92, no. 7, September 1993, pp. 152-159.

15 Editor's note: *Peor Imposible* was the name of a musical group whose members included Sara Ledoux, Rossy de Palma, Angelines Ureña 'Beti', Lina Mira ('Lina Estrany'), Fernando Fernandez ('La Estrella'), Sulpicio Molina ('Sulpi'), Toni Socies, Baltasar Munar ('Balti'), Fernando Korbal and José Virtudes ('José Goma').

16 Editor's note: Izquierda Unida is a political coalition organized in 1986 in opposition to Spain joining NATO. It was dominated by the former Communist Party of Spain (PCE), and also included leftists, greens, socialists and left-wing republicans.
The so-called *casetas* are private owned establishments in Andalusian festivals (or *Ferias*).

3.
Guillermo Paneque on *ARTnews* November 1990 cover. Copyright © 1990 ARTnews, LLC, November

as the local audience got its first look at Barbara Kruger (b. 1946), Jenny Holzer (b. 1950), Jeff Koons (b. 1955), Sherrie Levine (b. 1947), and a host of other cutting-edge postmodernists. In Valencia, Vicente Todolí, one of two (uncharacteristically, I later learned) taciturn Spaniards I met in Irving Sandler's postwar-art seminar at Yale, showed the comic-inflected paintings of Richard Bosman (b. 1944) at Sala Parpalló. I was hired to be the artist's translator. Bosman's dealer Brooke Alexander was there, and so was Pepe Cobo, who was showing a group of rising Andalusian artists in his "Máquina Española" gallery.

Todolí was soon to become the founding chief curator and then artistic director of IVAM (Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno), and Alexander and Cobo went on, with the late gallerist John Weber, to found Weber, Alexander, and Cobo. The gallery's opening in 1991 in its elegant white-box space in the shadow of the Reina Sofía signaled, as much as anything did, that the Spanish art world had arrived on the international scene, and the international scene had arrived in Spain. In a small way, I helped sate the Spanish appetite for information on what was going on outside. For *Arena*[18], I interviewed Charles Wright, director of the Dia Art Foundation[19], and Brian Wallis[20], founder of the alternative magazine *Wedge* (and currently chief curator at the International Center of Photography). For *El País* I wrote about a concept being developed for Mass MOCA, the world's largest art museum, by an up-and-coming director, Thomas Krens[21] – and about a controversial sculpture by Richard Serra (b. 1939) coming down in New York[22]. And for *RS*, the Reina Sofía's magazine, just a few years after the museum was born, I wrote about the culture wars raging around the work of artists like Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) and Andrés Serrano (b. 1950) in the United States.[23] (Later, in 2002, I became part of the story myself, when *ABC* interviewed me about the 100th anniversary of *ARTnews*)[24].

In overviews for *ARTnews*, I wrote about Spain's exploding scene: on the opening of CAAM (Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno) in the Canary Islands and MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona) in Barcelona, the political provocations of Francesc Torres (b. 1948)[25] at the ever-expanding Reina Sofía, the conceptual sculpture of "young Basques" Txomin Badiola (b. 1957) and Pello Irazu (b. 1963), the rise of Juan

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17 Editor's note: "El Arte y su doble : una perspectiva de Nueva York," was an exhibition curated by Dan Cameron and held from February 6 to March 22 at the Sala de Exposiciones de la Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid.

18 Editor's note: *Arena. Internacional de Arte/ International Art* was an art magazine edited by Borja Casani and directed by José Luis Brea, Mar Villaespesa and Kevin Power.

19 R. Cembalest, "Dia Art Foundation," *Arena* no. 4, October 1989, pp. 22-27.

20 "Brian Wallis Discusses Exhibitionism, interview with Robin Cembalest," *Arena*, no. 3, June 1989, pp. 48-49.
Editor's note: Brian Wallis is the author of the essay "Recovering the Mexican Suitcase" in this volume.

21 R. Cembalest, "El mayor museo del mundo," *El País*, July 1, 1989, Artes, p. 1, 3.

22 R. Cembalest, "Quitan una escultura de Richard Serra en Nueva York tras años de polémica," *El País*, April 10, 1989, p. 42.

23 R. Cembalest, "Cuando vuelve la censura," RS (*Revista Trimestral del Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*), no. 4, Primavera/Verano 1990, pp. 45-50.

24 Alfonso Armada, "Robin Cembalest: No hay nadie que marque el canón estético dominante," *ABC Blanco y Negro Cultural*, December 21, 2002.

25 Editor's note: This volume includes a text co-authored by Francesc Torres and John G. Hanhardt entitled: "A Transatlantic Dialogue."

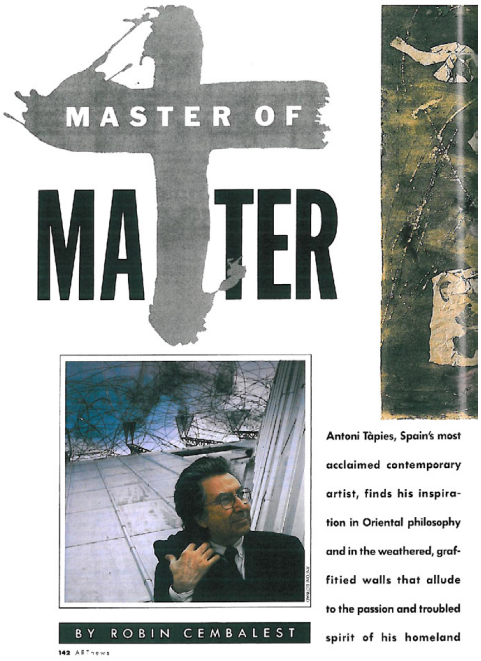
4.
Rogelio López Cuenca, *Décret nº 1* (public signage project), Sevilla 1992. Courtesy the artist.

Muñoz (1953-2001), Cristina Iglesias (b. 1956), Joan Fontcuberta (b. 1955), Juan Uslé (b. 1954), Victoria Civera (b. 1955), Susana Solano (b. 1946), Francisco Leiro (b. 1957), Jordi Colomer (b. 1962), Federico Guzmán (b. 1964), Pepe Espaliú (1955-1993), Rogelio López Cuenca (b. 1937), Rafael Agredano (b. 1955), and many others. In those days, a critical mass of them were living in downtown New York, along with Spanish dealers Marta Cervera and Fernando Alcolea, adding to the perception that Spain was the nation of the moment. In November 1990, *ARTnews* put Sevillian artist Guillermo Paneque (b. 1963), then 27 years old, on its cover. [Fig. 3]

The rapid growth in Spain's art world, impelled by the country's rush to integrate itself into the European community, was accelerated by imminent quincentennials of the first voyage of Columbus and the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims, anniversaries that demanded an elusive balance of chest-thumping, soul searching, and event planning. As Spain prepared for the Olympics in the North and Expo 92 in the South, the battle between Old Spain and New, local and global, traditional and cutting-edge, played out publicly in infinite ways as influences were rapidly absorbed, processed (or not), and regurgitated or transformed. This became the theme of many of my stories, from my coverage in *Stroll* of the controversy after modernist *farolas* were installed in Madrid's Puerta del Sol,[26] to my story in *The Village Voice* about how Rogelio López Cuenca's signs – with provocations like "Leave all hope spectactors. This is a spectacle" – disappeared from the World's Fair[27]. [Fig. 4]

26 R. Cembalest, "Bright Lights, Big Ciudad," *Stroll* no. 4/5, October 1987, pp. 40-41.
27 R. Cembalest, "It's a New World Order After All?," *The Village Voice*, vol. xxxvii, 1992, p. 93.

5.
Feria in Priego de Córdoba,
late '80s. Photo: Robin Cembalest



6.
R. Cembalest, "Master of Matter," *ARTnews*, vol. 89, no. 6, summer 1990. Copyright © 1990 ARTnews, LLC, Summer

In a *Village Voice* article on punk in Priego de Córdoba[28], [Fig. 5] I described the major identity crisis for the first generation to grow up under democracy – they didn't know what to rebel against. Adapting from the Sex Pistols, Basque independence movements, and contemporary Communism, the small-town teens selected freely from iconography ranging from swastikas to Stars of David to Charlie Chaplin. It was all the same to them, they told me, since their main goal was to shock. The story was titled "Tradition: A Curse," a sentiment that often seemed to apply to the country's visual artists as well. And when I profiled painter Antoni Tàpies (1923-2012) for *ARTnews*,[29] [Fig. 6] some friends gently chided me for writing about a "dinosaur." Not far away but in a far different context, the Duchess of Medina Sidonia, living in her family's ancestral home in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, was also rebelling against convention. After a career of going where no grandee had gone before – like protests and jail – the Duchess had become obsessed with her theory, developed in her family's archive, that the Americas were discovered long before Columbus. My profile of the duchess,[30] titled "Goodbye, Columbus?" was published in *Connoisseur* in 1991, shortly before her book *No Fuimos Nosotros*.

I had left *ARTnews* for the *Forward* in 1994, so when I went to Bilbao to preview the new Guggenheim museum, I finally got published in *Artforum*[31] [Fig. 7]. But after, as I returned to *ARTnews* as executive editor in 1998, the singular success of that museum – the so-called "Bilbao Effect" – became a recurring theme in my work, as I reported how cities in Spain

28 R. Cembalest, "Tradition – a Curse. Inventing Punk in a Small Spanish Town," *The Village Voice*, vol. xxxiii, 1988, pp. 22-23.
29 R. Cembalest, "Master of Matter," *ARTnews*, vol. 89, no. 6, summer 1990, pp. 142 – 147.
30 R. Cembalest, "Good-bye, Columbus," *Connoisseur*, December 1991, pp. 88-92, 128-132.
31 R. Cembalest, "First We Take Bilbao," *Artforum*, September 1997, p. 63-64.

7.
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1997. Photograph by David Heald © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

– and around the world – tried to replicate Thomas Krens's magic recipe for cultural tourism and image transformation.[32] However, even Krens himself was not able to recreate the potion, though he tried in venues ranging from Salzburg to Rio to Guadalajara, Mexico. Meanwhile, some of the Spanish cities that followed in Bilbao's wake, rushing to open museums in provincial capitals, now find themselves without the budgets, collections, or political will to sustain them.

Looking back at my work, one of the most influential stories in terms of my personal trajectory – though I didn't know it at the time – ran in *Art & Antiques*[33]. Motivated by my growing bird plate collection, I had pitched an item on shopping for ceramics in Talevera de la Reina. The story turned out to be harder to write than I thought. For one thing, the shopping was not so memorable; I did better in the Rastro[34]. And then I had to wrestle with the complex cultural DNA of this classic Spanish ceramic genre, which echoes not only Muslim, Delft, and Asian traditions, but, in particular, one of those fabulously hybrid forms that emerged in the colonial era: Portuguese imitations of Chinese porcelain. The only colonial art I knew was from my American-art classes at Yale and my internship at the American Folk Art Museum, so this was news to me.

Right after that story ran, newly installed as executive editor I began receiving invitations to speak about the magazine in the Latin world. A few years later, in Puebla, I got my Talavera bird plate after all.

Over the next years I visited Cuba, Argentina, Guatemala, Peru, Mexico, and Bolivia, where I spoke, moderated panels, reported stories, and looked at art. As it happened, this coincided with a shift in Iberian studies, as more scholars began considering the hybrid nature of Spanish identity – how it connects to the Jewish and Muslim past, and to the new society created after

32 R. Cembalest, "Everywhere Except Antarctica," *ARTnews*, vol. 90, no. 9, November 1991, pp. 39-40.
33 R. Cembalest, "Glaze of Glory," *Art & Antiques*, September 1998, pp. 104-106.
34 Editor's note: The Rastro is a famous flea market in Madrid. During the 1920s it was frequented by numerous members of the Madrid avant-garde.

news

Making the Local Global

To show how Cubism ruptured space, Madrid's Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía deploys an army of works by two great Spanish masters, Picasso and Gris, as well as their European contemporaries, such as Braque, Léger, and Jacques Lipchitz. To this familiar slate, museum director Manuel Borja-Villel has added a less familiar name: María Blanchard, a Spanish Cubist whose work has been given new prominence. There is now a non-Western sculpture, he has added 19th-century pieces from Equatorial Guinea, the Philippines, and the Côte d'Ivoire, borrowed from Madrid's National Museum of Anthropology. "What I'm trying to do is explain art history in a different way," he says.

Such juxtapositions—more common in an "artist selects" show at an encyclopedic museum than in the permanent collection of a museum devoted to modern and contemporary art—animate the complete installation of the Reina Sofía, which Borja-Villel began when he arrived at the museum a year and a half ago and which was inaugurated in late May.

"We're building a type of narrative that is mostly Spanish—that's what I have," the director says. "But it's not about Spanish art," he stresses.

"The 21st century is not a modernistic period. It's a global period, where local issues have lots of importance," he continues. "In that sense we're in a privileged position to tell a story in our collection. It's very local in a way, having Miró, Picasso, Juan Gris. But at the same time, it could be structured in a way that could be very global, that could involve the narration of not just one story but a multiplicity of stories."

These stories are less about the formal march of modernism than they are about themes, like "the reordering of the modern gaze" and "dystopia," to name a couple. To make his case, Borja-Villel has integrated 298 photographs—fine art as well as documentary—and 50 film and video works, along with paintings, sculptures, and installations, rescuing 400 previously unseen objects from storage and showcasing 137 new acquisitions. "Photojournalism is like one of those shows that emerge and disappear," he says. "We have Lewis Hine at the beginning, later on Helen Levitt, later Cristóbal Ross and surrealist photography."

Reviewers praised the inventive juxtapositions Borja-Villel staged at both of the museum's main buildings: the converted 19th-century hospital that opened first as a temporary-exhibition space, in 1986, and the four-year-old Jean Nouvel addition (the museum also controls two exhibition spaces in the

Manuel Borja-Villel's rehang of the Reina Sofía highlights its holdings of Spanish modernist icons—along with the unknown, the unexpected, and the international

BY ROBIN CEMBALEST

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8.
R. Cembalest, "Making the Global Local," *ARTnews*, vol. 108, no. 7, summer 2009, pp. 56-59. Copyright © 2009 *ARTnews*, LLC, Summer

1492 by the unprecedented meeting of cultures from the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia. In academia, the notion of the early modern Atlantic, defined not by national boundaries but by trade routes, took hold. In museums, curators struggled to redefine the notion of what "Spanish art" even means. Call it multiculturalism, globalism, revisionism, this trend helped inspire Vivian Mann's show "Uneasy Communion: Jews, Christians, and the Altarpieces of Medieval Spain" at the Museum of Biblical Art, which I covered for *Tablet*[35]. And it was an underlying theme of "The Colonial Revolution," my 2010 *ARTnews* feature on the rising interest in the United States in Latin American colonial art.[36] In the story, I reported how work that was considered artistically minor and politically incorrect has emerged on the cutting edge of art history, as intellectual trends coincide with demographic realities. Right after the article was published, the Prado staged its first major show featuring Latin American colonial painting, curated by venerable Velázquez expert Jonathan Brown.

When I arrived in Spain for the first time, the landscape for contemporary art was minimal – there were no major contemporary-art museums, few galleries, no festivals like PhotoEspaña, no alternative spaces like Casa Encendida, no international exhibitions like Manifesta. Some of my recent stories reflect the ways the scene has matured. One was a profile of Helga de Alvear, the German-born gallerist who has carved out a niche (in the former Weber, Alexander, and Cobo space) with an international group of artists.[37] Another was on Manuel Borja[38], the other Spaniard in Irving Sandler's seminar at Yale back in 1982. After a stint in New York at the Hispanic Society, Borja ran the Tàpies Foundation and then MACBA before becoming the first Reina Sofía director chosen outside a political process [Fig. 8]. His appointment shows that Spain has come a long way – maybe. Since his arrival at the museum in 2007, he has spent an inordinate amount of time negotiating full autonomy from antiquated bureaucratic and political controls. In other institutions as well, the issue of autonomy remains a problem. Recent confrontations at the Picasso Museum in Málaga and the Thyssen in Madrid show that there is still a sense that the power of the founding families trumps the freedom of expression of the professional staff hired to safeguard and promote their legacy. And in fall 2011, the regional government of Asturias ordered the six-month old, €44m Centro Niemeyer shut, alleging "serious irregularities" in its finances.[39]

35 R. Cembalest, "The Torah in the Altarpiece," *Tablet*, February 17, 2010.
36 R. Cembalest, The Colonial Revolution," *ARTnews*, vol.1 09, no. 4, April 2010, pp. 78-85.
37 R. Cembalest, "A Dealer with Ideas," *ARTnews*, vol. 109, no. 1, January 2010, pp. 52-54.
38 R. Cembalest, "Making the Global Local," *ARTnews*, vol. 108, no. 7, summer 2010, pp. 56-59.
39 Giles Tremlett, "Spain's €44m Niemeyer centre is shut in galleries glut," *The Guardian*, October 3, 2011, internet edition.

In a paradoxical way the sign of success of Spanish art on the international stage is that no one's talking about young Basques or Conceptual Catalans or Andalusian tricksters. For artists like Francesc Torres, Juan Uslé, Elena del Rivero (b. 1952), Jaume Plensa (b. 1955) [Fig. 9], Antonio Muntadas (b. 1942) [Fig. 10], and Miquel Barceló (b. 1957), to mention a few who have recently shown in New York, Spanishness is, of course, part of their identity – but it does not define them. True, most Spanish artists seeking success on the world stage have found it necessary to live outside Spain for a while (though today, New York does not have to be the destination; London or Mexico City will do just fine).

9.
Jaume Plensa, *Echo*, 2010-11, fiberglass with marble dust coating
Madison Square Park, NY, 2011
Presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy
© Jaume Plensa
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York
Photo: James Ewing, 2011

But this is good advice for everyone. Moving to Spain transformed and enriched my life in ways that I am still beginning to discover. As I realized anew when I read over a quarter-century worth of stories, for me reporting on Spanish culture has not only been a job but an inspiration, an intellectual stimulation, and a passion. That is why I wanted this essay to be subtitled "the first 25 years." I look forward to the next ones.

10.
Antonio Muntadas, *The Board Room*, 1987. *Muntadas / Bs. As.*
Espacio Fundación Telefónica, Buenos Aires (Argentina) 2007
Photographer: Oscar Balducci.
© Muntadas

Critical Years

Javier Montes

The evolution and development of Spanish media-related art criticism during the last thirty-five years has yet to be studied in depth. These are critical years indeed, when one realizes that they roughly comprise the longest period of democratic government and free press legislation in the history of Spain, all achieved after the death of Franco, the end of his dictatorial regime and the laboriously negotiated Transition towards the present parliamentary monarchy.

Javier Montes

Under the direction of José Camón Aznar (1898-1979)[1] the sixties witnessed the creation of the AECA: Asociación Española de Críticos de Arte. The organization had a timid beginning and remained fairly inactive during its first ten years, although its Catalan branch, presided over by Daniel Giralt-Miracle (b. 1944), showed more signs of dynamism. As we will see, the core of Spanish contemporary art criticism is not to be found in the languid – though hyper-productive – hand of an official, bureaucratic critical activity burdened by the mannerisms, political biases and patriotic trivialities of more than thirty years of art history under Franco. Such criticism helped to advance characteristic authors such as the catholic priest Alfonso Roig (1903-1987) or the last productive years of Eugenio D´Ors (1882-1954), considered the most relevant art critic and theorist of the time; in the forties he wrote strongly politically biased essays on Picasso which demonstrated the extremely low objective standards of critical activity during that period in post-war Spain[2]. If D´Ors, who showed such deep incomprehension of the work of the Spanish painter, was supposed to be the preeminent theorist of his time, it is not difficult to imagine how limited and provincial were the "minor" art critics of the period.

But the winds of change could be felt even in Spain towards the end of the sixties. The renewal and revitalization of the role played by civil societies in Western democracies (from May '68 to the strong feminist, queer, pacifist and radical movements, the decolonisation of Africa and the protests against the Vietnam War) had their share of influence over a tamed society and a sleepy intellectual class; criticism as mere stylish games based on an obsolete set of *haut goût* criteria, and addressing a small audience of *aficionados,* showed signs of decline. A new theoretical discourse, less for-

1 Editor's note: Camon Aznar was a university professor and art critic who, as a disciple of Miguel de Unamuno in Salamanca before the Civil War, was deprived of the chair in Theory of Literature and Arts which he had obtained in 1924. As the director of the Lázaro Galdiano Foundation, in 1954 he founded the art history magazine *Goya*.

2 Editor's note: Eugenio d'Ors' essay *Pablo Picasso* (Madrid:Aguilar) was first published in Spain in 1946. To some extent, it was a reelaboration of his previous text on Picasso published in French and English in 1930 (co-edition Croniques du Jour/John Zwemmer).

malistic and more focused on the socio-historical context of contemporary art production, began to be articulated. From a marxist perspective, this new criticism understood the work of art as one link in a communicative process in which the media plays a distinctive and influential role. At this time, scholars and critics such as Valeriano Bozal (b. 1940) pioneered an approach to contemporary artistic production that sought to break through the bland formalism that was still the default critical approach[3].

But even if we simplify the terms of debate to the point of talking about a conflict between a "social-realist" and a "formalistic" approach, we need to recognise other critical approaches in Spanish art theory of the time. Since the beginning of the seventies the consolidation inside the country of the different trends of what can roughly be called Spanish conceptualism helped to renew the terms of debate. As early as 1972 Simón Marchán Fiz (b. 1941) proposed, in his landmark essay *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto*[4], a first *insider* approach to these new artistic trends. Art criticism found new public forums in magazines such as *Serra D´Or, Destino* and *Batik*, strongly associated with conceptualism and its related strategies: arte povera, land art, earth art, minimalism, etc.

The participation of Antoni Muntadas (b. 1942) and other Catalan artists in the 1972 Kassel Documenta sparked interest in these new artistic practices. The public controversy between Antoni Tàpies (1923-2012), advocating an essentialist return to the purely plastic values of *true* painting,[5] and the collective Grup de Treball[6], closely associated with conceptual art, would be followed, in Madrid, by debates between those critics who championed a so-called "return to painting" and those who challenged artists considered to represent it. In 1976, immediately after the death of Franco, when the democratic Transition was about to begin, a new controversy arose when the Bienale de Venecia asked a group of leftist intellectuals to propose contents for its central pavilion[7]. Their intention was to give critical attention to a whole generation of artists who had worked for forty years in semi-tolerated clandestinity under Franco's dictatorship.

España. Vanguardia artística y realidad social: 1936-1976[8], the name of the exhibition, was itself a political statement, and the debates that ensued focused on the ideological assumptions of the proposal. The controversy around the selection made by the curatorial comission formed by critics and theoreticians Valeriano Bozal and Tomàs Llorens (b. 1936), artists such as Antonio Saura (1930-1998) and Antoni Tàpies, and the architect Oriol Bohigas (b. 1925), proved hygienic. The contents of the central pavilion were a welcome opportunity to open a long-delayed public debate over the rarefied artistic and intellectual atmosphere during the long years of Franco's dictatorship. Art historians and art critics were now encouraged to revise and reappraise the recent history of Spanish art from a new perspective.

3 Editor's note: Bozal's early publications analysed realism from a marxist point of view. See *El Realismo entre el desarrollo y el subdesarrollo* (Madrid: Ciencia Nueva, 1966) or *El realismo plástico en España 1900-1936* (Madrid: Ediciones Península, 1967).

4 Editor's note: *Del arte objetual al arte del concepto* (Madrid: Comunicación-Alberto Cozarón, 1972)

5 Editor's note: "Arte conceptual aquí" (Barcelona: *La Vanguardia Española*, March 14, 1973) was the first of a series of articles published by Antoni Tàpies outlining his position about Catalan conceptual art and about the pertinence of painting. The Grup de Treball response was the text "Documento respuesta a Tàpies" published in *Nueva Lente* 21 (november 1973).

6 Editor's note: Grup de Treball was active between 1973 and 1975. It included artists, film directors, writers, and art critics such as Francesc Abad, Jordi Benito, Jaume Carbó, Maria Costa, Alicia Fingerhut, Xavier Franquesa, Carles Hac Mor, Imma Julián, Antoni Mercader, Antoni Munné, Muntadas, Josep Parera, Santi Pau, Pere Portabella, Àngels Ribé, Manuel Rovira, Enric Sales, Carles Santos, Dorothée Selz y Francesc Torres.

7 Editor's note: this exhibition was not presented at the official Spanish Pavilion, but at the Central Pavilion of the Giardini.

8 Editor's note: A eponymous book was published by members of the Comisión, with contributions by additional authors (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1976).

In a celebrated article titled "Arte y política,"[9] Valeriano Bozal explained the selection criteria of the comission and insisted upon the necessity of an art *engaged* with the political reality of Spain during the previous forty years. Three years after the show, the debate was still going on. The critic Juan Manuel Bonet (b. 1953) published an article in *Pueblo* that refuted Bozal´s ideas:

> The political dimensions should be reconsidered. When we say "politics" we can't but remember the Venice Biennale of 1976, for which Valeriano Bozal and his friends stressed the significance of an exhibiton of Estampa Popular[10] in Cullera [a small provincial town in Eastern Spain], while barely acknowledging the work of José Guerrero [1914-1991]…[11]

Those debates were followed in the pages of a new magazine, *Batik,* launched in 1973 by Daniel Giralt-Miracle (b. 1944), where the controversy reached an unusual degree of vehemence. In October 1979 the Juana Mordó Gallery in Madrid opened "1980," a show of "new painting" curated by three young critics and theoreticians: Ángel González (b. 1948), Juan Manuel Bonet and Quico Rivas (1953-2008). One year later, in the fall of 1980, the Museo Municipal de Madrid hosted a similar show, entitled "Madrid DF." Both exibitions were devoted to the work of a new generation of young post-Franco artists based mainly in Madrid. In their accompanying texts for both catalogs these critics advanced a new political and formal agenda for the new decade. In the aforementioned article published in *Pueblo*, "*After the battle,*" Juan Manuel Bonet in turn attacked the strongly politicized conceptual art of the seventies which, according to him, was:

> All but painting (…) Years of Lent and constipation (…) Among all that Bozal and all that Rubert[12], all that Tomás Lloréns and all those translations of Umberto Eco (…), all that medium and message; they almost managed to make us forget the truth of painting, the necessity and the passion and the pleasure of painting.

Bonet refused to take refuge in a "private eclecticism" and offered a new artistic ethos for the decade that focused entirely on painting, thereby excluding many of the truly fruitful artistic developments in Spain during the eighties:

> As for me, I feel increasingly oppressed by obscure stories, literary painting and the return of sorcerers. Instead, I am increasingly fond of clear rooms and of pure light (…) I am obsessed with Sorolla and Caneja, with a certain pictorial Generation of 1927, Guerrero, Iturrino and Carmen Laffón.[13]

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9 Valeriano Bozal: "Arte y política," in the monographic issue on the Venice Biennale published by the magazine *Comunicación XXI*, 31-32 (1976).

10 Editor's note: an open collective initiative based on leftist commitment and antifrancoism, Estampa Popular favored printing techniques and realism – although not exclusively – as means of democratizing art.

11 Juan Manuel Bonet: "Después de la batalla," *Pueblo* (Madrid), November 17, 1979.

12 Editor's note: Catalan philosopher and university professor Xavier Rubert de Ventós (b. 1939)

13 Juan Manuel Bonet, "Después de la batalla," *op. cit.*

As vehement as Bonet was, Ángel González also viewed painting as the only interesting artistic expression for the new decade:

> To brood over painting, even in order not to paint, but to allow others to paint (…) The omnipresence of painting in the modern context does not come from a whim or an effort of voluntarism, but from the most lucid and strict planification. One paints after the extinction of all its preliminaries; one paints because of an irresistible attraction towards painting that confirms the memory of its own learning[14].

All this could be read in "History is painted like this (in Madrid)," the manifesto included in the catalog of the exhibition *Madrid DF*. In the same text, González attacked – barely *à clef* – the role of Tomás Llorens: "A certain art critic from València, follower of semiotics and of some made-up social realism, speaks now of *neo-avantgardes…"* One year before, Llorens had published in *Batik* an unfavourable review of the "1980" exhibition. It was, according to Llorens, inspired by the need to "celebrate their own achievement of stardom in the near future (…) In the gallery of Juana Mordó confusion is the first cousin of misery and misery is the sister of insecurity (…) They don the robe of *arbiter elegantiarum* (…) but that doesn´t hide their nature as civil servants of the new arriviste Right."[15]

There were other voices that criticized the proposals of "1980" and "Madrid DF." In a very interesting special issue of *Batik*, "Arte-España 1980," indispensable for understanding the art context of the period, the critic and curator Victòria Combalía (b. 1952) accused the young critics from Madrid of "poetic pretensions and preciousness."[16] Another preeminent critic of the time, Francisco Calvo Serraller (b. 1948), asked whether "the *parti pris* of the critic is not prevailing over the painting; that is, that instead of being at the service of painting, the critic puts painting to work for his prejudices."[17]

The reader might be surprised by the violence of these *vendettas* among critics and theoreticians. But it should be remembered that thirty years ago Spain was just beginning to get used to intellectual public controversies, far from the semi-clandestine criticism under late Francoism. On the other hand, we have seen how Tomàs Llorens himself explained how theoretical debates were at times an excuse for hidden fights for the control of newly created artistic institutions in a democratic Spain. The death of Franco and the beginning of the so-called Transition towards democracy meant that new structures of creation and the criticism of contemporary art in Spain had to be developed. New public and private institutions sought to come to terms with contemporary art in an international context. Art criticism began to assume new responsibilities and power positions inside the art world; not only did the critic inform about the process

14 Angel González: "Así se pinta la historia (en Madrid)," exh, cat., *1980* (Madrid: Museo Municipal, 1980).
15 Tomàs Llorens: "1980. El espejo de Petronio," *Batik* 52 (November 1979).
16 Victòria Combalía: "Arte España 1980." *Batik* 50 (June 1979).
17 Francisco Calvo Serraller, "¡Que vienen los federales!." *El País, Artes*, Madrid, 25 octubre 1980.

of modernization, but he or she actively participated in it. Art critics were now actively involved in the processes of production, selection and publicizing new developments. Some associated themselves with the art market, advising private collectors in their purchases. In this respect, the risks were evident; critics began to promote trends, artists and works that were implicated in private investments. The growing interest in contemporary Spanish art was directly related to its market appeal, as corporate and private collectors saw new opportunities for profit in a previously neglected cultural field.

Public institutions represented another strong effort to update the Spanish art scene and to catch up with a broader international context. The Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, dedicated to modern and contemporary art, opened in Madrid in 1986. Tomàs Llorens directed it from 1988[18], and in 1990 it reopened after an important remodelling of spaces and contents. Years later Juan Manuel Bonet would direct the museum as well. IVAM, the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, opened in València in 1989, and soon became an important Spanish institution under the direction of Vicente Todolí (b. 1958)[19]. In Barcelona, however, the opening of the Museu d´Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) was delayed until 1995. Until the completion of its new premises, designed by German architect Richard Meier (b. 1934), it was directed by Daniel Giralt-Miracle. It is therefore easy to see how art criticism and institutional projects were closely related during this period.

On the commercial side, the first edition of ARCO, the Feria Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo, opened in Madrid in 1982. From the start it was a mixed event. Unlike other art fairs at the time, ARCO was heavily subsidized with public money. The media and general audiences viewed it as a huge collective exhibition, almost an annual biennial, which allowed visitors to "catch up" with contemporary art thanks to a yearly stroll through its premises. In subsequent years ARCO captured the interest and attention of the Spanish mass media, which in previous years had appeared to sustain a more articulate approach towards Spanish contemporary art.

In the eighties a whole new generation of critics, less concerned with the controversies of the first democratic years of the Transition, established new fields of debate and new publications to articulate them. That publishing boom proved to be ephemeral and would hardly survive into the next decade. Among new specialised journals one should mention *Lápiz*, founded in 1982. *Guadalimar*, founded in 1975 by Miguel Fernández-Braso, offered a common ground for both old-school critics and younger theoreticians. *Trama*, founded by a group of artists that included Juan Manuel Broto (b. 1949), Xavier Grau (b. 1951), Javier Rubio (b. 1952) and Gonzalo Tena (b. 1950)[20], was established in 1977 after the French model of *Tel Quel,* and demonstrated a strong interest in new painting trends.

18 Editor's note: Tomàs Llorens was appointed as director of the institution in June 1988, when its name changed from Centro de Arte Reina Sofía to Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

19 Editor's note: Tomàs Llorens was the founding director of IVAM in 1986. Juan Manuel Bonet directed the same institution between 1999 and 2005.

20 Editor's note: *Trama* was also the name of the group of abstract painters behind the magazine. The group was active between 1973 and 1978 and included the painters Broto, Grau, Rubio and Tena, whose work was defended by Tàpies in the aforementioned article in *La Vanguardia* (1973). Tàpies also supported the launching of the magazine.

As for the daily national press, one should note the role played by *El País*, the newspaper that embodied the changes in the free Spanish press after Franco. In 1980 it launched a weekly section devoted exclusively to the art scene: *El País Artes*. In its pages readers found the voices of renowned critics such as Calvo Serraller and Ángel González, together with the new points of view of a whole generation of younger critics and scholars, including Anna María Guasch (b. 1953), Juan Vicente Aliaga (b. 1959), Estrella de Diego (b. 1958), Fernando Castro Flórez (b. 1964), Mar Villaespesa, Francisco Jarauta (b. 1941) and the recently deceased José Luis Brea (1957-2010).

These new voices would become stronger and articulate their views more fully during the nineties – a more ambiguous and less easily readable decade. It is true that the openly confrontational critical scene of the eighties now acquired nuances and sophistication. The instruments of open and free intellectual debate were employed with greater familiarity. But this can also be read as the result of the progressive de-ideologization and *taming* of the Spanish contemporary art scene, now fully assimilated as a branch of a worldwide cultural industry. With a certain delay – owing to rarefied political and socio-historical conditions – the Spanish art world entered the international market for cultural commodities. Public and private institutions devoted to collecting and displaying contemporary art blossomed all across the country thanks to the political decentralization of the *Estado de las Autonomías*. The role of mass media – and the role of an art criticism associated with it – changed as well in relation to new cultural artifacts.

Today, Spanish national newspapers (*ABC, El Mundo, La Vanguardia* and *El País*) publish their own weekly cultural supplements that are quite substantial when compared with other examples in the contemporary European press. The mass media tends to play a "lubricating" role in artistic production in order to facilitate its consumption by a wider audience. In Spain as well as in the rest of Europe – the United Kingdom would be a case study – the attention of the media towards contemporary art has grown exponentially, while its ability to interpret it in any deep or significant way has diminished considerably.

All these factors have led to the disappearance of the many magazines and specialized journals that flourished in the previous two decades. New publications such as *Exit* hardly compensate for this loss of bibliodiversity. Notable, however, is the development of on-line alternative critical projects, such as *Salon Kritik*, founded by José Luis Brea, who also supported pioneering Spanish websites such as *Arts.zin*, devoted to "online criticism of new art practices." Brea was also behind the rhizomatic online project *Aleph,* which focused on artistic creation specifically designed for digital environments, and the on-line magazine *Acción paralela*.

The role of the critic in national newspapers (serious art criticism is virtually nonexistent on Spanish TV channels or radios) has been modi-

fied and mollified. Controversies, debates and simple divergences of opinion are scarce, and the role of art criticism has become increasingly informational. Thus enters the critic as *chico para todo,* in charge of sanctioning the most diverse artistic manifestations with the tenuous patina of high culture. But so, too, arrives the acritical critc, who works with official institutions in an effort to promote their achievements. It remains to be seen what new approaches Spanish art criticism will take in the present decade.

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DESIGN AND LAYOUT

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ISBN: 978-84-15245-36-0

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