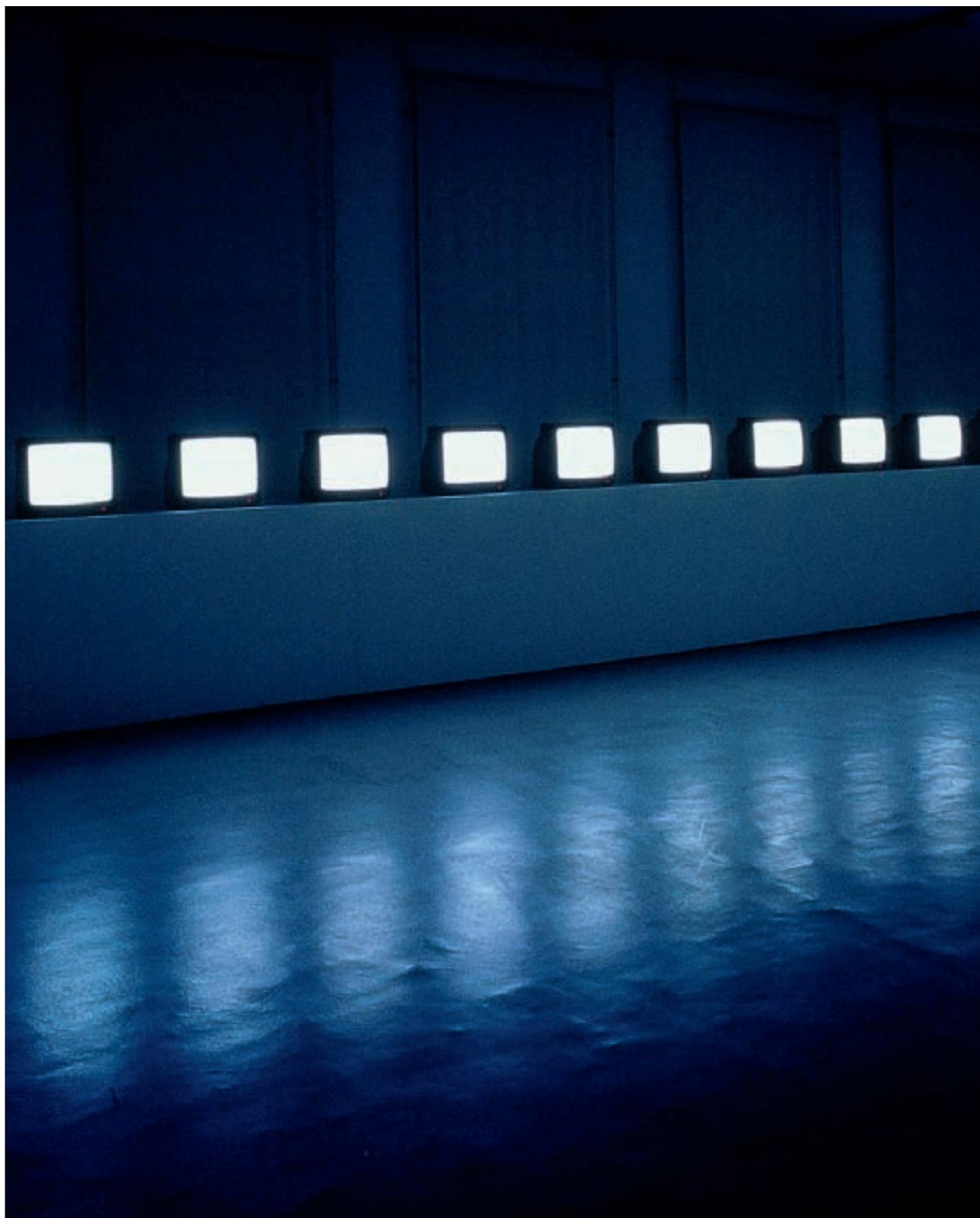


Time as Matter
MACBA Collection
New Acquisitions

Exhibition Guide



“A museum can either be a museum or it can be modern, but it cannot be both,” declared Gertrude Stein in the early twentieth century. The invention of modernity has its origins in the distant past but its aesthetic sensibility has emerged more recently. It is legitimate to ask whether we are still modern in the context of our culture and the values we attribute to artistic practices. There are many reasons that make us think we still are, especially if we identify an essential branch of modernity with the avant-garde impulse to break with inherited traditions. The validity or continuity of traditions and the ruptures they have experienced allow us to survey present-day genealogies with a critical eye. They also allow us to appreciate the renovation of paradigms of behaviour in art and their influence on changes in the functioning of institutions, including museums. From the second half of the twentieth century until today, much of the art of the “second” avant-gardes – or post-war avant-gardes – has questioned the classical model of the museum in order to invent another one, one that is not encyclopaedic and does not serve any government: a museum that invents relationships between individuals, objects and values, a museum that constantly changes the images of the present to provide other images of the future.

Today, when the first decade of the twenty-first century is drawing to a close, we can ask ourselves whether it is possible to be contemporary and be a museum at the same time. If we have to choose, the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) wants to be contemporary before being a museum: it wants to stay within the flux of things that affect us and shape us. We do not know what the museum of the twenty-first century will be, or how it will crystallize, and it is highly probable that this institution will not be called a museum. It will be defined by the behaviour of artists and the public.

Museums no longer hold exclusive rights to the presentation of art but they do have a primordial responsibility toward their receivers. A responsibility that is not restricted to the preservation of the material qualities of collections. Beyond that, a museum is responsible for the constant activation of meanings, for updating the intentions of artefacts known as works of art that were created with a particular intention. After exhibitions like *When Attitudes Become Form*,¹ we know that art becomes art in a process of institutionalization and reception. And that the history of contemporary art has also been written through its exhibitions.



Rita McBride
Arena, 1997 (detail)
MACBA Collection,
Museu d’Art Contemporani
de Barcelona Consortium.
Long Term Loan of the Artist.
Installation view, Taipei
Biennial, 2002

Over the course of these pages – which are an introduction to the possible itineraries followed by the recent acquisitions to the MACBA Collection – we shall discuss the condition of artworks as objects, things, artefacts and devices. It is probable that this “introduction” will be in your hands before you have the physical experience of encountering these works, and that its content, in contrast, will be received after that experience. That is the intention. Alongside the spirit of contributing to the understanding of what is exhibited, it seems important to us not to provide all the information beforehand or fill the spaces between the different works with textual explanations. As in a thriller, the ideas created by this experience will end up behaving like the characters in a novel, moving and interacting with each other. It is also a situation akin to the mechanics of archives, which exist to be activated by a user who reconfigures the order with every reading, with every use.

In the twentieth century, breaks with artistic traditions did not involve the substitution or destruction of existing models but, rather, superimpositions, recuperations and transformations that are added to the numerous layers to compose parallel stories. The concept of the archive allows us to think about the collections from the viewpoint of users, and not that of creators. So, the various orders contained within the collections are updated through presentations like this. There are no official stories endorsed by authority. Art is as well an instrument of use.

Representation – Transformation

One of the functions of a collection of contemporary art is to “sew” the fruits of artistic ruptures to the traditions to which they are genealogically related. Art is not created out of the history of art, but its various idioms are not alien to each other, nor are their meanings independent of each other. 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 favour of activities of transformation; the centre of gravity has shifted, from the author to the receiver, and individual subjectivity has been abandoned, to the benefit of research into a certain communicable objectivity. This research into objectivity identifies itself with the desire to transform and is derived from disenchantment with the world and the elements through which it manifests itself. Art in our time flees from nature as a source and takes its starting point from the very culture in which it wants to find a place, in the same artifice that produces it and nurtures it: the city as a stage and a showcase for the techniques of production and consumption.

We interpret art in relation to its history, but also in relation to our time, to the way things are now, and to those with whom we share our lives. Thus, history has to be rewritten all the time, as the accumulation and superimposition of new works and the passing of time are constantly changing the meaning of all the works in existence. T. S. Eliot wrote:

What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them (...) the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past (...) [The artist] must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same.²

Going back to the opening words of this text, what is today’s relationship with modernity? What is the dialogue between the contemporary and the modern? Giorgio Agamben recently declared that, in order to be contemporary, one also has to know how to be outside one’s time. Any awareness of the present leads us away from that very present. “Contemporaneity fits, in effect, into the present, marking it out above all as archaic, and only somebody who sees in the most modern and recent the indications and signs of the archaic can be contemporary.

Archaic means: pertaining to the *arkbé*, i.e. to the origin. The origin is not, however, situated only in a chronological past: it is contemporary with historical evolution and does not cease to act on it, like an embryo that continues acting on the tissues of the mature organism and the child in the psychic life of an adult.”³ Whether the modern project breaks with specific traditions or is absorbed by their roots is still open to debate. It can be said, for example, that the contemporary does nothing more than retie and re-sew some wispy threads of the modern in a time that is technologically much more advanced, economically unstable, politically defenceless and socially fragile. It can also be said that there is no single and unique modernity but various entrances and exits to moods, beliefs and values exemplified from difference.

Time as Matter denotes an invention that represents a radical change in the way that works of art relate to us, their receivers, and how we see them today relating to each other. We shall refer now to the change in perspective exemplified by two conditions of every work of art: in terms of their material status, works of art can be inert and maintain their material composition unaltered over the course of time, or they can order time for us because they are based on a particular time span. Time forms an essential component, just like any other material with which they are made. In 1973 the American art critic Lucy R. Lippard wrote one of the books providing an exceptional definition of the art produced in the last half century: *The Dematerialization of the Art Object*⁴ assembles the works of a generation of artists that sought to change the state of the things they had inherited. We still depend on these ground-breaking and relatively iconoclastic experiments for our understanding of the output of our contemporaries. The title of Lucy R. Lippard’s book, however, can only be taken as a metaphor, as there is no art without material. Art is a particular arrangement of material in the world, not just a manipulation of material that is more or less virtuous, more or less “appropriate”. The journey we take through the works in this collection that we are reinventing will yield numerous examples of the tensions between inertia and dynamism, and of how breaks form new traditions.

Up to a certain point, around the 1960s, art expressed itself in the form of inert objects. Objects, products, things that did not have to change their physical qualities over time and that demanded, even required, that the condition of time was managed 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 of this state of things was triggered by four general sources of intrusion into the quietude of art: music, theatre, dance, and cinema – all ephemeral arts, arts with a time span, arts that imposed a beginning and an end determined by their creator, but 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. The fact that a work of art contains the decision to start and finish puts us on the defensive, but at the same time it functions as a guide, as if it were taking us by the hand to share a slice of life with us. The tension between these two typologies will accompany us over the course of this long journey between the past and the future.

“All art comes from anger,” as the American artist Lawrence Weiner once stated. A fit of rage against the things that are presented to us. All art springs from the artist’s yearning to change the world, through the change effected on the receivers of an artwork, on each of the individuals confronted by it. Hence the educative nature of the museum: it helps the world to change. Sensitive experience produces ideas, as well as knowledge and pleasure, and knowledge changes both the object that is known and the subject that knows. Pleasure and emotion distinguish experience and make it unique and unrepeatable for each of us. Art unites material culture with that of ideas like no other human activity. The Collection, of which we now present a new selection, is unique and unrepeatable in its contents and layout.

History of the Collection

Following on from the purchases made by the Ajuntament de Barcelona and the Generalitat de Catalunya since their democratic reinstatement, the MACBA has relied since its opening in 1995 on the invaluable contribution of the MACBA Foundation (constituted in 1987) to continue expanding this public legacy. The last few years have proved decisive in endowing the Collection with personality and putting forward proposals and ideas for growth that we now want to bring to fruition. These ideas have been inspired by the programmes of temporary exhibitions that have been put on over the years. Some of these exhibitions have been a determining factor in what is now a genuine culture of art in our country. What was presented as a model has, in effect, become a tradition. Models are ideal entities with a limited time span; traditions are organic: they grow and reproduce, are grafted and transform, and it is more difficult to make them disappear.

The tradition that the MACBA Collection wants to nurture is strongly rooted in paradigms of representation and transformation of the world that are faithful to the intentions that have driven its artists. The MACBA is a museum of artists via works of art; we work with artists before we work with artworks. We do not transport objects from one place to another; instead, we are interested in the effect of art on people, over and above the material qualities of the objects. Art lives in our consciousness, not in the objects we assemble inside a building. This is a credo to which we shall always adhere.

The museum has traditionally been allotted the task of preserving the material properties of works of art. Its function is, above all, to provide access to codes of interpretation and reception for different publics, for the society that creates and maintains a museum and for all those people with whom this society wants to share a given moment. We therefore state that a museum is an institution of political translation, i.e. a place that stages tensions and conflicts, fears and yearnings of the different moments through which we are destined to live.

The French anthropologist Marc Augé said that the human condition brings with it as an individual, at every point in its existence, three great angsts or questions that are translated into universal tensions, “the tension between the collective and the individual, the tension between the interior and the exterior and the tension between the past and the present”.⁵ Art was invented to imagine the future, and for centuries it has been subject to monopolies of interpretation and appreciation. When it is put at the service of the construction of public awareness, an awareness that is shared by a community and exchanged, it enters into contact with another culture and demonstrates that that culture is alive. This is why objects created with an aesthetic intention have been separated from those created with an artistic intention: the art of our times does not depend on problems of aesthetics but on the behaviour of the receiver, which is what gives it its specificity.

Modern – Contemporary

What we call contemporary art has existed for little more than a century. Its precedents lie in the eruption of aesthetic modernity in the nineteenth century. The various waves that destroyed the concept and aims of the naturalistic pictorial tradition, the invention and development of photography and the popularization of cinema and radio combined with the first cataclysm in Western consciousness triggered by First World War to lay the foundations for a conception of art and artists, of their products and of the circles within which they move that has become fundamental to us in the early twenty-first century. We must not forget, however, that contemporary art has been profoundly institutionalized and its nature has diversified. Art – the arts – born as a series of practices peripheral to the dominant culture, has gone on to occupy a central position, to the point of becoming, in some cases, a genuine instrument of political, economic and social representation and justification.

In 1955 Barcelona played host to an exhibition drawn from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art in New York. This was spread between galleries in the Palau de la Virreina and the Museu d’Art Modern, in the Parc de la Ciutadella. Under the auspices of the Third Biennale of Ibero-American Art, the exhibition gathered together works classified

according to technique (painting, sculpture, printing), as well as featuring a section devoted to North-American architecture of the period. The show formed part of the diplomatic and cultural exchanges flowing between the United States and Franco's Spain, and it provided the latter with its introduction to abstract art.⁶ At a time when Franco's regime was first becoming more liberal, social control, police vigilance and censorship regulated a country struggling to forget the deprivations of the Civil War. The abandonment of the autarchy of the previous decades found powerful allies and this change of direction required symbolic correlations. Art would play a significant role in this scenario, and artists such as Oteiza, Chillida and Tàpies would see their work being acclaimed abroad and subsequently accepted by the authorities back home.

Rejection of Realism

Artists and critics had mixed reactions to this exhibition, but for the local public it offered one of the first opportunities to observe the aesthetic innovations of the period, albeit filtered through the MoMA and sanctioned by its authority. The presence of paintings by Kline, Rothko, Pollock, Morris Louis, etc., helped consolidate the pictorial Informalism that linked Catalonia with the abstract tendencies that would dominate the art world in the following decade and the (then emerging) art market until today. The exhibition was highly resonant and breathed new life into an old conflict that would continue to be played out until the end of the twentieth century: that of figurative art versus abstract art. The invention of abstraction, consciously understood as a rejection of reality and the claim of constituting a universal and timeless language, is one of the most complex equations in Western culture. In Catalonia, American Abstract Expressionism gave life to Informalism, which was then also identified with local (i.e. Spanish) signs of identity.

“Luis González Robles, the real executor of artistic policy via his post as official curator of exhibitions, identified the essential characteristics of Spanishness in the work of Tàpies: ‘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 colours and the muffled tones of the Spanish artistic tradition.’⁷ And he would say the same, more or less,



Exhibition *El arte moderno en los Estados Unidos*, Palau de la Virreina, 24 September – 24 October 1955

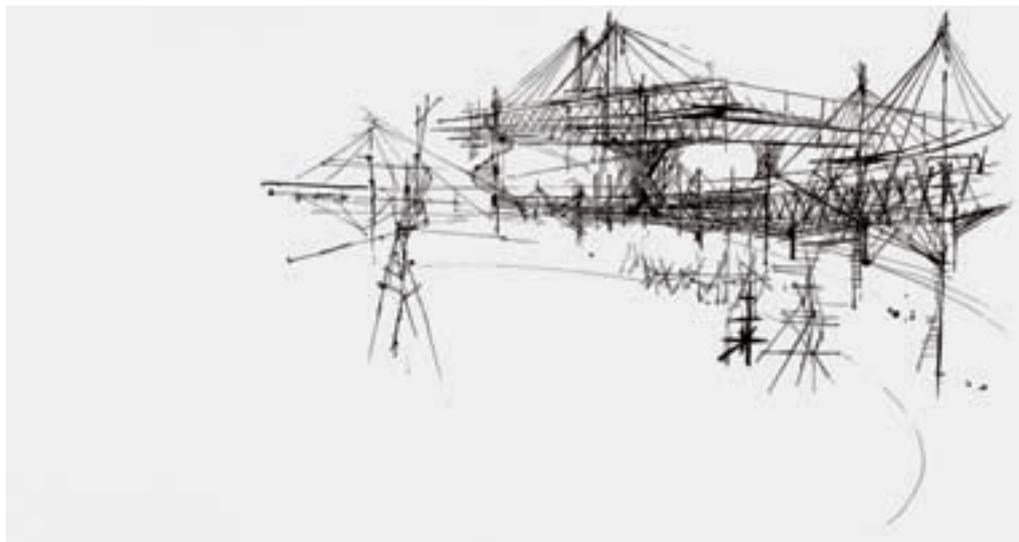
about Feito, Guinovart, Canogar and Amadeo Gabino: ‘despite their vivid modernity, they are linked to the same old artistic tradition.’⁸ Aguilera Cerni made the following comment about the Spanish participation in the 1958 Venice Biennale, in which Tàpies and Chillida won the prizes for painting and sculpture, respectively: ‘Spain has intervened 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.’⁹

It was at this time, around 1955, that the current presentation of the Collection began, albeit discreetly, aware of what could constitute an aesthetic shock in the artistic milieu of the time.¹⁰ Abstract art was not then considered highly by the political authorities, although they could not avoid recognising the relevance, as well as the “usefulness” in foreign policy, of artists like Tàpies, Cuixart, Millares, Saura, Chillida, Oteiza, etc., then acclaimed by many international critics. What at first seemed to be an “anomaly” would gradually become an official art, or at least an art officially received and promoted. Over a good twenty years Informalist painting would end up becoming a synonym for modernity, and its universe would contain contemporary art in its totality. Pictorial Informalism constitutes our contemporary classicism.

Other Contemporaneities

In 1956, a young Dutch painter, affiliated up until then with the CoBrA group, suddenly turned his back on the group’s principles of free and crude abstraction to start working on a major project that would occupy him for almost twenty years. Constant Nieuwenhuys began *New Babylon*, the ultimate global expression of utopian thinking. Although the Marshall Plan had assisted the reconstruction of a Europe devastated by the Second World War, Constant, along with members of the Letrist International and then the Situationist International spear-headed by Guy Debord, offered another revolution, this time against banality, consumerism, modern city planning and the lack of passion that the abundance of objects and information was instilling in European society. The term “Pop Art” would be coined only a few years later,¹¹ and it would share with the Situationist spirit of revolt – along with an exaggerated

Constant
New Babylon, 1963 (detail)
MACBA Collection.
Fundació Museu d’Art
Contemporani de Barcelona.
Fundación Repsol Collection



sense of acid humour – a rejection of the anaesthesia provoked in individuals by excess, conventionalisms and the reduction of ideas to the lowest common denominator.

While Oteiza and Chillida physically tackled the problems of form in relation to the behaviour of metals, Constant renewed the link with the Constructivist strategies of the first decades of the twentieth century and investigated new materials, such as plastic. His project, however, was ideological rather than formal: *New Babylon* is not a project for a new city along the lines of Le Corbusier starting with a clean slate free of traditional city planning. Constant did not design a new city but built models and drew up scenarios that served to help imagine what a different way of communal living could be like. *New Babylon* would have to be built by its inhabitants through play and the disinterested pursuit of pleasure. Play and pleasure replaced functional planning strategies: they are the antidotes to the social linearity imposed by modernism, whose risks had already been perceived.

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 would state, in an essential work on his production *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971), 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 was dissipated in the 1970s until it turned into a nightmare. Gordon Matta-Clark provided an extraordinarily lucid and bitter example of what the city had become in this decade in which modernity was more mechanical than ever. Although Matta-Clark's work depends on machines, he himself is a great performer, a great stage act situated in the heart of the urban setting. The artist's body comes on stage against the facts of architecture and the conventions associated with it. Matta-Clark removes the city's make-up and exposes its guts, with violence and also with surgical precision.

On the local scene, the 1970s also ushered in the contained version of a certain type of rationalism that had established itself on the surface of paintings, backed up by mathematics and calculation. Artists such as Pablo Palazuelo and, later on, Soledad Sevilla and Joaquim Chancho, rejected the principles of expressivity to go back to the line and the basic elements of geometry. A geometry that Gego, on the other side of the Atlantic, would make organic once again by using the line and the cross as the main features of a decorporalized sculpture.



Hans Haacke
Shapolsky et al.
Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, 1971 (detail)
MACBA Collection. Acquired jointly by the Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, with financing from the Director's Discretionary Fund and the Painting and Sculpture Committee

The spirit of *New Babylon* gave rise to two major trends, and their development has largely provided the framework for the subsequent works assembled in our Collection today. Moreover, on the basis of the ideology of play and disinterested achievement of pleasure that enlivens the spirit of *New Babylon*, we find the works of 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 the activity of today's museum is the transmission of knowledge, the essence of the school, linked to research, to the laboratory, to the creation of more knowledge. In 1968 the Norwegian artist Palle Nielsen created a participative 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 run by Pontus Hultén, and was 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 Collection has acquired all the documentary material relating to *Modellen* from Nielsen's own archives.) *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 psychedelia, the work is a microcosm of activities aimed at children, who are normally overlooked by society.

More recently, Peter Friedl made a photographic inventory of playgrounds from all the cities he had visited for the installation *Playgrounds* (1995-2004). The images are taken from the eye level of a child, as if he sought to capture the latter's viewpoint. There are no users, however: the playgrounds are deserted! In fact, this work refers to the tradition of documentary photography associated with conceptual art, which springs from the non-expressive use of the objectivity of the camera. It is also a criticism of a very specific urban typology, proper to a modern utopia, which is now nothing more than the leftovers of our cities' territory, stifled by safety regulations and the progressive deterioration of the public space. In short, it is a hypothesis for the organization of an archive, from the moment at which 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.

Palle Nielsen
Modellen: En modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle, 1968
(documentation from the artist archives)
MACBA Collection.
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium.
Gift of the artist

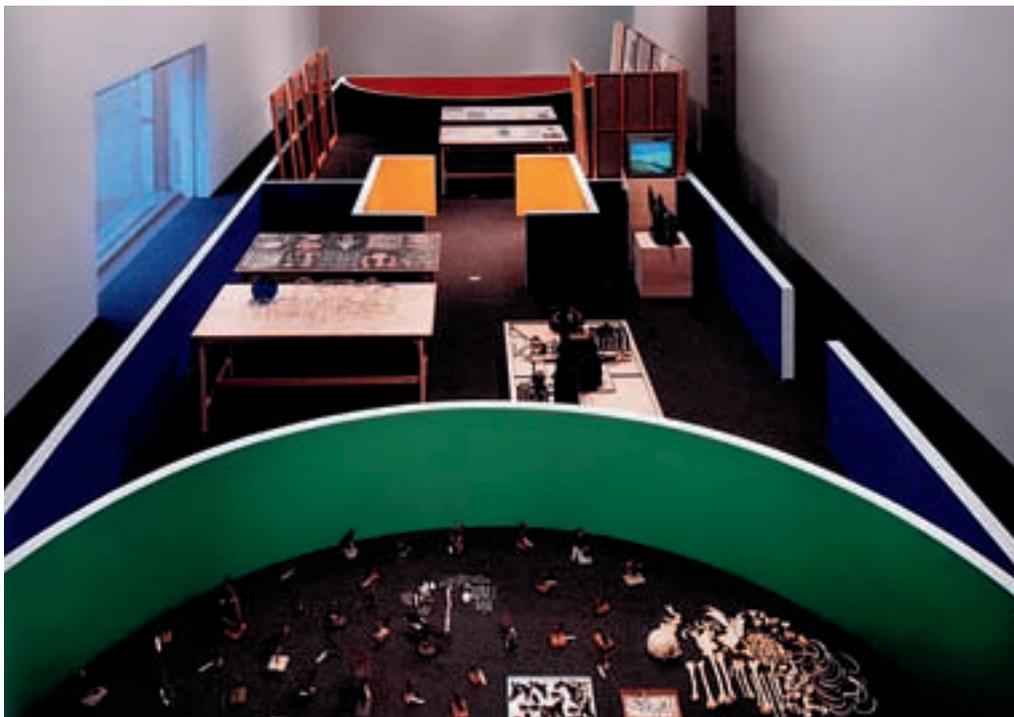


The logic of the archive also inspired the research undertaken by the architect and urbanist Nils Norman when he assembled and classified the remains of playgrounds that are disappearing around the world. This is a work of archaeology that represents the object under study at the moment in which it is turned into rubble and ceases to exercise its function. Constant sets up play as a model of coexistence and Nielsen proposes it as an educational model that escapes the control of authority, while Friedl proclaims its desertification and Norman its demise.

The definition of a playground generates the structure of Matt Mullican's *M.I.T. Project* (1990-2009). After his first experiments on virtual reality with the first macro-computers of the mid-1980s, designed to provide an image for his personal cosmology, in this work Mullican brought together two concerns that bring him closer – albeit via very different materials and aesthetic choices – to the work of Palle Nielsen. So, Mullican reconstructed on a playing field 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 both 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 exactly the role of his personal and inaccessible world, which is contrasted with the exhibition of a three-dimensional global map.

European Pop

Although they spring from different sources, the Pop Art produced in Europe and by *New Babylon* share a condemnation of the consumer society and the relevance of other pleasures rooted in everyday life. Richard Hamilton is one of the artists with the closest – albeit somewhat oblique – links with Catalonia. In 1963 he started to spend long summer holidays in Cadaqués, attracted by the figure of Marcel Duchamp who also spent his summers there. Hamilton is essential to any understanding of the evolution of the town's Galeria Cadaqués, a microscopic enclave of avant-garde art in the 1970s, where links were forged between the Catalan art of the 1970s and the avant-garde of the early twentieth century, via the presence



Matt Mullican
M.I.T. Project, 1990-2009
MACBA Collection,
Fundació Museu d'Art
Contemporani de Barcelona.
Installation view, MIT List
Visual Arts Center, Boston, 1990

of Marcel Duchamp (and Dalí) and John Cage. Lanfranco Bombelli, who sadly died in 2008, generously bequeathed us a selection of works, with pride of place going to those produced by Hamilton and Dieter Roth in 1976 for the exhibition *Collaborations of Ch Rotham*. This gallery instigated emblematic projects such as *Cadaqués Canal Local* (1974) by Muntadas and *Flauta i trampolí* (1981) by Miralda, as well as numerous exhibitions and events.¹²

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 and Miralda, who travelled to London in the early 1960s, met both Hamilton and Alloway and made contact with the art being created in Europe at that time. Rabascall is one of the great unknowns of the Catalan artistic scene, despite coming from Barcelona. Rabascall and Miralda coincided in Paris with other artists, such as Jaume Xifra, Benet Rossell and Dorothee Selz, whose work in the early 1970s – both individual and collective – was already attracting the attention of Alexandre Cirici, the veritable intellectual father of the avant-gardes of the second half of the twentieth century in Catalonia. The Pop Art produced in Europe differs fundamentally from its American counterpart in its attitude to the consumer society. Europe had recovered from its post-war hardships and a new generation was coming of age in conditions very different from those of their parents: cars, domestic electrical appliances, architecture, fashion and furniture formed an everyday environment that was very different in aesthetic terms. 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 the Americans. They did not celebrate the industrialization of the production of goods and objects, but denounced the impoverishment of the urban setting 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 techniques, representational strategies and ethical attitudes from the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, especially the Dadaism of Heartfield, Schwitters and Hausmann in Berlin, is clearly apparent. The principle of collage – which the critic Brian O'Doherty saw as the origin of the paradigm of anti-Expressionist perception – made a comeback. The information overload is transformed

Dieter Roth
and Richard Hamilton
*Three Sausage Bearing
Busts*, 1976
MACBA Collection.
Fundació Museu d'Art
Contemporani de Barcelona.
Long Term Loan of the
Bombelli Family Collection

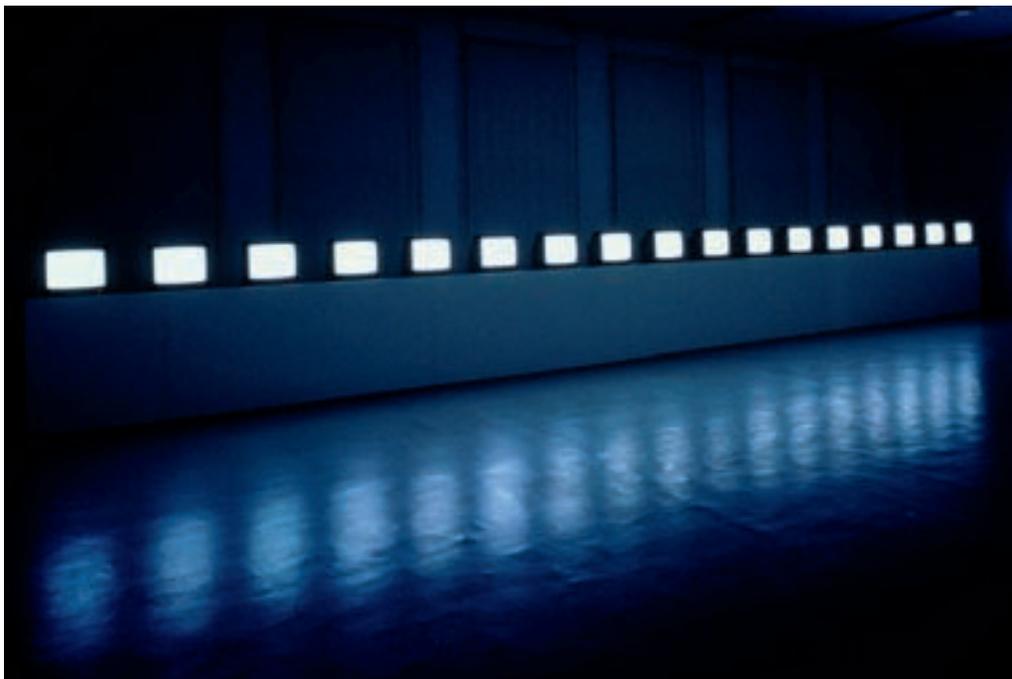


into a “thirst for images”. In 1975 Pere Noguera experimented with photocopying techniques to demonstrate how a product can become the simulacrum and shadow of itself.

Media Excess

The attacks by artists in the orbit of Pop against the manipulations that the (new) media impose on the constitution of public awareness gave rise to a new thematic line that took advantage of these very same media. The works of the Argentinian David Lamelas, along with collages by Joan Rabascall, confront us with an anti-spectacle of communication that makes evident the indigestion provoked in the sensory and cognitive systems. Indeed, *Situación de tiempo* (1967) by David Lamelas has lent its title to this show: the work puts us in front of a battery of television sets that are switched on but receive no signal and “look at us” while offering 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, participates in the trend to use information and the media as material. The political repression in Argentina in the 1970s led León Ferrari to exile in Brazil, where he produced the series of heliographs *Nosotros no sabíamos* (1976 [2008]), which reveals the feeling of anaesthesia that takes over a society living with terror. He used newspaper reports to denounce both the barbarity of the repression and the connivance and complicity of the morally upright social classes. Ferrari also gave vent to his anti-clericalism by criticising the hypocritical attitudes of the Catholic hierarchy in collages using manipulated images from the official press in the series *L'Osservatore Romano* (2001 [2008]).

Repression, censorship and manipulation of opinion are forms of violence associated with war: they are forms of conflict under a state of siege that has been the norm in many societies not so far removed from our own. In 2004 Francesc Abad took on the project of restoring the memory of those who had been shot in the Camp de la Bota – the arena for the repression unleashed on Barcelona after the Spanish Civil War. This is a collective work that brings those figures who have disappeared back to a present in which public memory has had to be legislated.



David Lamelas
Situación de tiempo, 1967
MACBA Collection,
Museu d'Art Contemporani
de Barcelona Consortium.
Installation view, Witte de With,
center for contemporary art,
Rotterdam, 1997

Ideologies – be they political, religious or ethnic – have undergone violent and bloody translations throughout history. In 1976 Francesc Torres made *Construction of the Matrix* in the context of the 37th edition of the Venice Biennale. This work threw light on the confluence of opposing ideologies (Marxism, Christianity) in their actions and consequences, which seem to have been consumed in our planet's basic element: the earth. It also explores the evolution of the human species through ideology and religion on to violence: the mirage of a new society can emerge from this matrix, as could be deduced from the politically uncertain situation in Spain at that time.

Stripping away the conditioning of the media is the aim of Sanja Iveković. The configuration of stereotypes from media images of women is also a concern of Eugènia Balcells and Eulàlia Grau, and Martha Rosler has similarly tackled this subject in her videos. Muntadas, for his part, investigated the exchange structures offered by television, which was becoming increasingly popular in Spain in the 1970s. Collectives such as the Grup de Treball, and later Video Nou, tried out new ways to produce and divulge information – which in the first case were developed under conditions of censorship, and which, in the second, could be interpreted as the embryo of the local television stations of the 1980s.

From Nature and Action to Language

In the early 1960s, the reappropriation of attitudes and systems of presentation from the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century took place alongside Abstract Expressionism, in contradiction to the validity of the values associated with artistic practice. A new generation of artists mainly inspired by John Cage and “happenings” sought to create art in a different way. Artists such as Robert Smithson shunned the urban setting to use landscape as a canvas, as a support for his work. “Happenings” and dance had shown that architectural space could serve as a presentational support and raw material for art, and that the viewer of an action was necessary for a work to exist. Smithson theorised the distance between site and non-site, in reference to the concretion of nature and the abstraction of the exhibition space – the gallery, the white cube. Smithson was also the person who defined the new nature of time for this generation of artists. In his seminal essay “Entropy and the New Monuments” (1966), Smithson wrote:

Francesc Torres
Construction of the Matrix,
1976
MACBA Collection.
Ajuntament de Barcelona
Fund. Installation view,
Museu d'Art Contemporani
de Barcelona, 2008



Instead of (the new monuments) causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future: Instead of being made of natural materials such as marble, granite, or other kind of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome, and electric light. They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries. Both past and future are placed into an objective present.¹³

The new monuments to which Smithson was referring were the minimalist works of artists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt and Dan Flavin, from whom Smithson diverged radically once he had rejected architectural space and the model of perception on which these artworks depended. Smithson was talking about another time constructed by the work, of another relationship with the linearity of history and the constant transformation of the energy that the universe needs to maintain itself.

Intervening in nature would make it possible, on the one hand, to escape the conventions of the exhibition space and the determining environment of the city, and, on the other, to experiment with unusual materials and dimensions. It would also make possible to integrate the degradation and possible disappearance through erosion (entropy) of such an intervention. Artists developed systems for reintegrating these interventions into the artistic circuit, but the result was that the status and nature of a work of art would never be the same. One of these transformations was the result of a contribution by Lawrence Weiner, who in 1968 made the declaration of intent that would mark his working practice from then on:

1. The artist may construct the piece
2. The piece may be fabricated
3. The piece need not be built

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.¹⁴



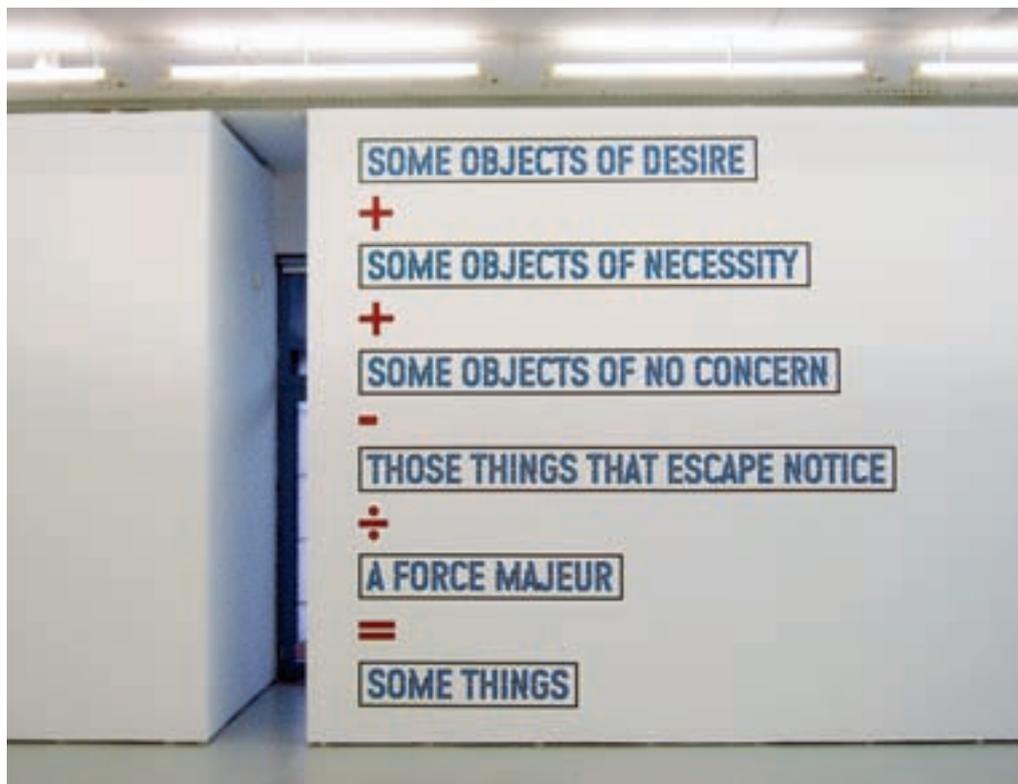
Robert Smithson
Spiral Jetty, 1970 (still)
MACBA Collection,
Museu d'Art Contemporani
de Barcelona Consortium

Back in 1960, as part of his quest for alternative materials and presentational structures, Weiner had exploded TNT charges in a park in California, thereby making sculptures by subtraction. The subtraction of parts of a given object is the negative image of the addition of material characteristics that forms the paradigm of artistic intervention. Artists soon realized that the linguistic formulation of an action could replace the action itself, but in this case it is the receiver who can execute it: the artist is no longer a work's centre of gravity, as the latter is incumbent on the person deciding the execution of the action.

Nature – the collision between nature and culture – has, since the late 1960s, also been the main concern of Lothar Baumgarten. The son of an anthropologist, Baumgarten lived in the Amazonian jungle of Venezuela after having imagined it from scientific literature. His work constitutes an attempt to convey culture and history. In his photographs from the series *Montaigne [La Gran Sabana]. Venezuela* (1977–1985), Baumgarten provided a critique of the medium's claim to realism by inserting colours and words in the photos' margins to indicate everything that photography never manages to convey (tastes, smells, temperatures). *Imago Mundi*, the installation created on the façade of the MACBA in 2008, offered a similar counterpoint to the universality of photography claimed ever since its invention. The mural work *Salto (Pipa Cornuta)* (1977) presented the image of a waterfall made up of the names of local rivers in their original language: toponyms are enclaves where languages that are no longer spoken, or are in the process of extinction, still survive.

Weiner's use of language in his work has nothing to do with poetry. As he said, his work can be translated, poetic experience cannot. Nevertheless, over the course of the 1970s poetic experience consolidated itself as the central element in the work of artists from different cultural contexts. Marcel Broodthaers was the artist who most explicitly acknowledged the influence of Stéphane Mallarmé – the inventor of a specific arena of modernity in which Broodthaers the poet could establish himself as an artist. On the basis of a new type of poetic experience, the Belgian artist launched what we now call artistic practices of institutional critique by turning his attention in the early 1970s to the transformation of the classical educational concept of the museum. Nancy Spero also uses the written word – in this case, that of Antonin Artaud – in the drawing's pictorial space, where writing and dance

Lawrence Weiner
Some Objects of Desire, 2004
 MACBA Collection.
 Fundació Museu d'Art
 Contemporani de Barcelona.
 Installation view, Cristina Guerra
 Contemporary Art, Lisbon, 2004



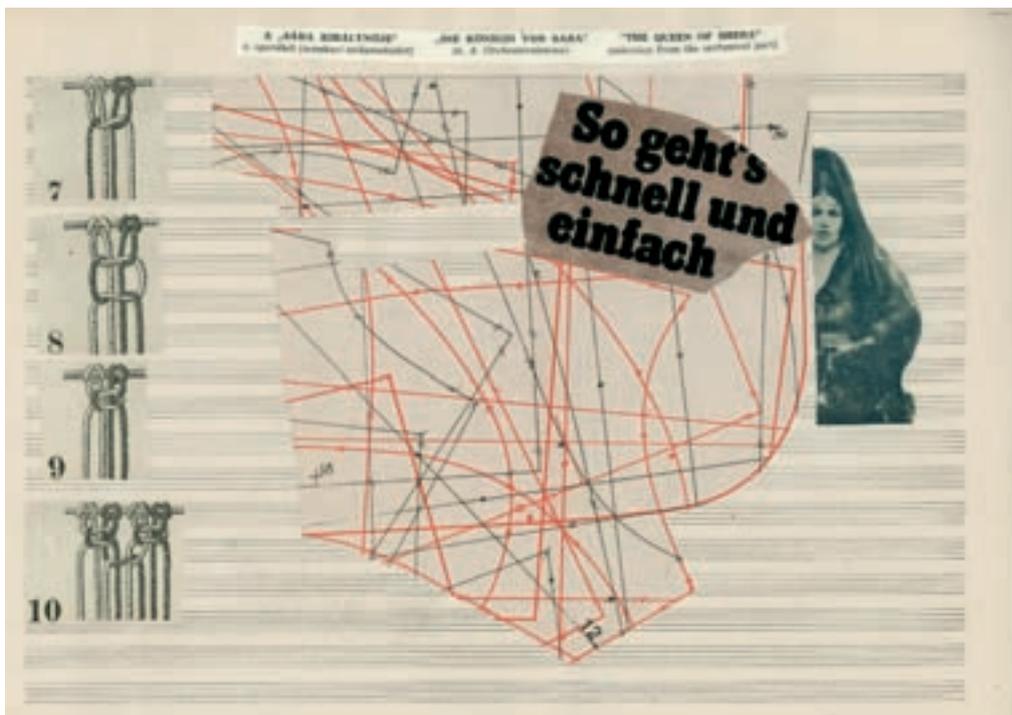
mingle in an overtly feminist approach. Words and musical notation appear once again in the collages of Katalin Ladik, placing her in the Dadaist tradition of the sound poem or visual poetry, which evolved as subculture within the visual arts throughout the twentieth century.

Theatre and Cinema

Two of the artistic categories that serve as references for the arts with a fixed time span – as discussed above – appear to be mutually contradictory. Theatre – an archaic, handmade form that some people consider dead – and cinema – a twentieth-century art form for many, but also an extremely powerful industry that has created new standards of narration – did, however, cohabit briefly in the early twentieth century. There was a short-lived period of cinema that was filmed theatre. While television was inspired by the narrative and distribution models of radio, cinema was born from theatre, before very quickly engulfing its vitality as a tool for the comprehension of the present. The French philosopher Alain Badiou explains this as follows:

- Theatre has at its disposal an experimental, precarious and public machination which:
- presents the eternal in an instant
 - singularises the relationship with this presentation (as the spectacle is always unique, precarious, abolished)
 - amplifies its own occurrence in a collective universal direction by right (as the empirical limit of the public is indifferent, the public represents humanity as such).¹⁵

Television is mediation against the immediacy of theatre. It represents repetition against the unrepeatability of live action. Television would invent another type of time that configures, from a standpoint of spectacle and abundance, the decline and progressive disappearance of the public stage. Theatre and cinema – television – joined forces in the early 1960s to radically change the physiognomy of contemporary art. The birth of performance cannot be understood without the practices of theatre and avant-garde dance, just as the emergence of the concept of the installation cannot be understood without the input of cinema and, later on,



Katalin Ladik
The Queen of Sheba, 1973
MACBA Collection,
Museu d'Art Contemporani
de Barcelona Consortium

video. Theatre and performance are differentiated by the fact that a performer is not an actor interpreting a fixed role. In performance, the artist interprets him or herself.

Dan Graham is one of the artists who, fascinated by the serial nature of the minimalist art that dominated the American scene in the 1960s, offered a criticism of the era's models for artistic reception spaces through their actions. Influenced by dance and rock, Graham created performances that analysed how the action became a laboratory for forms of perception. We should remember that the perceptive model proposed by the critics who provided the theoretical basis for Abstract Expressionism allocated the primacy of perception solely to the eye: viewing was a pure act, an encounter uncontaminated by the characteristics of painting, a space that the eye could cover without any obstacles or jolts. The model of perception presented by Graham contradicts this model and reminds us – as Brian O'Doherty has observed – of the role of the body and corporality in every act of perception:

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 conceptualised sensations and updated concepts. In this unstable drawing lie the origins of the perceptive scenarios, of performance and body art.¹⁶

After Graham's work, understanding the formulation of a new category of art is determined not only by time but also by the ways in which an artist connects with a specific audience. Maintaining the unity of time and space is crucial. In contrast, unity of action, as exemplified by the work of Joan Jonas, would undergo constant alterations, while drawing on narrative modes that now seem archaic, or at least exotic. For Jonas, the influence of the Japanese Kabuki and Noh theatres is grafted on to the figure of the oral narrator, also found in the traditions of the southern Mediterranean. Magic, enchantment and phantasmagoria – whether of ancient origin or state-of-the-art (as in TV serials) – are put at the service of readings of history that connect the author's subjectivity with the supposed objectivity of the official narration.

The work of the American artist Rita McBride refers to the possibility of remaking objects and images, after a generation of artists such as Michael Asher and John Baldessari – with whom McBride studied in the 1980s – had spurned the role of these objects in the artistic production that dominated the 1970s. McBride behaves, in a way, like an inventor through the situations triggered by objects. *Arena* (1997) is a structure that provides a technical alternative to the depersonalisation of modular engineering, where repetition ends up creating a landscape unified by objects and forms. The utilitarian nature of the work also transforms the nature of 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 in the stories of these two means of communication. While the cinema has become the paradigm of much of the art that has been produced since the 1990s, we can now trace its influence on work from the early 1970s. In 1972 David Lamelas created *Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning)*, an installation that combines film and slide projection. The film featured a series of plausible, apparently banal scenes, which were presented from different viewpoints via 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."¹⁷

Cinema treated in this way becomes a mechanism for presentation, and the mere machinery of the mechanism goes beyond the concept of sculpture. The arrangement of a cinematic drama within the three dimensions of the space and the use of sound and lighting distances us for ever 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 displayed a clear demonstration of this concern in the installation *In the Shadow of the City... Vampirey*, which was typical of the architectural substitutions that countered the return to the pictorial model in the 1980s. In this work Barry was reacting to



Joan Jonas,
Lines in the Sand, 2002
 MACBA Collection.
 Ajuntament de Barcelona
 Fund. Image of the
 performance, documenta 11,
 Kassel, 2002



Judith Barry
In the Shadow of the City...
Vamp r y, 1985 (detail)
 MACBA Collection.
 Museu d'Art Contemporani
 de Barcelona Consortium

the notion of simulation and the “thirst for images” that the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard characterized as the spirit of the time. Barry, in contrast, put forward 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, as in his reworking of the unmade film projects of the French writer Georges Perec. Aballí made posters announcing films, giving them a public status, even though they had never existed. This work represents precisely the time of possibility, and projects on to history the shadows of desires that have not taken form: they are an echo of something that should have existed. The Dutch artist Manon de Boer uses such echoes to respond to historical events. *Attica* (2008) commemorates and puts up an anti-monument at the end of the riot that took place in 1971 in Attica prison, on the outskirts of New York. This is considered one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of the United States, after the massacres of the Indians and the Civil War. So, *Attica* is a reflection of the consideration of time as something circular: the past is not behind us, but just in front, and it could 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 not seen merely as a source of poetic experience but also as an instrument of social change and liberation. These were some of the aims of the Medvedkin group, which assembled round figures such as Jean-Luc Godard in the late 1960s. Asier Mendizabal reappropriated 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 a science put at the service of a desire: the workers’ desire...” This text can be read on a banner lying on a trestle table, although the end of the sentence was not visible: “...to liberate themselves.” 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.

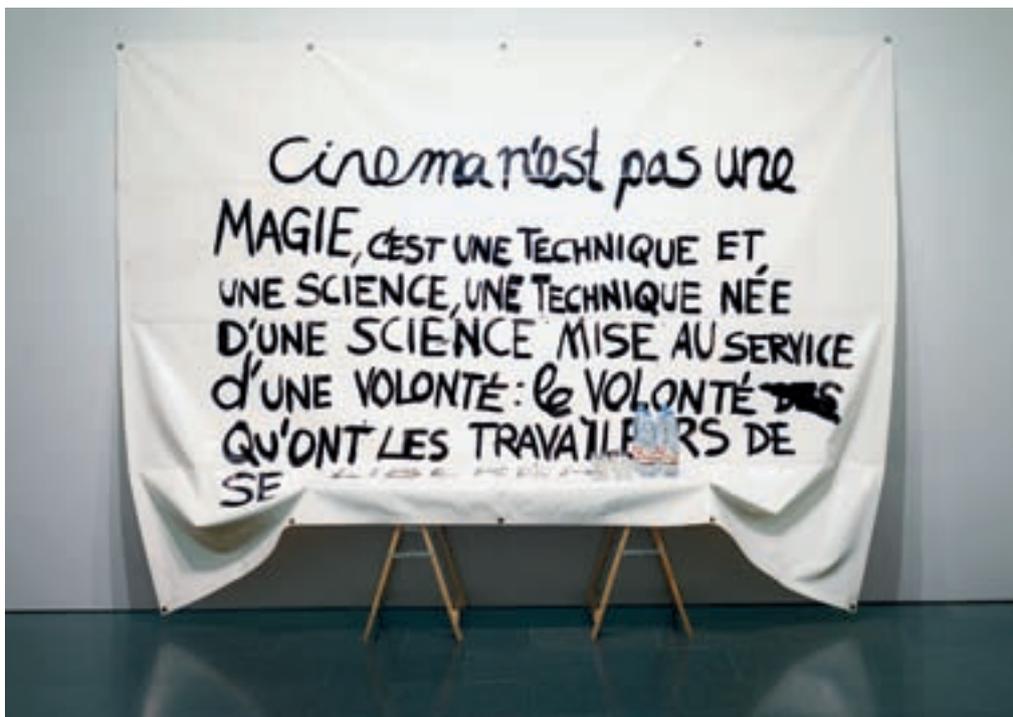
Manon de Boer
Attica, 2008 (stills)
 MACBA Collection.
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Peter Watkins, the British film director born in 1935, won an Oscar for best documentary in 1967. His work is a landmark in the political development of documentary cinema as a language capable of representing ideas about reality. Watkins is known for using fiction within the idiom of documentary cinema, which revolutionized the language of the medium in the late 1950s. The Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevicius covers the figure of the documentary filmmaker in the form of a false interview to tackle the notions of authorship and representation in the description of history. What gives a story its form, the events or the narrator? *The Role of a Lifetime* (2003) presents fiction, the distinguishing feature of Watkins' work, as a powerful instrument for depicting history.

More Modern

References to modernity, its origins and its manifestations, have been present in this story from the beginning. One of the reasons for the renewal of interest in what has been and what continues to be modernity is precisely its presence in the works of younger generations of artists who question the validity of the modern over and above the post-modern discourse that has dominated the debate in the West in the last three decades. The Peruvian Armando Andrade Tudela reviewed the ways in which information materializes and collides through history: "In my research, I have been focusing on several ways in which aspects of modernity 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."¹⁸ The legacy of modernity does not press down on our history in the same way, as a conglomerate of ideas, beliefs or facts identifiable as such. The film *La Ricarda*,¹⁹ made in 2006 by a group of artists assembled by Michel François and Jean-Paul Jacquet – 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 around the technique of the *cadavre exquis*. It joined together various views of these spaces that were as emblematic in our



Asier Mendizabal
Cinema, 1999
 MACBA Collection.
 Ajuntament de Barcelona
 Fund. Installation view,
 Museu d'Art Contemporani
 de Barcelona, 2008

consciousness as they were, up until then, distant. Subjective descriptions here run in parallel with objectivity and the transparency of the modern movement; today's experience of living tries to trample on the rationalism that propelled the forms and materials of a precise and ephemeral moment in which spaces are being made for life.

One of the determining factors in architectural modernity, the principle of *existenzminimum*, formulated in 1929 by the International Congress of Modern Architecture, sought to define the essential characteristics of healthy and comfortable housing that society could provide for its most disadvantaged members, regardless of the composition of their family. Public housing reformers such as Ernst May, Hans Schmidt and Bruno Taut formulated these conditions before the Second World War. In the early twenty-first century, Santiago Cirugeda has reinvented the conditions of minimum housing in the context of a construction fair where access to housing explains the clash between the new "disadvantaged" of our society and the crisis that presaged the collapse of the market, the construction industry and the speculative economy centred on land use.

Excesses and deficiencies of modernity, approaches to and distancing from the present, entrances to and exits from the real – the various physiognomies now offered by the MACBA Collection are a landscape that has been sown for some time. It runs from discourses and works from the new classicisms to apparently disconcerting recent arrivals and is marked by a continuous accumulation of stories and subjects arranged in the form of sediments to reveal the recent past in the same way as they will continue to invent futures.

Armando Andrade Tudela
Untitled (1), 2008
MACBA Collection.
Ajuntament de Barcelona
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- 1 *When Attitudes Become Form*, Kunsthalle Bern (1969), exhibition curated by Harald Szeemann.
- 2 T.S. Eliot: "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), *The Sacred Wood*. London: Methuen, 1920.
- 3 Giorgio Agamben: *Què vol dir ser contemporani?* Barcelona: Arcàdia, 2008, p. 18-19.
- 4 Lucy R. Lippard: *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1973.
- 5 Marc Augé: *Culture et déplacement*, in the *Université de tous les savoirs*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002, p. 60.
- 6 Jorge Luis Marzo: *Arte moderno y franquismo. Los orígenes conservadores de la vanguardia y de la política artística en España* (1966). Girona: Fundació Espais, 2008.
- 7 Manuel J. Borja-Villel: "Los cambios de gusto. Tàpies y la crítica", *Tàpies. Els anys 80*. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1988, p. 203 [exh. cat.] quoted in Jorge Luis Marzo: *Arte moderno y franquismo*, op. cit.
- 8 Genoveva Tusell García: "La proyección exterior del arte abstracto español en tiempos del grupo El Paso", *En el tiempo de El Paso*. Madrid: Centro Cultural de la Villa, 2002, p. 13 [exh. cat.] quoted in Jorge Luis Marzo: *Arte moderno y franquismo*, op. cit.
- 9 Jorge Luis Marzo: op. cit, s. p.
- 10 The exhibition combined the presence of openly realist and abstract artists in what was, from today's viewpoint, an extremely eclectic vision of the American artistic scene.
- 11 The artist Richard Hamilton and the critic Lawrence Alloway used the term for the first time in 1958.
- 12 *Galeria Cadaqués. Obres de la Col·lecció Bombelli*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2006 [exh. cat.].
- 13 Robert Smithson: *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Jack Flam, ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 11.
- 14 *Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner*. New York: Seth Siegel, 1969 [exh. cat.].
- 15 Alain Badiou: "Théâtre et philosophie", lecture given at the Bar de la Comédie de Reims and published in *Les Cahiers de Noria*, no. 13 (May 1998), p. 14.
- 16 Brian O'Doherty: *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976). San Francisco, CA: The Lapis Press, 1986, p. 52.
- 17 David Lamelas: *A New Refutation of Time*. Rotterdam and Munich: Witte de With, in collaboration with Kunstverein München and Richter Verlag, 1997, p. 86 [exh. cat.].
- 18 Statement by the artist. Unpublished.
- 19 *La Ricarda* will be presented at the Capella MACBA at the beginning of July.



Michel François
and Jean-Paul Jacquet
La Ricarda, 2006 (stills)
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MUSEU
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MUSEU
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DE BARCELONA

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Exhibition

From 15 May to 31 August 2009

Opening times

Mondays and Wednesdays, 11 am to 7:30 pm
(8 pm from 24 June)
Thursdays and Fridays, 11 am to midnight
Saturdays, 10 am to 8 pm
Sundays and public holidays, 10 am to 3 pm
Closed Tuesdays (except holidays)

Daily guided tours
(included in the ticket price)

Activities

The Uncertainty Principle

From 15 May to 12 June

Capella MACBA, Carrer dels Àngels, 7

Program related to the MACBA Collection that will feature a series of activities aimed at exploring the many different ways of generating hypotheses and reflecting on artistic, cultural and scientific creativity.

On the Margins of Art

From 9 July

MACBA Study Centre

A wide-ranging vision of the different ways in which artists placed their creative abilities at the service of political activism over the second half of the twentieth century, including magazines, books, posters, flyers, postcards and other printed materials

Nits de MACBA

From 15 May to 18 September,

every Thursday and Friday, from 8 pm to midnight



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