

**THE  
PERSISTENCE  
OF  
GEOMETRY**

**ABSALON  
SERGI AGUILAR  
ARMANDO  
ANDRADE TUDELA  
ELEANOR ANTIN  
TXOMIN BADIOLA  
JAMES LEE BYARS  
WALTERCIO CALDAS  
JORDI COLOMER  
JOSÉ DÁVILA  
LEÓN FERRARI  
GEGO  
DAN GRAHAM  
RODNEY GRAHAM  
HANS HAACKE  
PELLO IRAZU  
DONALD JUDD  
RICHARD LONG  
DAVID MALJKOVIĆ  
GORDON  
MATTÀ-CLARK  
MARIO MERZ  
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BRUCE NAUMAN  
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CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTIONS OF  
MACBA FOUNDATION - "LA CAIXA" FOUNDATION

 "la Caixa" Foundation

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The Persistence of Geometry.  
Contemporary Art Collections  
of "la Caixa" Foundation  
and MACBA

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2010, "la Caixa" Foundation and the MACBA Foundation reached an agreement to jointly manage their contemporary art collections. The two collections were created with a similar aim in mind: to reconstruct the history and memory of recent art in a sequence that allows for multiple readings and approaches to the works. Bringing together the two collections (which include over 5500 works) has strengthened our ability to pursue this goal, opening up new opportunities to relate works in a way that adds meaning and interpret them to better understand the sensibility of our time.

The agreement between the two institutions has led to a series of joint actions: exhibitions that offer new readings of present-day art, international seminars, and a range of initiatives aimed at making contemporary art more accessible to different publics based on an approach that stresses education and participation. Exhibitions are a key element of the project because they provide an opportunity to interpret artists and periods from new perspectives. In contrast to the traditional narrative presented by museums, which tends to focus on the chronology of works and movements, the exhibitions organised by "la Caixa" Foundation and MACBA explore associations between works from different periods and cultural contexts based on formal and thematic aspects that relate to the concerns of contemporary men and women.

*The Persistence of Geometry* is the second exhibition to emerge from the agreement between the two institutions. It presents a selection of works drawn from the collections of "la Caixa" Foundation and MACBA that reflect the recurring presence of geometry in contemporary sculpture, from the 1960s to the present day. The exhibition illustrates the rupture of traditional forms and the redefinition of the artwork, which seeks to engage viewers as active participants through their experience of form and space.

**THE PERSISTENCE  
OF GEOMETRY**

## THE PERSISTENCE OF GEOMETRY

Nimfa Bisbe

Three geometric figures executed in marble – a sphere, a cube, and a parallelepiped – are shown enclosed in their respective vitrines, as if guarding the great complexity of the universe. The porosity of the white marble makes them look ancient, as if eroded by time, and their extreme whiteness lends them the sense of mystery evoked by supreme perfection. They are the work of **James Lee Byars**, for whom geometry was an ideal of perfection. His pieces reflect an aspiration to arrive at the irreducible elements from which the universe could be created, the kind used by the demiurge in the Platonic dialogue *Timaeus*. Throughout history, geometry has been a symbol of purity, intelligence, and perfection. In the present day, its presence conditions every aspect of our lives, both in the physical reality of urban space and industrial products, and on the screens through which we enter the virtuality of cyberspace. In an act of artistic inventiveness, Lee Byars enclosed the primitive forms that underpin this development in museum display cases, as if seeking to safeguard for eternity the imagined possibility of absolute and immutable purity, and to protect this ideal from our culture's inability to continue sustaining universally valid truths.

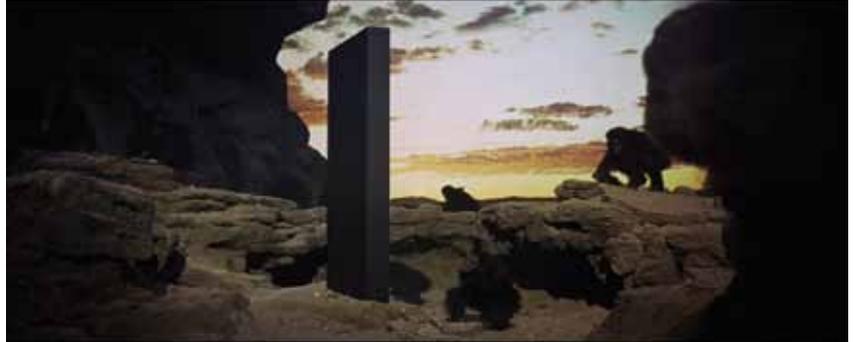
Byars's piece opens the exhibition *The Persistence of Geometry*, which presents a selection of works from the art collections of Fundació "la Caixa" and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) that illustrate how geometry has been used in sculpture from the 1960s to the present day. The show explores the rupture of traditional forms and the ensuing redefinition of the artwork brought about by Minimalism and performative practices, which established an interactive relationship with the viewer.

Geometry is an abstract form of thought that can be used to explore, represent, and construct spatially. The cognitive process it involves offers a means of comprehending and structuring the world. In this respect, geometry performs an ordering function and provides the harmony needed to deal with the seemingly irregular and unstable nature of reality. In ancient Greece, geometry was viewed as a metaphysical ideal and identified with notions of perfection, beauty, reason, and balance. In Western culture it has been an endless source of inspiration. In addition to its scientific and cosmological functions, an aesthetic and mystical role has also been attributed to this branch of mathematics.

In twentieth-century art, geometry has been closely linked to the concepts of abstraction and modernity. Its use was associated with a move away from the representation of reality, as artists shifted their focus to non-referential space. Cubism initiated a process that saw geometry acquire intrinsic value and emerge as the symbol of a new age. The discourse of geometric abstraction was built on utopian ambitions rooted in the Platonic ideal. Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich aspired to create a new universal language beyond the forms of phenomenal reality, and in geometry they found a visual analogy for the purity, simplicity, and immutability of the universe. Mondrian explored the absolute, the essence of the world, and established an idealist approach to the rationalisation of visual perception. The result was an austere composition of lines and rectangular planes disconnected from spatial representation. His art and theory had a significant influence on the Bauhaus and the architecture of right angles, flat spaces, and crystalline materials associated with the rationalism of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. Malevich, for his part, developed a mystique around the square, which for him represented the ultimate structures the world is formed of. His metaphysics began to be dismantled at the hands of his contemporaries, Russian Constructivists such as Aleksandr Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, and El Lissitzky, who, with the aim of constructing new forms for a new society, sought to forge a connection between abstraction and real life. Geometry offered a vocabulary that enabled these artists



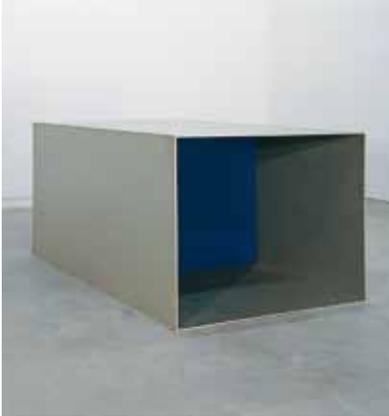
Kazimir Malevich  
*Painterly Realism of a Football Player –  
Colour Masses in the 4th Dimension, 1915*



Stanley Kubrick  
*2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968

to avoid subjectivity and illusion, and to create an art based on the real properties of materials and their constructive relationships. This activity, however, did not fit in with the ideology of socialist realism, and several decades would have to pass before artists would once again seek to break with the idealism of abstract art. It was in the 1960s that geometry became the focus of renewed attention in the context of Minimalist sculpture, whose practitioners proposed to purge art of expressive and metaphorical content.

Minimalism gave prominence to the geometry of simple, regular forms, the anonymity of prefabricated industrial materials, and an opaque, cold image that became the hallmark of the most advanced art. Its rapid spread contributed to the proliferation of geometric forms in art, and the cube became omnipresent on the American scene. In 1968, Stanley Kubrick dramatically captured the impact of this geometry with the mysterious monolith that appeared in his film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The geometric form of the black slab rises up like an icon of the power of intelligence and technological superiority, a structure which, with its polished form and pristine, monochrome surface, epitomises the idealism of abstraction and the formal properties of Minimalism. However, while Minimalist sculpture may have connected with the yearning for progress of a society making rapid technological progress, the verticality of Kubrick's monolith pointed to a metaphysics flatly rejected by Minimalist artists. Their works did not hold out the promise of transcendence or represent the immutable forms of an intelligible world. Rather, they sought to take art down off its pedestal and put it on the same level as the rest of the things of the world. Geometry was stripped of Platonic idealism, and some artists even disassociated it from the tradition of earlier artistic avant-gardes. **Donald Judd**, one of its leading exponents, confirmed that he shared this extreme position in 1965: 'My work isn't geometric



Donald Judd  
*Untitled*, 1968–1985

in that sense. One of the reasons, I guess, that my stuff is geometric is that I want it to be simple; also I want it to be non-naturalistic, non-imagistic, and non-expressionistic.<sup>1</sup> For Judd geometry became a working method and a way to avoid any symbolism or cultural connotations. In his cold, impersonal aluminium and Plexiglas boxes, there are no references beyond the form, material, and objecthood of the works themselves. 'The shape is the object,' said Michael Fried,<sup>2</sup> and 'what you see is what you see' was a tautology articulated by Frank Stella, who defended the self-referentiality of the artwork.<sup>3</sup> Both statements became premises of Minimalism.

Yet there were also those who argued that Minimalism should be an art of the real; some of the movement's adherents were wary of art objects that seemed to refer only to their own presence, as if they existed in isolation from the world. The pure visual experience characteristic of abstraction, which took viewers out of their bodies in so far as it originated in the atemporal mental space associated with the idea of art, was giving way to a physical experience that brought viewers back to the tangible, temporal world. The new sculptures had moved to the 'here and now' of earthly objects and addressed the viewer directly. In this shift towards reality, the artwork began to be understood as an event in which the viewer participated by establishing a timeframe for the work and intervening in its space.

Many of the works presented in the exhibition are heirs to the European tradition of Constructivism, though most reflect the debate on the nature of the artwork instigated by American proponents of Minimalism.<sup>4</sup> Since then, geometric forms have been used in a new way that appeals to the senses as well as addressing cultural, social, and political issues.

Postminimalism and Conceptual Art adopted the geometric forms of Minimalism in an expanded field of practices – including environments and installations, film, video, and photography – which were used to explore aspects of the construction of the artwork, its performative nature, the creative process, the properties of light, and the temporality of perception. The art object is virtually displaced by a phenomenological experience in Hans Haacke's experiments with natural processes, Richard Long's interventions in nature, and James Turrell's light projections, and Bruce Nauman's unsettling environments engage directly with the viewer. The notion of the immutable time of the artwork is questioned by Francesc Torres and replaced by the idea of constant change in Robert Smithson's earthworks. Gordon Matta-Clark activates a complex set of perceptions in the context of architectural transformations, and Dan Graham brings a social conscience to the domain of art.

1. Donald Judd, interviewed by Bruce Hooton in 'Oral history interview with Donald Judd, 1965 Feb. 3', *Archives of American Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution) [online], accessed 17/10/2011, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-donald-judd-11621>.

2. Michael Fried was the main detractor of Minimalism and the one who best understood the threat it posed to the art of modernity. The quotation is from 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons', in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 88.

Bruce Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and Judd', *Art News* 65, no. 5 (September 1966), re-published in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 158.

4. For a detailed analysis of the history of Minimalism, see James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).



View of exhibition rooms at CaixaForum Barcelona (2002). Foreground: Richard Long. *Círculo catalán* (Catalan circle), 1986

**Hans Haacke** chose a Plexiglas cube, similar to the Minimalist prototype of this geometric form, as a container to make natural phenomena visible in the art space. The clarity of the technologically determined form allowed him to highlight organic processes because of the contrast it established. His *Condensation Cube* (1965) shows the behaviour of water heated by light. The work presents a simple experiment involving a very slow process, the observation of which requires time and attention. During this time, the immutability of the geometric form is disturbed by the instability of the environment inside and outside the cube. Haacke wanted 'to create something vague, [...] whose form cannot be accurately predicted,' something that changes and reacts to the environment as a living organism does.<sup>5</sup>

**Richard Long** has based his artistic production on epic walks that have taken him around the world. In the course of his treks, which have a performative character, he seeks to comprehend the landscape space through his own body. As part of his interaction with nature, the British artist marks the land with a trace of his presence, lending his intervention a formal structure with basic shapes: lines, circles, spirals, and ellipses. The act of geometrising nature also creates a record of his movement through the landscape. These geometries are transferred to interior exhibition spaces in the form of natural materials that document his intervention in the landscape. Such configurations cannot recreate Long's experience for the viewer; they take on a new status and constitute another reality, which the artist uses to measure and geometrize interior architecture.

For his part, **James Turrell** creates a visual experience for the viewer by manipulating light. In *Afrum Red* (1967), an intense red light is projected into the corner of a completely dark room, where it is perceived as a cube suspended in space. 'My interest in the perception

5. Hans Haacke (Cologne, January 1965), in *Hans Haacke: 'Obra Social'* [exh. cat.] (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1995).

**Hans Haacke** → p. 23

**Richard Long** → p. 24

**James Turrell** → p. 25

of light is in giving it *thingness*. It exists just as a physical object has presence. I make *thingness* of perception by putting limits on it in a formal manner,' wrote Turrell.<sup>6</sup> The appearance of solidity depends on the distance from which the work is observed; the illusion breaks down when the viewer approaches and sees the three-dimensional form resolve itself into planes of light on the two adjacent walls.

In Bruce Nauman's work, geometry serves as a device for generating forms of experience. Unlike Turrell, Nauman focuses on the behaviour of the viewer. This involves more than just incorporating the participation of the viewer to activate the work; **Nauman** seeks to provoke a reaction that throws viewers off balance so they become aware of their attitudes and sensations. His early works involving the public grew out of his exploration of his own behaviour in a series of exercises he filmed in his studio. In these actions, the artist performed a kind of choreography of repetitive gestures, which he used to establish a dialogue between his own body and a space delimited by geometric forms. Nauman transferred the experiments and spatial parameters to his installations to induce physical and psychological sensations in viewers. *Black Stones under Yellow Light* (1963–1965) is an installation composed of cubes of black polished marble. The cubes, which are arranged diagonally, block off the space and form an imposing X. The artist disrupts the regularity of the geometric form by bathing the space in an irritating yellow light and playing with the difference in the size of the cubes, whose form is strongly redolent of Minimalism. The impression of instability and disquiet is immediate upon entering the space, and the imposition of the enigmatic X creates a particular feeling of discomfort.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1970s, as a result of the proliferation of approaches that blurred the boundaries between the arts, the concept of sculpture was not clearly defined. *Sculptura* (1969) by **Francesc Torres** seems to evoke this situation; the letters that form the title of the piece float freely in a Plexiglas case filled with water, moving about and changing order. Sculpture had abandoned its immobility and was now exposed to the effects of time and environmental conditions. Its structure ceased to be immutable; it was now as changeable as the geometric forms the Catalan artist photographed in the urban landscape. These fleeting, dematerialised images, whose forms are at the mercy of time, become more solid and tangible in photos and configure a new temporality within the photographic reality. **Àngels Ribé**,<sup>8</sup> **Carles Pujol**, and **Josep Ponsatí** are other Spanish artists represented in this exhibition. Linked to Body Art and Land Art, they captured actions involving geometric forms in photographs and on film, reflecting the transformation of the artwork into an event conditioned by real time.

6. James Turrell, *Air Mass* (London: South Bank Centre, 1993), p. 26.

7. For further discussion of Bruce Nauman's work, see pp. 92–97, Julian Heynen, 'Reciprocals'.

8. For a discussion of the work of Francesc Torres and Àngels Ribé, see pp. 98–102, Elena Vozmediano, 'The Gaze that Draws'.

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**Bruce Nauman** → pp. 40–42

**Francesc Torres** → pp. 28–32

**Àngels Ribé** → pp. 37–39

**Carles Pujol** → p. 33

**Josep Ponsatí** → pp. 34–35



Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970

For **Robert Smithson**, photographing and filming his interventions in nature became another way to approach sculpture and a means of projecting a new reality that transcended the pure physicality of the art object. *Spiral Jetty* (1970), his best-known work and an icon of Land Art, exists as a sculpture, a film, and a text. The sculpture consisted of a monumental spiral with three whorls – made of black basalt rocks, white salt crystals, and earth – which extended like a jetty into the reddish waters of Great Salt Lake in the Utah desert.<sup>9</sup> The spiral was the ideal form for Smithson's project because it summed up all his concerns around processes that unfold over time, the transient nature of matter, history and entropy. The spiral is a form that expands and contracts; it has no beginning and no end, and can compress time into a single idea. In the film, the artist juxtaposed the space of Jurassic time with that of the present and the future, and offered an abstract description of the work's form in space through a recitation of the geographical coordinates of the site. In addition to being located at a remote site that is hard to reach, the precise reality of *Spiral Jetty* requires that it be looked at in a way that goes beyond the physical experience. 'To be in the scale of the *Spiral Jetty* is to be out of it,' wrote Smithson. 'Size determines an object, but scale determines art. [...] Scale depends on one's capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception.'<sup>10</sup> The scale of *Spiral Jetty* determines an artistic experience produced by the expansion and contraction of various languages and meanings that Smithson located in the interaction between the site and the document. That is why the film *Spiral Jetty*, which the artist describes as 'a spiral made of stills' is not a representation of the site, but rather a non-site full of references, which is part of the work.

Collaboration with artists involved in Land Art, including Robert Smithson, marked the beginning of **Gordon Matta-Clark's** career as an artist and contributed to his interest in integrating the notion of temporality in artworks. However, the artist, who trained as an architect, chose to work with architectural structures in the urban landscape rather than creating pieces in large natural spaces. His interventions involve making cuts and holes, and removing sections of buildings that have been abandoned or are slated for demolition. The artist himself sees the resulting structures as sculptures that he uses to explore space, ways of inhabiting it, relationships between interior and exterior, light and composition.<sup>11</sup> Matta-Clark imposed a geometric order on his extractions and dissections, configuring complex spaces, such as the truncated cone in *Conical Intersect* (Paris, 1975) – a work inspired by the light projection in *Line Describing a Cone* (1974), by Anthony McCall – the concentric circles of *Circus-Caribbean Orange*

9. To create *Spiral Jetty*, which was 415 metres long and 5 metres wide, Smithson used 6,650 tons of basalt and earth (<<http://www.diaart.org/sites/main/spiraljetty>> ).

10. Robert Smithson, 'The Spiral Jetty', in György Kepes (ed.), *Arts of the Environment* (New York: George Braziller, 1972), republished in *Robert Smithson* [exh. cat.] (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González, 1993), pp. 183–184.

11. 'It's not about using sculptural ideas on architecture; it's more like making sculpture through it.' Gordon Matta-Clark, interviewed by Liza Bear (May 1974), in Gordon Matta-Clark, *Works and Collected Writings*, ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 2006), p. 172.



Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973

(1978), and the two semicircles that dramatically modulated the interior in the building intervention *Office Baroque* (Antwerp, 1977). In the latter work, various spaces were linked by 'arabesque cuts that exposed the whole building to a series of interior views.'<sup>12</sup>

Though Matta-Clark's building interventions were conceived with the idea that viewers would move through them, in the end his work has reached a wider audience through photographs. The exhibition presents a large number of black-and-white photographs that the artist took of his architectural interventions. In addition to documenting and providing a visual record of works that have now vanished, the shots constitute a parallel work in which the artist seeks to transmit a sense of what he experienced spatially as he wandered through the works. Most capture the geometric dimension of the removed sections, bends, and apertures of light to reinforce the plastic discourse of the complex spaces created by the artist. Many of his photos deconstruct the classic point of view, playing with the framing of the various openings and destabilising the spatial coordinates in order to recreate the sense of instability generated by the experience of physically moving through the work. In a way, Matta-Clark's work can be seen as anticipating the web-based visual technologies that enable one to view images that simulate the experience of physically moving through a space. Matta-Clark also made an effort to expand the meaning of his artistic practice to include a social dimension by engaging in an 'urban dialogue' with the city. This involved reflecting on issues such as the boundaries of private and public space in architecture.

I began with a summer of cutting openings into walls and floors that had been staunch defenders of other people's privacy or isolation. By penetrating the layers that divided one family's

12. Gordon Matta-Clark, p. 228.

limited surface reality from another's, their simple proximity was heightened. A spatial reality was emphasised that the private pleasures and hells of earlier residents would have never allowed.<sup>13</sup>

This description could well apply to **Dan Graham's** *Alteration to a Suburban House* (1978–1992), a model in which the façade of the house is replaced by clear glass and a mirror bisects the interior space. Such an alteration would reflect the environment in front of the house in its interior and expose its inhabitants to the exterior. Graham, a great admirer of Matta–Clark, submitted architecture to a formal operation that highlighted the ambiguity of the boundaries between public and private space. A critique of the standardisation of urban life and the social relations of community residents was a constant in his work and was closely linked to his ambivalent relationship to the Minimalist object. He brought a social dimension to Minimalism through architectural models in which he used impersonal cubic forms, while at the same time extending his critique to the formalism and materialism of Minimalist art, which he saw as isolating itself from the social context in which it was produced.

The forms of geometry have persisted in art over the last several decades, reflecting a range of sensibilities, narratives, and styles. For many artists, the geometric vocabulary codified in the 1960s and 1970s has become a frame of reference for their artistic production or the focus of critical examination. In the 1980s, Minimalist iconography, which had by then been canonised as part of art history, was adopted as a style and model of representation by artists receptive to theories associated with postmodernity, such as **Pello Irazu**, **Sergi Aguilar**, and **Txomin Badiola**.<sup>14</sup> The reuse of Minimalist codes did not signify a return to the concepts that gave rise to them, for the cultural context had changed; instead, they became a receptacle for new content. In this process, geometry was divorced from the concept of abstraction as geometric forms were inscribed with figurative content or referential intent, as we see, for example, in the works of **Jordi Colomer** and **Jan Vercruyse**.

For the Israeli artist **Absalon**, simple forms – the triangle, the cylinder and the cube – were the point of departure to configure distinctive living spaces. Based on the dimensions of his own body, the artist constructed small architectural spaces. The neutral, white units, which he called 'cells', looked like shelters from some futuristic world. He provided them with furniture of a sort in Minimalist style so potential occupants could carry out the most basic day-to-day activities. In the video *Proposition d'Habitation* [Proposal for a Habitat]

13. Gordon Matta–Clark, p. 141.

14. For a discussion of the work of these artists, see pp. 103–107, Peio Aguirre, 'Minimalist Poetics in Expansion'.

**Dan Graham** → p. 76

**Pello Irazu** → p. 66

**Sergi Aguilar** → p. 63

**Txomin Badiola** → pp. 64–65

**Jordi Colomer** → p. 58

**Jan Vercruyse** → p. 60

**Absalon** → p. 59

(1991), the artist demonstrates how the cells can be used as living spaces. Absalon did not see this asceticism in terms of isolation, but rather as a reflection on the value of privacy in our society, which is increasingly characterised by public exposure. His aim was to install the cells in urban environments and inhabit them temporarily, but his premature death brought the project to a halt.

**Rachel Whiteread** takes up Bruce Nauman's casting technique and shares Matta-Clark's interest in architecture, its basic elements (floors, walls, doors and windows), and the social history of buildings. Her work is based on casts of spaces and objects, which she uses to create sculptures in plaster, rubber, concrete, and resin. The installation of these casts in repetitive sequences – like the rectangles extracted from the floor of a corridor that form a sculpture executed in 1995 – follow the formal precepts of Minimalism but add a symbolic component. Whiteread's sculptures refer to a domestic space that is recognisable and personalised. In her work, geometry in the Minimalist image is a means of inscribing on the art space a narrative concerned with personal experience and social criticism.

The exhibition concludes with *Images with Their Own Shadows* (2008), a work by **David Maljković** that explores the legacy of a forgotten modernity in the former Yugoslavia and draws attention to projects that were invisible in the context of artistic tendencies in the West. The artist constructed a sculptural opening, similar to the diaphragm of a camera – a gateway to the past that he uses to present the ideas of EXAT-51, a group of artists, designers, architects and theorists active in Zagreb in the early 1950s. The film projected in the interior of this space was shot at a museum that belonged to one of the group's members, architect Vjenceslav Richter. It shows images of geometric sculptures that reflect the visual experimentation of avant-garde movements, interspersed with fragments of an interview that the artist conducted with the architect. The sound of the 16mm projector, evocative of past technology, captures the utopian radicalism of 1960s and 1970s architecture, and the focus is shifted to the future as we listen to the architect's words: 'As long as there are artists' studios that experiment, EXAT continues to live and work.'

Throughout the twentieth century, geometry and avant-garde art have been intertwined. Whether as an ideal of purity, a way of silencing anything other than its own forms, or a vehicle for speaking once again of the world, geometry has provided formal structures for a broad spectrum of artistic practices. This exhibition presents a selection of pieces that offer a glimpse of the broad scope of geometry on its journey from abstraction to the referential in the art of recent decades.

# CATALOGUE

**METAPHYSICS  
OF GEOMETRY**

**JAMES LEE BYARS**



## JAMES LEE BYARS

Detroit, 1932 – Cairo, 1997



### The Figure of Question

1986

Kavala marble, oak wood and glass

Tetrahedron: 60 x 12 x 12 cm

Vitrine: 175 x 50 x 50 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
R.196

### The Spherical Book

1986

Kavala marble, oak wood and glass

Sphere: diámetro 21 cm

Vitrine: 175 x 50 x 50 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
R.196

### The Soft Cube

1986

Kavala marble, oak wood and glass

Cube: 27 x 27 x 27 cm

Vitrine: 75 x 50 x 50 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
R.197

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**In both these associations – perfect as decimal and perfect as spherical – Byars had arrived on his own, or innocently, at the position of Pythagoras and his school in the sixth and fifth centuries BC. For the Pythagoreans 10 was the number of totality because it represented the sum of  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4$ . In Pythagorean cosmology, 1 represents the point or dot, which is the first physical sign of something nudging its way into manifestation; 2 represents the line, two dots joined, the second move of reality once it has embarked on the whimsical project of spatial extension; 3 is the triangle, three dots joined, which is the first plane figure, the only plane figure that can be constructed from three points; and 4 corresponds to the tetrahedron, four dots joined, the first solid figure.**

Thomas McEvilley, 'Falling Angel', in *James Lee Byars: The Palace of Perfect* [exh. cat.] (Oporto: Fundação de Serralves, 1997), p. 168.

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**ESSENTIAL FORMS**

**DONALD JUDD**

**HANS HAACKE**

**RICHARD LONG**

**JAMES TURRELL**



**'What you see is what you see,' as Frank Stella, one of the pioneers of Minimalism, put it in 1966. The work of these artists owes a debt to this movement, which used an essential vocabulary of basic, abstract forms to avoid any form of symbolism and silence the emotional expression of the artist. Stella's words direct our gaze to the physical presence of works in which the only references are to their own materiality and geometry. Sculpture dispenses with the pedestal and establishes a new relationship with the viewer, who can now contemplate the work as a real object in a concrete time and space.**

## DONALD JUDD

Excelsior Springs, Missouri, 1928 – New York, 1994



Untitled

1988

Anodised aluminium and Plexiglas

Four units: 50 x 100 x 50 cm, each

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC446

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**What I was looking for was a particular kind of partial geometry with flat, regular zones, rather than Expressionism. But pure geometry, excessively linked to the space of traditional European painting, was too outdated and its meaning, too inappropriate.**

Donald Judd, 'Symmetry', in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings (1975–1986)* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1987).

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## HANS HAACKE

Cologne, 1936



### Condensation Cube

1963–1965

Plexiglas, water, light, air currents,  
temperature in the exhibition space

76 x 76 x 76 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
Gift of the National Committee and Board of Trustees,  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
R.1523

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**I have partially filled Plexiglas containers of a simple stereometric form with water and have sealed them. The intrusion of light warms the inside of the boxes. Since the temperature inside the boxes is always higher than the surrounding temperature, the water enclosed condenses: a delicate veil of drops begins to develop on the inside walls. [...] With continuing condensation, some drops reach such a size that their weight overcomes the forces of adhesion and they run down along the walls, leaving a trail. [...] The box has a constantly but slowly changing appearance that never repeats itself. The conditions are comparable to those of a living organism that reacts in a flexible manner to its surroundings. The image of condensation cannot be precisely predicted. It is changing freely, bound only by statistical limits. I like this freedom.**  
**New York, October 1965**

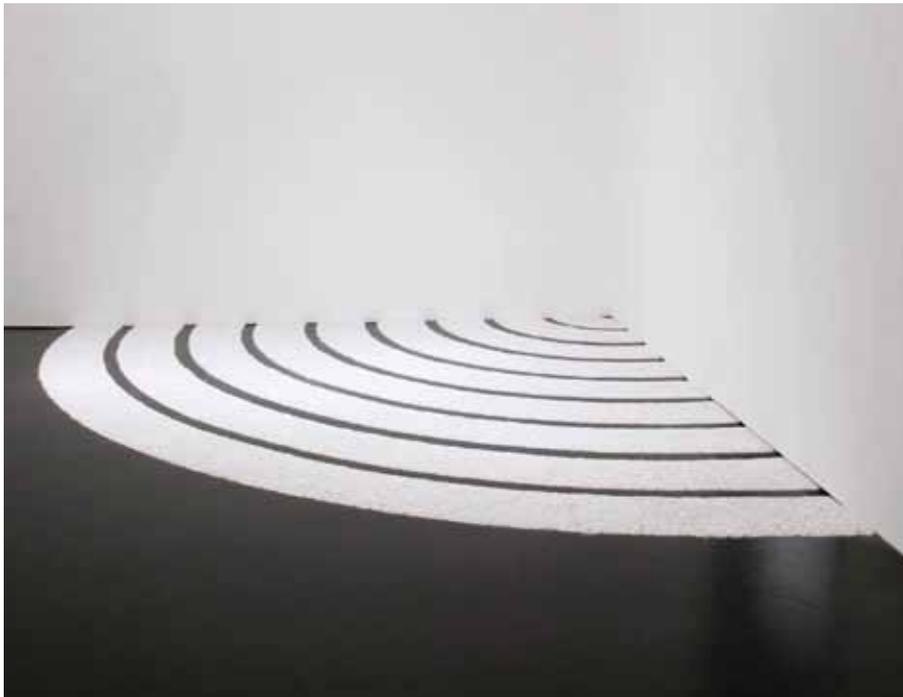
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Hans Haacke, in *Hans Haacke. "Obra Social"* [exh. cat.] (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1995), p. 32.

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## RICHARD LONG

Bristol, 1945



Untitled

1986

White marble

Radius 450 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC264

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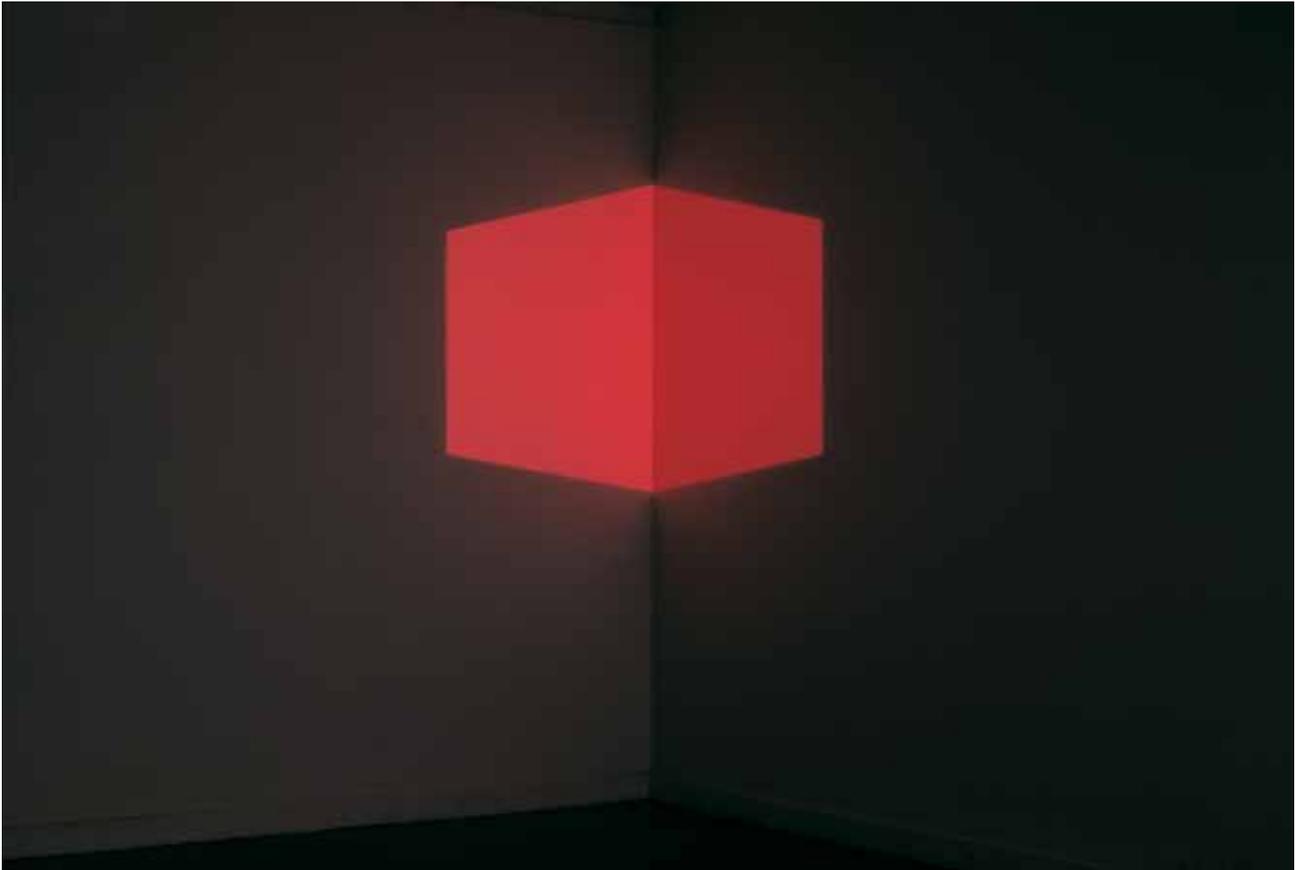
**[...] it is always like a balance – a harmony of complementary ideas. You could say that my work is also a balance between the patterns of nature and the formalism of human, abstract ideas like lines and circles. It is where my human characteristics meet the natural forces and patterns of the world, and that is really the kind of subject of my work.**

Richard Cork, 'An Interview with Richard Long' [1988], in Richard Long, *Richard Long: Walking in Circles* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1991), S. 250..

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## JAMES TURRELL

Los Angeles, California, 1943



Afrum Red

1967

Xenon projection

Variable dimensions

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC512

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**The space generated was analogous to a painting in two dimensions alluding to three dimensions, but in this case three-dimensional space was being used illusionistically. That is, the forms engendered through this quality of illusion did not necessarily resolve into one clearly definable form that would exist in three dimensions.**

James Turrell, *James Turrell* by Craig Adcock [exh. cat.] (Tallahassee: Florida State University Gallery & Museum, 1989), p. 11.

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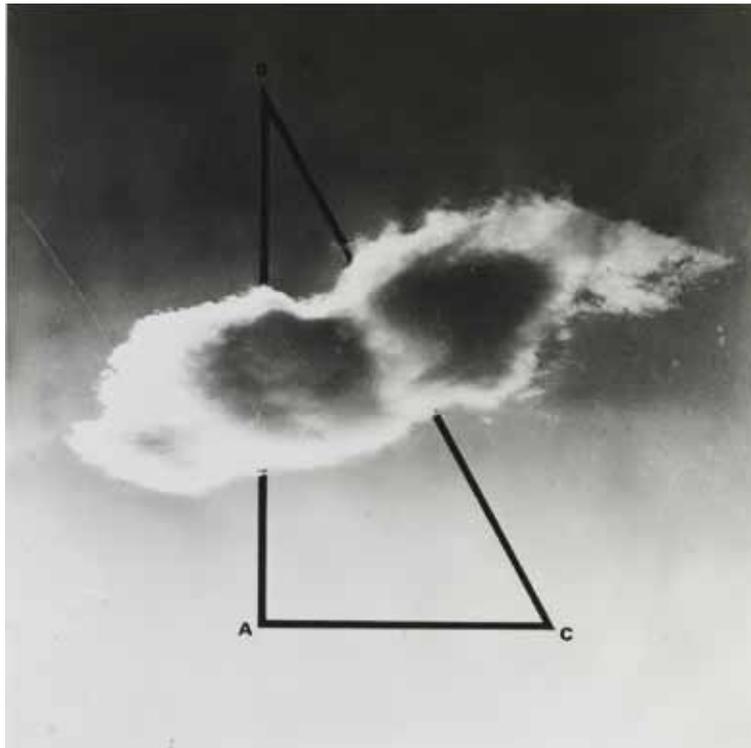
**GEOMETRY  
IN ACTION**

**FRANCESC TORRES  
CARLES PUJOL  
JOSEP PONSATÍ  
ELEANOR ANTIN  
ÀNGELS RIBÉ  
BRUCE NAUMAN  
ROBERT SMITHSON**

**These artists have generated figures that grow and develop in space, and that allow us to see geometry as something alive and in a constant state of transformation. They use their own bodies or interact with space to create new forms or reveal existing ones, seeking the presence of geometry in the world around them, outside the walls of any museum. Given the ephemeral nature of their interventions, photography or video are the best way to record the artist's experience and the work itself, which unfolds over time and as a result can no longer be captured in a single image.**

## FRANCESC TORRES

Barcelona, 1948



Triángulo semioculto por una nube  
(Triangle partially concealed by a cloud), 1972  
Gelatin silver print  
40 x 40 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Barcelona City Council Fund  
R.3250

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The fascination with technique led him to document processes that are primarily governed by randomness. Once again, these are documents of minimal actions in which relatively innocuous events totally devoid of emotion are perceived. [...] Geometry also allows him to realise a series of writings on the landscape, such as *Triángulo semioculto por una nube* [Triangle partially concealed by a cloud] (1972). The apparent chaos of nature contains geometric fissures that the camera captures in a series of works on the urban landscape. *Triángulo imaginario delimitado por el sol* [Imaginary triangle defined by the sun], *Constatación de la luz del sol en el piso trece* [Verification of the light of the sun on the thirteenth floor], and *Statement About the Existence of a Light Triangle on Sheridan and Belmont* (1972) are photos that identify the presence of particular forms of light reflected on the buildings of New York.

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Bartomeu Marí, 'Francesc Torres y el museo', in *Francesc Torres: da capo* [exh. cat.] (Barcelona: MACBA, 2008), p. 10.

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Triángulo imaginario delimitado por el sol  
(Imaginary triangle defined by the sun), 1972

Gelatin silver print  
39.4 x 39.4 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Barcelona City Council Fund  
R.3251



Constatación de la luz del sol en el piso trece  
(Verification of the light of the sun on the thirteenth floor), 1972

Gelatin silver print  
39.4 x 39.4 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
R.1494



Statement About the Existence of a Light Triangle on Sheridan and Belmont

1972  
Gelatin silver print  
39.4 x 39.4 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Barcelona City Council Fund  
R.3246



Cardboard sculptures. Prototypes for limited editions

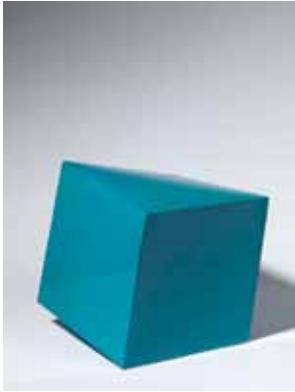
1968–1969

Painted cardboard

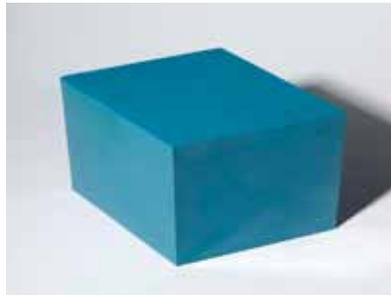
MACBA Collection, Barcelona City Council Fund

**FRANCESC TORRES**

Barcelona, 1948



**False perspective**  
**Prototype for a limited edition**  
**1968–1969**  
 Painted cardboard  
 23.3 x 21 x 38.5 cm  
 MACBA Collection  
 Barcelona City Council Fund  
 R.4260



**Deformed cube I**  
**Prototype for a limited edition**  
**1968–1969**  
 Painted cardboard  
 23.2 x 23.2 x 23.2 cm  
 MACBA Collection  
 Barcelona City Council Fund  
 R.4261



**Sculpture made of an indefinite number of modules**  
**Composition by the owner**  
**Prototype for a limited edition**  
**1968–1969**  
 Two painted cardboard modules  
 23.3 x 23.3 x 23.3 cm, each  
 MACBA Collection  
 Barcelona City Council Fund  
 R.3254



**Sculpture**  
**Prototype for a limited edition**  
**1968–1969**  
 Painted cardboard  
 23.3 x 23.1 x 26.1 cm  
 MACBA Collection  
 Barcelona City Council Fund  
 R.4259



**Deformed cube II**  
**Prototype for a limited edition**  
**1968–1969**  
 Painted cardboard  
 23.2 x 23.2 x 23.2 cm  
 MACBA Collection  
 Barcelona City Council Fund  
 R.4262



Sculptura

1969 (2000)

Plastic, plexiglas and water

102.8 x 122.2 x 35 cm

MACBA Collection

From the Government of Catalonia Art Fund

R.471

**FRANCESC TORRES**

Barcelona, 1948

## CARLES PUJOL

Barcelona, 1947



Platja 30.9.75

(Beach 30.9.75), 1975

Five colour prints

37.8 x 58 x 2.7 cm, each

MACBA Collection

From the Government of Catalonia Art Fund

R.511

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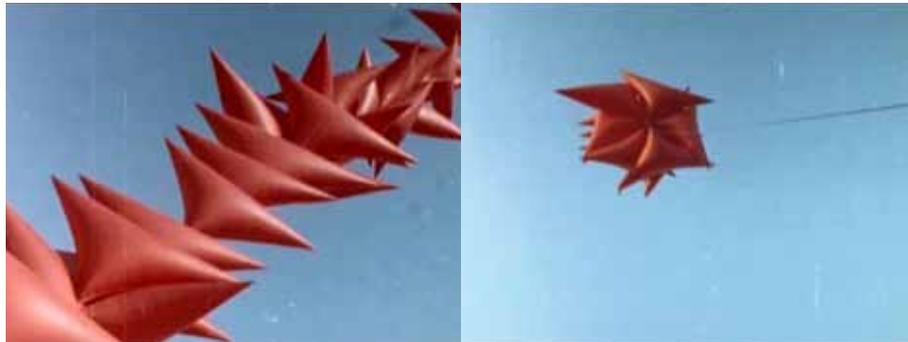
I gradually boiled down the essence of what I was doing and was left with a couple of very simple elements – complete geometrism and space – which I repeatedly made use of, and where I practised the tricks of my trade. Then it occurred to me that if instead of painting a space or a line I represented these elements in three dimensions, the discourse I could generate would be much richer. This gave rise to my first installation, *Platja* (Beach), in 1975. The surface of the prepared canvas was the sand; the foam of the sea was the spray I applied. Temporally, all this involved a process: the distension of the lines, the ebb of the water. So it wasn't just a spray applied in a static way: it was mobile.

Carles Pujol, interview with Albert Macià, in *Avui Art* (Barcelona: 27 February 1991), p. 4.

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## JOSEP PONSATÍ

Banyoles, Girona, 1947



### Cap de Creus – Cadaqués – Benidorm

1972

Single-channel video, colour, sound, 49 min

MACBA Collection

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium

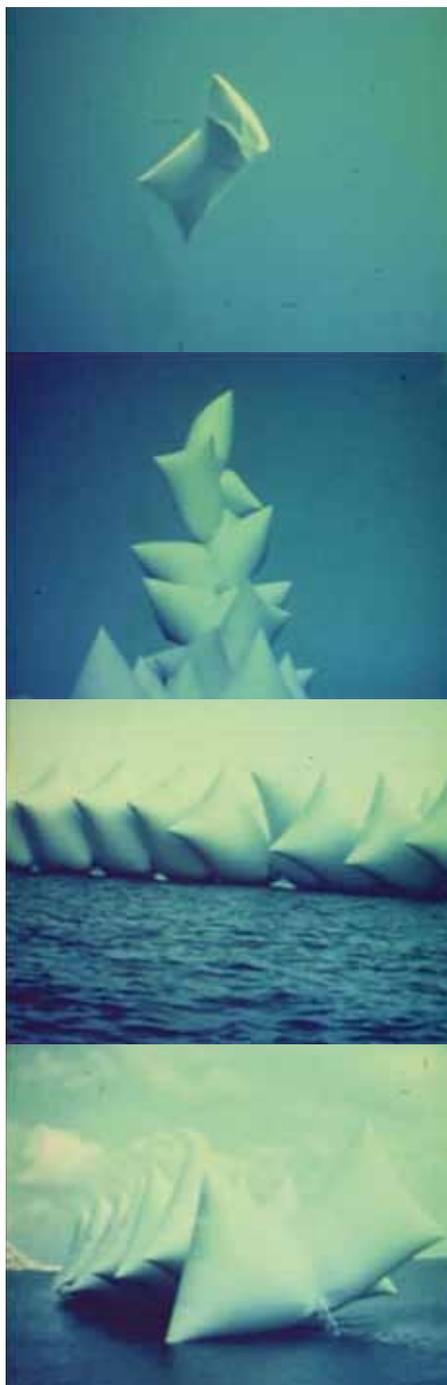
R.3688

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**The whole movement known as modernism was made destroying previous forms in the name of a discipline linked to rigid geometry [...]. In this case, however, we see the victory of some organic shapes which tend to animal forms. [...] Its material element is minimal while its essential element is ritual, gesture, participation, that kind of ballet, of choreography which we have seen performed by the people participating in its evolutions.**

Alexandre Cirici, 'El II hinchable de Ponsatí, en Ibiza', in *Ponsatí: El hinchable de Ibiza* (Monsanto Ibérica-Aiscondel, 1971).

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**Ibiza**  
1971

Single-channel video, colour, 5 min  
MACBA Collection  
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
R.3195



**Granollers**  
1971

Single-channel video, colour, 3 min 24 s  
MACBA Collection  
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
R.3194

**JOSEP PONSATÍ**  
Banyoles, Girona, 1947

## ELEANOR ANTIN

New York, 1960



### 100 Boots

1971–1973 (2005)

Printed ink on cardboard

51 postcards, 11.4 x 17.8 cm, each

MACBA Collection, Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

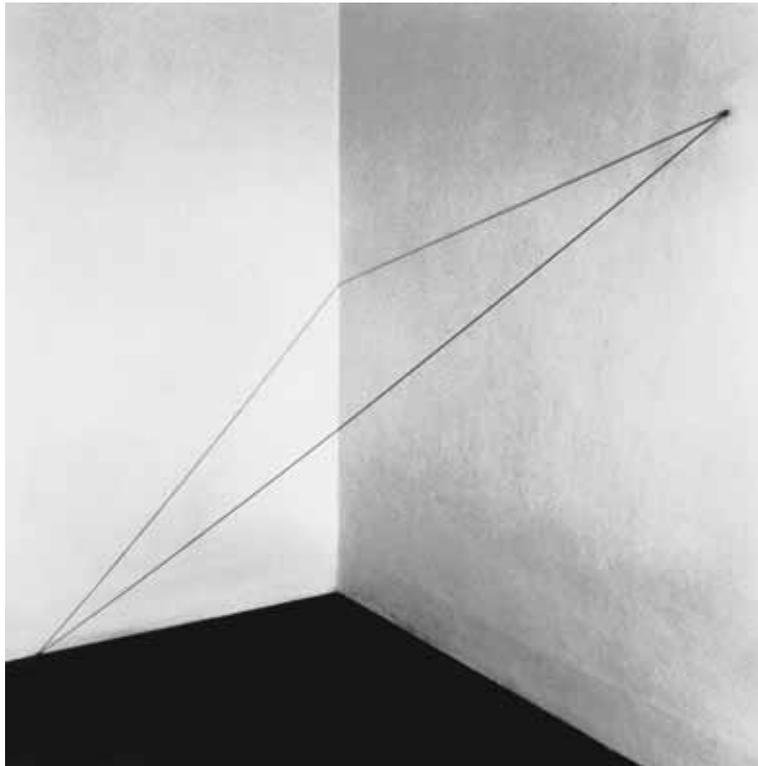
R.3567

**In a long straight line, the boots face the sea. In a curving line, they traverse a deep gully. In concentric circles they surround a circular bed of flowers and in gridded ranks they occupy a supermarket aisle. There are fifty-one pictures in all. The boots appear indoors and out, in the city and in the countryside. They take rides in a car and on a boat. Now and then they rest. Printing the records of their activities as postcards, Antin sent them to a thousand denizens of the art world.**

Carter Ratcliff, *Out of the Box: The Reinvention of Art, 1965–1975* [exh. cat.] (New York, Allworth Press, 2000), pp.43–44.

## ÀNGELS RIBÉ

Barcelona, 1942



### 3 punts (1)

[3 points (1)], 1970

Gelatin silver print

60.8 x 61.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Gift of Dinath de Grandi de Grijalbo

R.1493

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**Àngels Ribé's 'presence' has a highly individual and fascinating effect on her work: she is present in it in order to demand anonymity. In her piece from 1970 entitled *3 punts 1* [3 points 1], we have an equilateral triangle that brings into view the shadow of a cord at an angle of intersection of two walls. Each of the vertexes of this triangle stands out due to the tension of a point that imperiously demands the existence of the other two in order to constitute a geometrical shape. None of the points can form anything without the existence of the others. All three are necessary and at the same time anonymous in a perfect mutual relationship. The triangle, as Cézanne knew full well, is the measure of the world.**

Antoni Llena, 'Un instante en el tiempo de la eternidad', in *En el laberinto. Àngels Ribé 1969-1984* [exh. cat.] (Barcelona: MACBA, 2010), p. 171.

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3 punts (2)

[3 points (2)], 1972

Two gelatin silver prints

60.8 x 66.3 cm, each

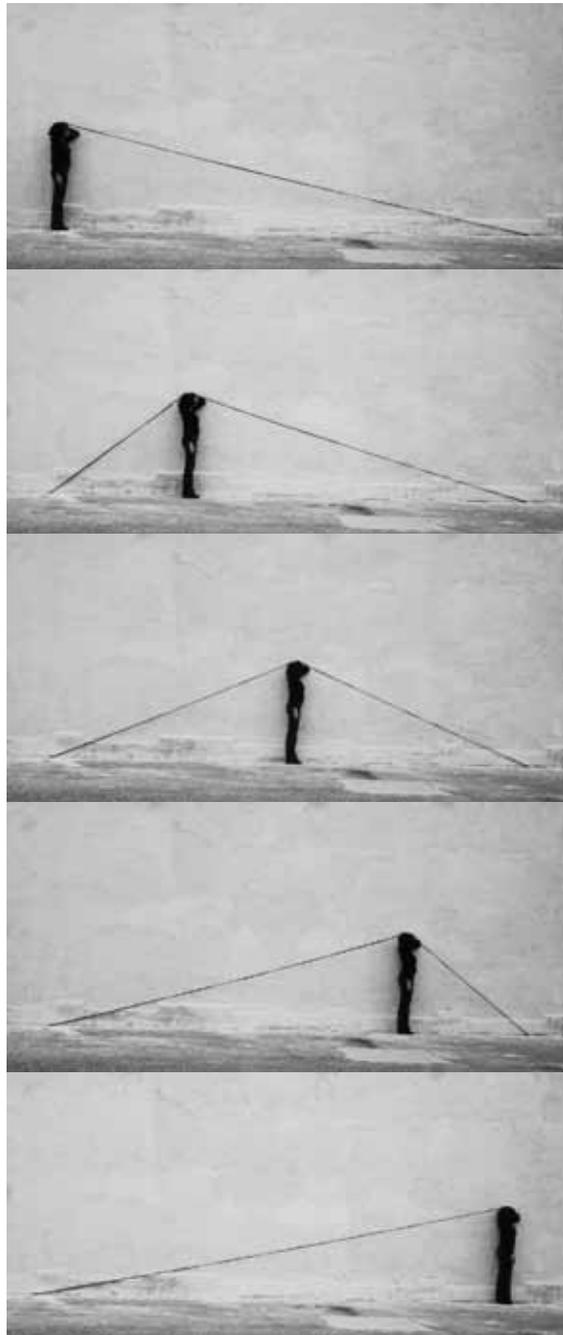
MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Gift of Dinath de Grandi de Grijalbo

R.1491

**ÀNGELS RIBÉ**  
Barcelona, 1942



**3 punts (3)**

**[3 punts (3)], 1973**

Five gelatin silver prints

30.5 x 61 cm, each

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Gift of Dinath de Grandi de Grijalbo

R.1489

**ÀNGELS RIBÉ**  
Barcelona, 1942

## BRUCE NAUMAN

Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1941



Black Stones under Yellow Light

1987

Yellow neon and black marble stones

48 x 500 x 600 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC362

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**My work is about the tension between what is given and what one thinks, about this relationship, and not exactly about what one sees, as many people think.**

Bruce Nauman, interviewed by Celia Montolio, in 'Entrevista con Nauman: el juego de la provocación', *Revista Lápiz* 98 (Madrid: 1993), p. 42.

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Slow Angle Walk. Beckett Walk

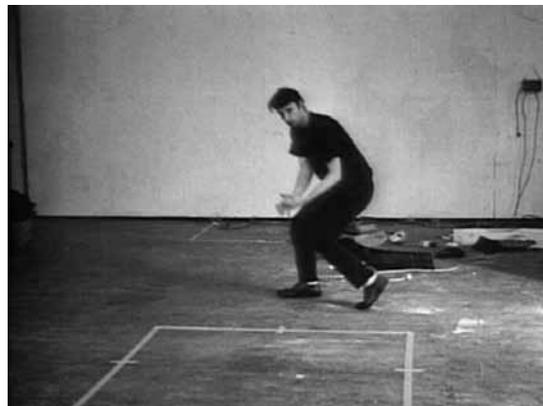
1968

Single-channel video, b/w, sound, 60 min  
 MACBA Collection  
 Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
 R.2223



Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square. Square Dance

16mm film transferred to video, b/w, sound, 8 min  
 MACBA Collection  
 Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
 R.2220



Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rythms

1967-1968

16mm film transferred to video, b/w, sound, 10 min  
 MACBA Collection  
 Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
 R.2219

**BRUCE NAUMAN**  
 Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1941



Untitled

1994

Etching on paper

50.3 x 56 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Private Long-term loan

R.1770

Untitled

1994

Etching on paper

50.3 x 56 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Private Long-term loan

R.1774

Untitled

1994

Etching on paper

50.3 x 56 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Private Long-term loan

R.1773

Untitled

1994

Etching on paper

50.3 x 56 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Private Long-term loan

R.1772

**BRUCE NAUMAN**  
Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1941

## ROBERT SMITHSON

Rutherford, New Jersey, 1938 – Amarillo, Texas, 1973



### Spiral Jetty

1970

16mm film transferred to video, colour, sound, 35 min

MACBA Collection

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium

R.3664

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**As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the *Spiral Jetty*. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake remained rock still. The shore of the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral. No sense wondering about classifications and categories, there were none.**

Robert Smithson, 'The Spiral Jetty', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1996), p. 146.

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**DRAWING IN SPACE**

**MARIO MERZ**

**GEGO**

**ARMANDO ANDRADE TUDELA**

**LEÓN FERRARI**

**WALTERCIO CALDAS**



**A line grows and joins others to form a more complex system – a net, a mesh, a grid. In these works the line serves as a basic unit that is used to create new structures, ranging from free forms that abandon the exactitude of pure geometry and evoke nature, to systems that reflect the composition of our cities. Drawn in the air or on paper, the product of ordered growth or random development, these forms have progressively invaded and organised space, giving rise to balanced systems. The full and the empty are combined in transparent, ethereal structures that have shed the hardness of their essential unity.**

## MARIO MERZ

Milan, 1925 – Turin, 2003



Untitled

1972

Iron, glass, lead, ink and rope

222 x 181 x 60 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

R.40

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**As I see it, the spiral doesn't go straight or sideways: it works in such a way that it carries the twisted path within it and turns it into a straight one. At the same time, inside the spiral the straight line is twisted to the greatest degree possible. Everyone thinks this is the initial power of the world, very famous because you see it in the stars; you see this wonderful spiral. In the end, it doesn't matter whether it's wonderful or it scares you, and in fact it is a bit frightening.**

**The very image of the spiral is terrifying, but it's ancient, so it's rendered less intense in the process, that is, it's mitigated in the geometric process. It's the geometric process that moderates the shock.**

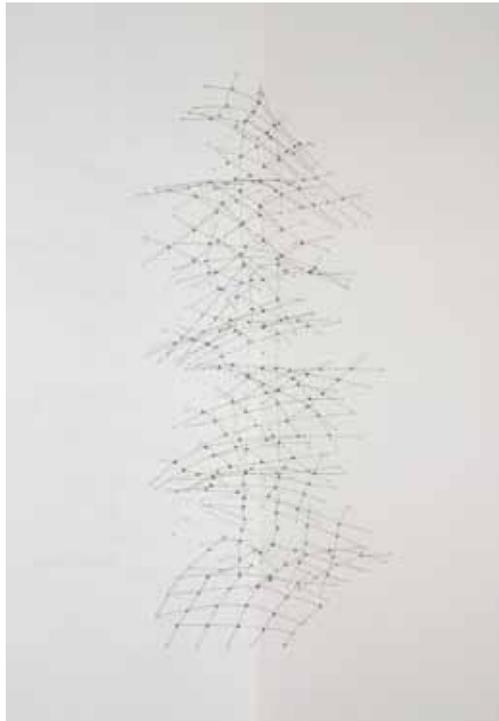
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Mario Merz, interview with Bruno Corà in 'Mario Merz: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... El tetraedro proliferante', in *Mario Merz* [exh. cat.] (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1993), p. 82.

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**GEGO**

Hamburg, 1912 – Caracas, 1994

**Columna 71/9****(Column 71/9), 1971**

Stainless steel and metal

202 x 87 x 85.5 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
Long-term loan from the Alfons Pons Soler Collection

R.2612

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**Air**  
**Space**  
**Vacuum**  
**Light**  
**Serial**

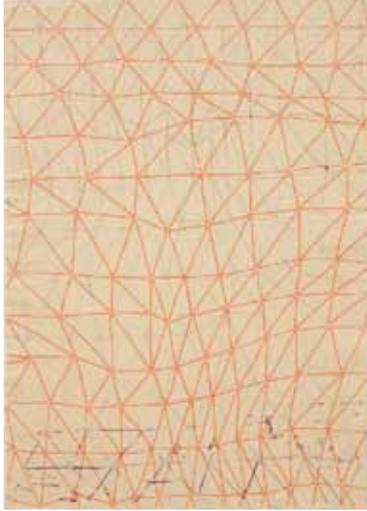
**LINE**

**Endless**  
**triangulation**

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Gego, 'Sabidura 7', in *Sabiduras y otros textos de Gego*, eds. María Elena Huizi and Josefina Manrique (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts-ICAA, Caracas: Fundación Gego, 2005), pp. 67–68.

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Untitled

1970

Ink on paper  
54.7 x 38.7 cm

MACBA Collection

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
Long-term loan from Fundació Gego  
R.3057

Untitled

1969

Ink on paper  
63.2 x 49 cm

MACBA Collection

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
Long-term loan from Fundació Gego  
R.3051

Untitled

1969

Ink on cardboard  
65.4 x 50.1 cm

MACBA Collection

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
Long-term loan from Fundació Gego  
R.3050

Untitled

1970

Ink on paper  
53.2 x 42.1 cm

MACBA Collection

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
Long-term loan from Fundació Gego  
R.3059

**GEGO**

Hamburg, 1912 – Caracas, 1994

## ARMANDO ANDRADE TUDELA

Lima, 1975



Untitled (1)

2008

Rattan and steel  
53.7 x 30.5 x 33.5 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Barcelona City Council Fund  
R.3215



Untitled (2)

2008

Rattan and steel  
51.4 x 37 x 31.5 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Barcelona City Council Fund  
R.3216

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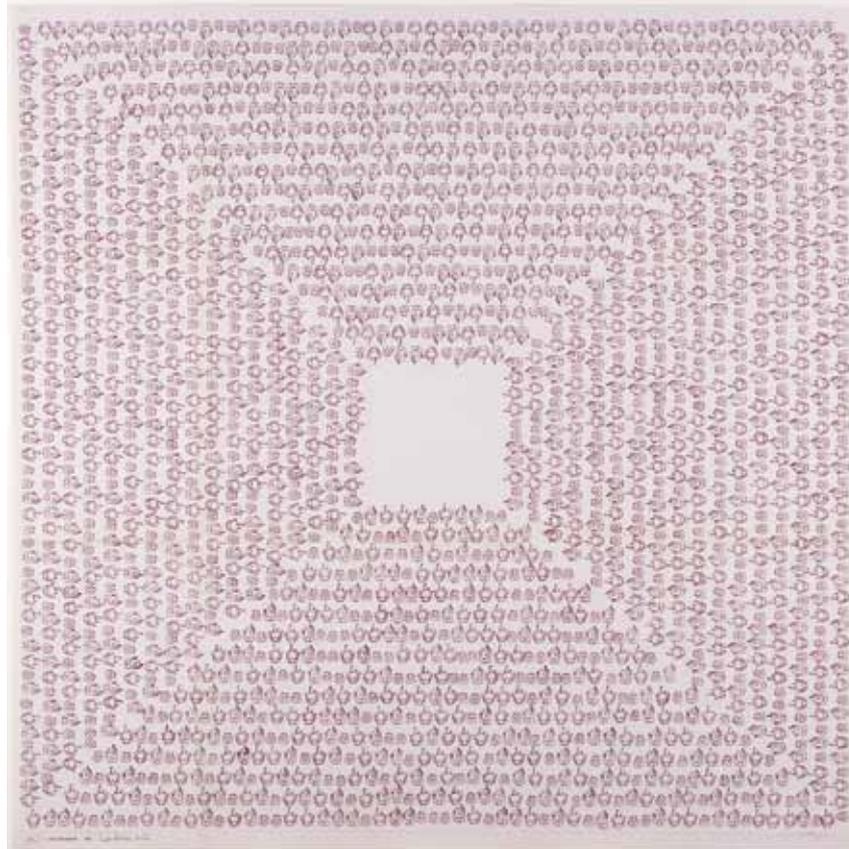
**Rather than presenting a finished product or developing a specific formal language, Andrade Tudela is interested in the character of language and the readability and possibilities of Minimalism and geometric abstraction in its current reception.**

'Torcida: Armando Andrade Tudela', in *Daadgalerie—Exhibitions—Past* [online] (Berlin: Daadgalerie, 2009), accessed 6/10/2011, <[http://www.daadgalerie.de/en/index\\_en.php](http://www.daadgalerie.de/en/index_en.php)>.

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## LEÓN FERRARI

Buenos Aires, 1920



### Espectadores

(Spectators), 1981 (2007)

Heliogravure on paper

98 x 98.6 cm

MACBA Collection

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium

Gift of the artist

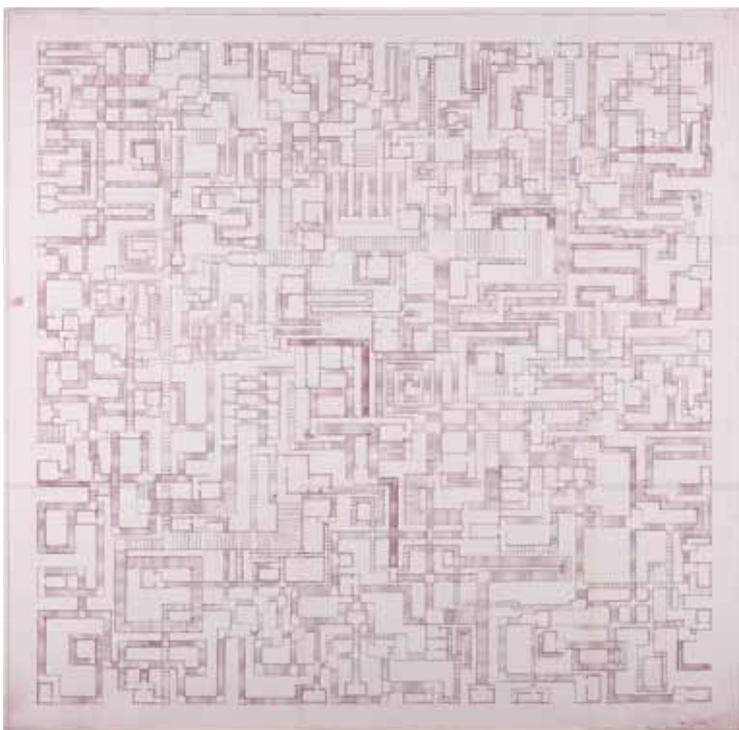
R.2970

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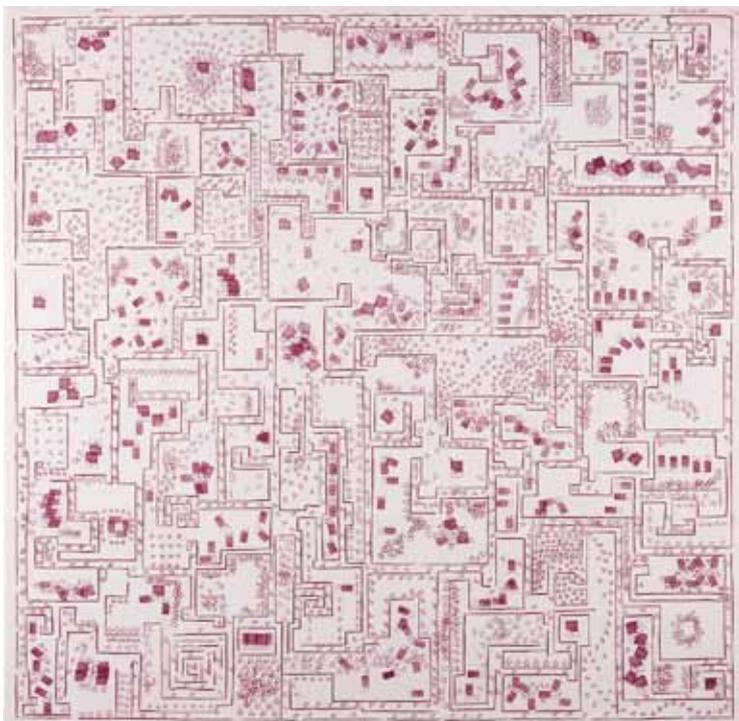
**I pick up a pen and start a line inside a paper rectangle, and the next day another line in another rectangle, and the day after that another one: always in rectangles. I don't alter the perimeter; I don't use scissors to cut out entrances, holes, bays, peninsulas, coves, profiles of shoulders or armpits, to then start the drawing. I don't distort the rectangle: the purity perishes in its destruction.**

León Ferrari, 'Prismas y rectángulos', in *Retrospectiva: obras 1954-2004* [exh. cat.] (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2004), p. 301.

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Escalera  
**(Staircase), 1982 (2007)**  
Heliogravure on paper  
98 x 98.6 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
Gift of the artist  
R.2966



Ciudades  
**(Cities), 1980 (2007)**  
Heliogravure on paper  
98 x 98.6 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
Gift of the artist  
R.2969

**LEÓN FERRARI**  
Buenos Aires, 1920

## WALTERCIO CALDAS

Rio de Janeiro, 1946



Aladim

1988

Polished metal and chromed steel

300 x 120 x 5 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Long-term loan from the Alfons Pons Soler Collection

R.2697

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**Waltercio Caldas's pieces seem to spring from the imaginary and unsettling geometry of water. Successive hindrances within the void, or rather, within the plenum. The only way to face them is by paring down oneself to them, which does not mean annihilation – on the contrary, it means extra vitality being added, incorporating and electrifying them completely until they dissolve. And then one must go on, landing on another one, successively.**

Sônia Salzstein, 'Olhar o mar...', in *Sculptures* [exh. cat.] (Rio de Janeiro: Galeria Sérgio Milliet / Funarte, 1988). Cited in *Waltercio Caldas: 1985–2000* [exh. cat.] (Rio de Janeiro and Brasília: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2001), p. 195.

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**POETIC  
GEOMETRY**

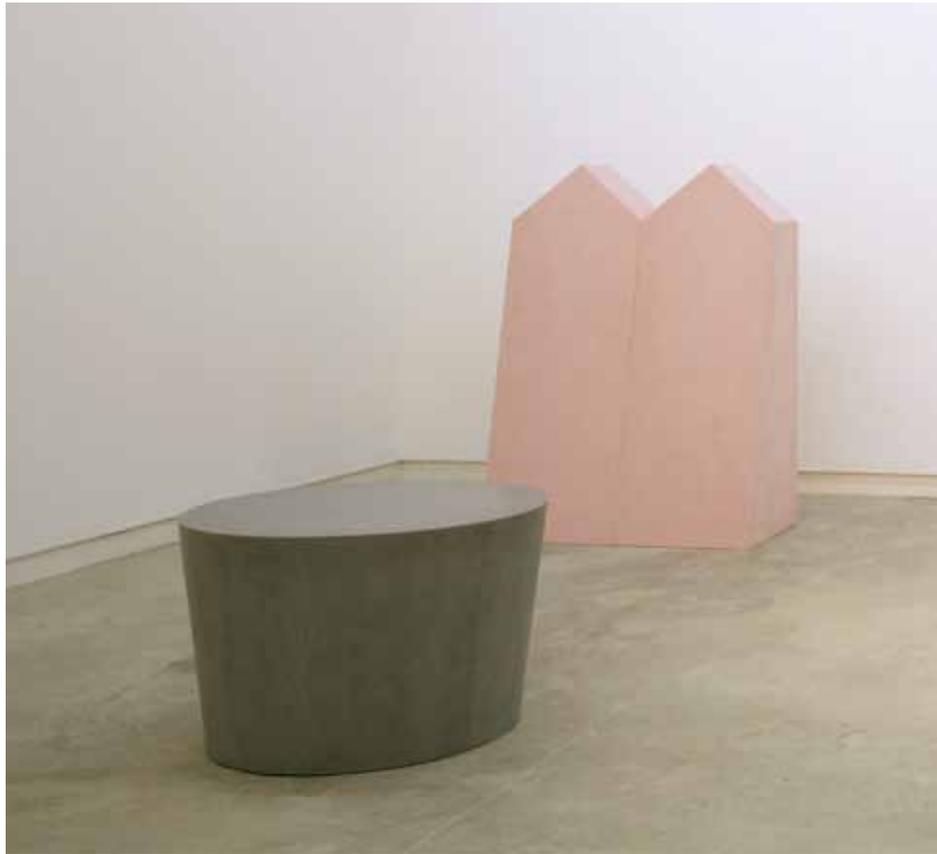
**ETTORE SPALLETTI**



**Spalletti uses simple, monochrome forms that evoke moments in the history of art that have served as reference points for him. For this artist, abstraction does not imply a renunciation of tradition or the place where it originates, but rather the possibility of approaching ideals of order and perfection through the basic components of painting: colour, pure form, light and texture, created in Spalletti's case through the use of powdered pigments. In this installation, the harmony of his geometric forms and the atmosphere he creates through his use of colour transmit a sense of lightness and calm, creating a space conducive to contemplation.**

## ETTORE SPALLETTI

Capelle sul Tavo, Italy, 1940



**Posa**  
**1989**

Coloured stucco on wood  
Pink pieces: 190 x 70 x 70 cm, each  
Grey piece: 70 x 110 cm  
Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation  
AC449

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**To develop a discourse on the appearance of pictorial substance and its effects in terms of reverberation and upwelling, and to avoid diverting attention towards other expressive irradiations, he has reduced the presence of the volumes as much as possible. Their formalisation, which gives body to a column or a parallelepiped, a balance pan or a washbasin, depends on an elementary geometric development, linked to the figures of the square and triangle, the circle and the ellipse.**

Germano Celant, 'Ettore Spalletti: el paraiso del límite', in *Ettore Spalletti* [exh. cat.] (Valencia: IVAM, Centre Julio González, 1992), pp. 67–68.

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**MINIMALISMS  
IN EXPANSION**

**JORDI COLOMER**

**ABSALON**

**JAN VERCRUYSSSE**

**RACHEL WHITEREAD**

**RODNEY GRAHAM**

**SERGI AGUILAR**

**TXOMIN BADIOLA**

**PELLO IRAZU**

**JOSÉ DÁVILA**

**Through the use of simple geometric forms and modular repetitions, these artists appropriate the forms of Minimalism and provide them with new content. Geometry is no longer abstract. The works focus on objects which, though unusable, are brimming with references to our world. While some of the artists stress formal speculation, the majority engage in a dialogue with everyday objects that entails a critical or ironic exploration of the way we construct and inhabit our life spaces.**

## JORDI COLOMER

Barcelona, 1962



El lugar y las cosas

(The place and the things), 1996

Plaster, wood, metal and lamp

114 x 133 x 121.5 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

R.199

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**When Jordi Colomer places his version of the 'arkitekton' on a table, with a lamp illuminating it from above, imitating an explicitly model-like situation, he interprets the intelligible, spiritual form of existence of Malevich's 'arkitekton' – that is, of a deliberately dematerialised object – as a real object created in a real situation in art history, at a real moment in time determined by the historical and real utopian ideas of the revolutionary theory of non-objectiveness, that is, a theory of total balance and absence of conflict. Jordi Colomer's work offers a new perspective on Malevich's act of creation, of transforming a picture of non-objective content into a three-dimensional object paradoxically expressing the vision of non-objectiveness even more sensually and clearly than the two-dimensional abstract picture.**

Lóránd Hegyi, 'Jordi Colomer', in *Abstrakt/Real* (Viena: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1996), p. 168.

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## ABSALON

Ashdod, Israel, 1964 – Paris, 1993



Proposition d'Habitation

(Proposal for a Habitat), 1991

Video, colour, sound, 3 min 38 s

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC869

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**The volumes are constructed in such a way that despite the relatively small sizes, I will not suffer from lack of space. In their quality, these cells are more mental spaces than physical ones. As mirrors of my inner life, they will be familiar to me.**

Absalon, 'Project', in *Cellules* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1993), n. pag.

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## JAN VERCRUYSSSE

Ostende, 1948



### Tombeaux

(Graves), 1989

Painted wood

90 x 250 x 48 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation  
AC450

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**The *tombeaux* cannot be divided into groups or sub-assemblies, but some of them do – in an indefinite space – share certain characteristics. Some of them invest verticality with variable dimensions referring neither to a range nor to a scale but to immediately present internal proportions.**

Alain Cueff, 'XIV Sketches for Tombeaux (Stanza)', in *Jan Verduyssen* [exh. cat.] (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1990), p. 122.

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## RACHEL WHITEREAD

London, 1963



Untitled (Resin corridor)

1995

Resin

21.5 x 137 x 342 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC34

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**My work is concerned with making objects that are constructed from negative spaces: I use a direct casting technique to reveal the negative, manipulating apparently mundane domestic items to produce pieces that surpass their original identity. I think there is a correlation between these domestic items and our physicality.**

Rachel Whiteread, *Aanwinsten = Acquisitions: 1989–1993: Een selectie = A Selection* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1993), p. 74.

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## RODNEY GRAHAM

Abbotsford, Canada, 1949



### Collected Papers

1988

Five copper boxes and books

18 x 51 x 38 cm, each

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC899

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**My Freud sculpture series came out as a 'design solution' to the problem of exhibiting so-called book works. [...] I started designing bookshelves and was led to Judd. I decided to quite literally adapt Judd-like forms to the purpose of housing and displaying books, quite specifically the works of Freud, which concerned me at the time. I was interpolating texts into readymade (published) editions of Freud and it seemed a logical step to insert these books into shelves, i.e. 'interpolate' them into Judds.**

Rodney Graham, 'Joke/Case Histories' (1988), in Dorothea Zwirner, *Rodney Graham: Friedrich Christian Flick Collection* (Cologne: Dumont, 2004), p. 82.

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## SERGI AGUILAR

Barcelona, 1946



**Metálica**

(Metallic), 1987

Steel

123 x 80 x 81 cm

Contemporary Art Collection "la Caixa" Foundation

AC386

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**The wall, the sphere that is projected in the cylinder and the point, the cubes, the prisms, the floor and the marks, the colour, the gold, white, red and black, and the purist accentuation of an irregular geometry are used by Sergi Aguilar for their linguistic function – they are easily recognisable – but above all for their formal capacity to define and express, in themselves, an experience and a personal meaning of life.**

Miquel Molins i Nubiola, 'Sergi Aguilar', in *Sergi Aguilar* [exh. cat.] (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 1991), p. 62.

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## TXOMIN BADIOLA

Bilbao, 1957



Coup de dés

1987

Steel

128 x 120 x 75 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation  
AC299

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**I try to struggle with a hybrid stage in which sculpture is not justified by beauty, by the production process, or by style; but neither is it a demonstration of a conceptual statement, a metalinguistic by-product. This would be a stage in which sculpture is expressed through its inner workings, its structure, and what this may mean or imply in terms of broader considerations, including extra-artistic ones.**

Txomin Badiola, interview with Xabier Saez de Gorbea (1986), in *Malas Formas: Txomin Badiola, 1990–2002* [exh. cat.] (Barcelona: MACBA, 2002), pp. 117–118.

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E. L. El Ruso, 3  
**(E.L. The Russian, 3), 1987**  
Steel  
135.5 x 97 x 63.5 cm  
MACBA Collection  
Barcelona City Council Fund  
R.130

**TXOMIN BADIOLA**  
Bilbao, 1957

## PELLO IRAZU

San Sebastián, 1963



**Tisbe**  
1989

Steel and synthetic paint  
97 x 76 x 114 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation  
ACF0479



**Esquina**

(Corner), 1989

Steel and oil  
19.5 x 16.5 x 28 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation  
TC199

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**[...] I was thinking that maybe, in terms of the legacy of the Russian Constructivists – I don't know – something is being attempted. Because the generation of young Basque sculptors, who believe reality and the work must be dismantled so they can recompose and create their own, remain true to an austere visual mastery of the overall result. This is one of the ways the Constructivist legacy is influencing contemporary Basque art.**

Jorge Oteiza, 'Posmodernidad', in *Oteiza: Propósito experimental* [exh. cat.]  
(Barcelona: Fundación Caja de Pensiones de Barcelona, 1988), p. 270.

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## JOSÉ DÁVILA

Guadalajara, Mexico, 1974



Bicho gigante I

(Giant bug I), 2009

Wood and paint

136 x 125 x 145 cm

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

AC968

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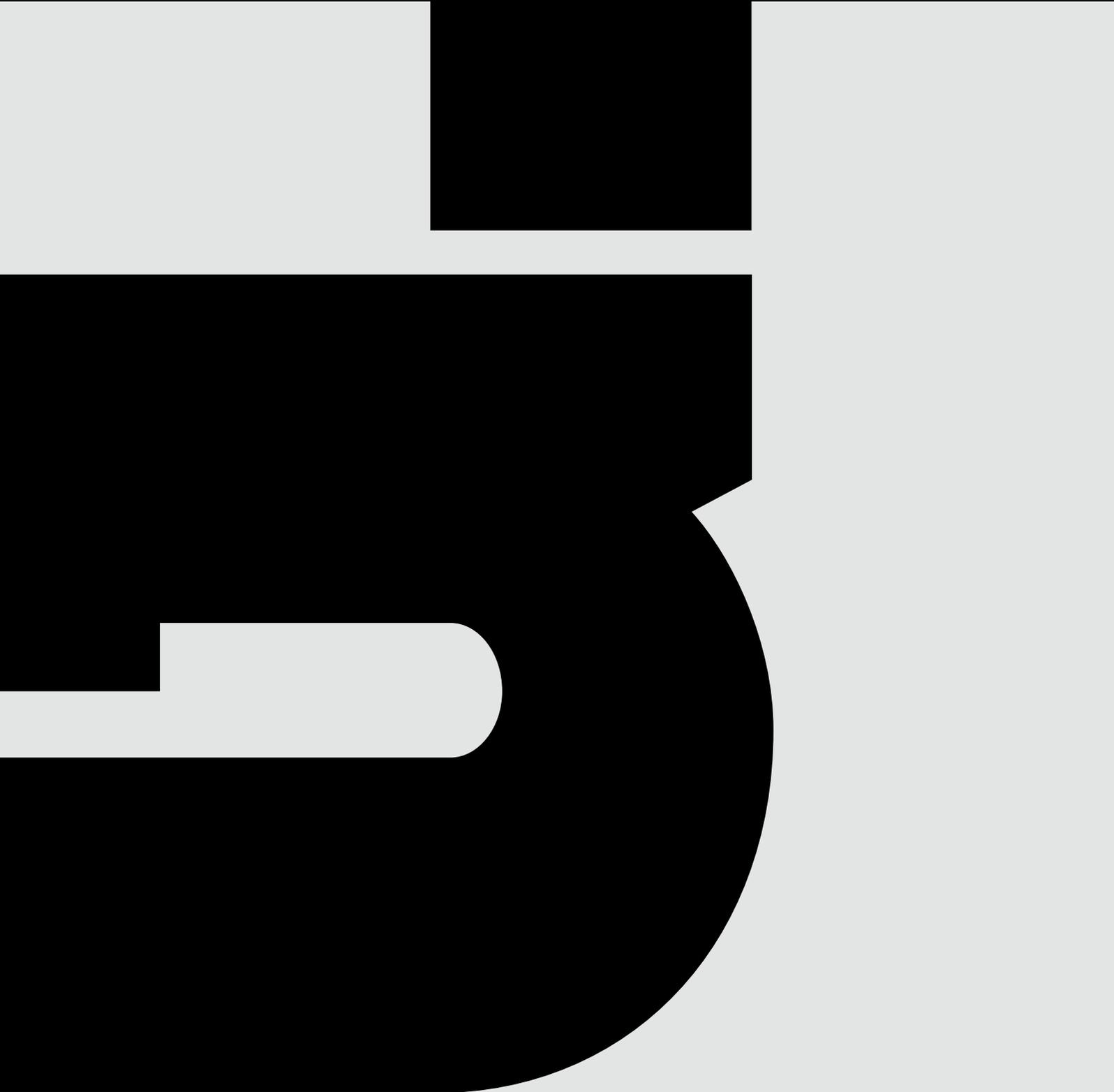
***Bichos gigantes* [Giant bugs] (which references Lygia Clark's matchbox structures) is a sculptural work that also evokes the abstract forms of household furniture and buildings linked to the constructive project of the modern sculpture tradition. But unlike solid sculpture of immutable volumes, in this case the form can be modified; the volumes produced in the space pursue a continuous and ever-changing relationship of balance.**

*José Dávila, Dos más dos igual a cinco: José Dávila (Madrid: Galería Travesía Cuatro, 2009).*

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**GEOMETRIC  
STRATEGIES**

**DAMIÁN ORTEGA**



**If geometric forms were conceived as abstractions divorced from time and place, how are they to be interpreted when they appear in a context as specific as the outskirts of a city? Damián Ortega disassociates these forms from idealism and makes them the protagonists of a narrative. Basing his work on the manoeuvres described in *The Art of War* – a Chinese treatise on military strategy that dates to the sixth century AD – Ortega uses the geometrical form of a brick to metaphorically represent the depersonalisation of the subject in an organised system. In this re-enactment, geometry is a means of representing the subject's loss of identity: the form of the whole predominates over the basic unit that gives rise to it. In this way, Ortega highlights the fragility of these seemingly solid systems: the toppling of a single module leads to the collapse of the entire system.**

## DAMIÁN ORTEGA

Mexico City, 1967



### Nine Types of Terrain

2007

Nine 16mm projections

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation  
ACF0078

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**The idea of *terrain* marks a very important difference between the physical and geographical space and the space for situations and happenings, something immaterial and fickle, displaced by the currents of the surrounding forces. The intention was to acknowledge the implicit fight unavoidably established between the natural and the constructed space, that is to say, the topographic space and the geometric space of the intervention.**

Damián Ortega, 'Nueve tipos de terreno', in Jessica Morgan et al, *Damián Ortega: Do It Yourself* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art; New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2009), p. 172.

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Damián Ortega, Nine Types of Terrain, 2007



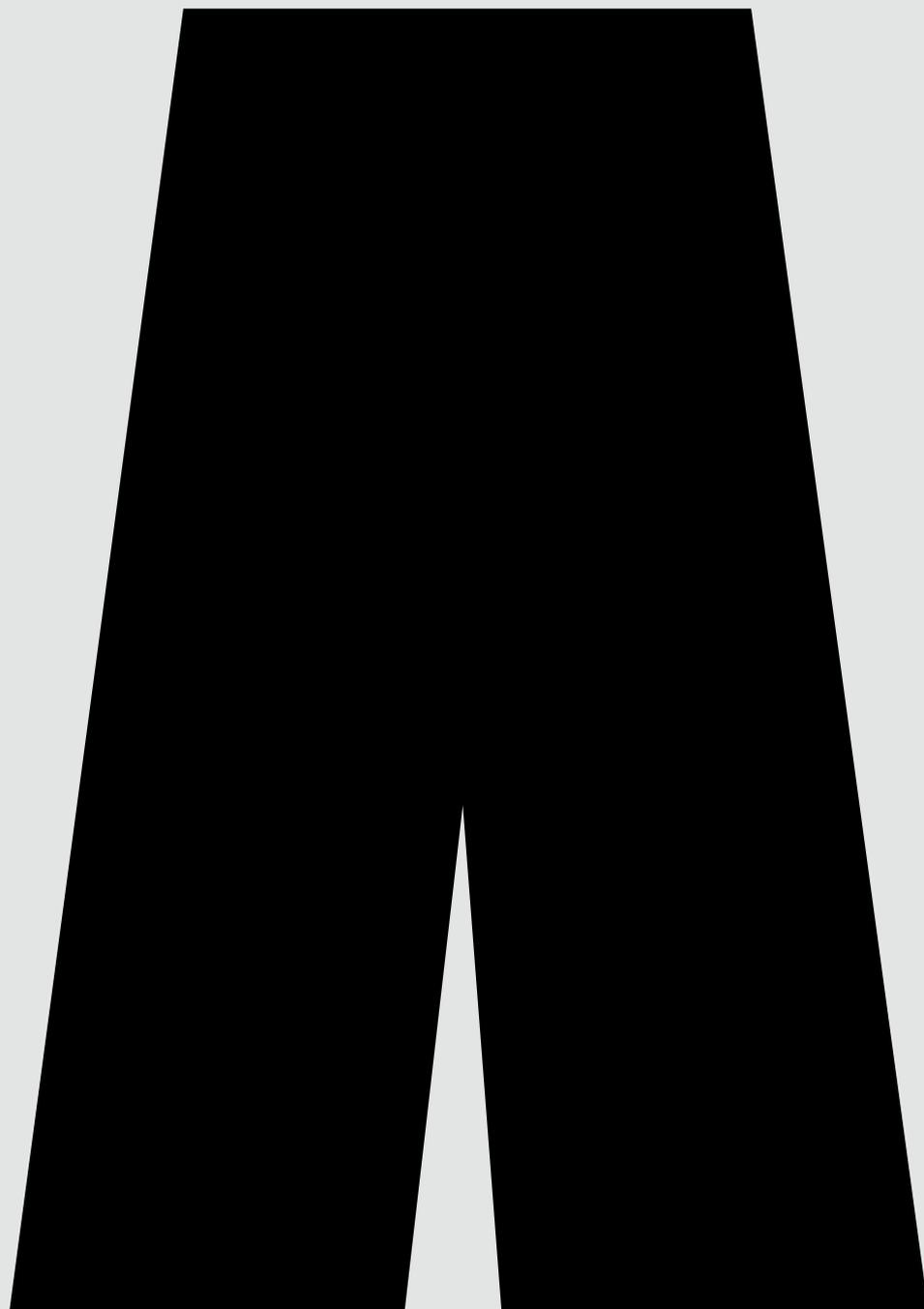
Damián Ortega, Nine Types of Terrain, 2007



Damián Ortega, Nine Types of Terrain, 2007

**INTERSECTIONS  
IN ARCHITECTURE**

**DAN GRAHAM  
GORDON MATTA-CLARK  
MATT MULLICAN  
DAVID MALJKOVIĆ**



**These artists explore geometry through architecture and the role it plays in organising private and public space. From this common starting point, they pursue a range of approaches to examine the idea of boundaries: the ones that separate what is private from what is shared, the ones that circumscribe our movements within an organised space, and the ones created in totalitarian systems to keep the official record of the past apart from histories consigned to oblivion. From a variety of perspectives, Gordon Matta-Clark, Dan Graham, Matt Mullican and David Maljković show us that architecture itself and the limits it establishes reflect social relationships that exist in a specific historical context and space.**

## DAN GRAHAM

Urbana, Illinois, 1943



### Alteration to a Suburban House

1978–1987

Detail

Plywood, fitted carpet, lightweight cardboard,

balsa wood, mirror, card and plexiglas

184 x 267 x 120 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

R.2572

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**I wanted to integrate the external space into the visual dialogue and, by getting rid of the wall, I created *Alterations to a Suburban House* and the first *Two-Way Mirror Pavilions*, in an attempt to project myself into the surrounding landscape. [...] I believe I was influenced by Robert Venturi's attack against Mies van der Rohe's aesthetics of the time. However, the more I investigated the reasons for this critical approach, the more I appreciated the beauty of Mies's viewpoint. So I tried to get Mies and Venturi, two opposites, to interact. *Alterations to a Suburban House* is a combination between Farnsworth House and the curving of the façade towards the nearby buildings that we find in Venturi's early projects, as well as the use he makes of the single-family suburban house.**

Dan Graham, interviewed by Pietro Valle, in *Artland* [online] (15/5/2002), accessed 23/10/2011, <[http://architettura.it/artland/20020515/index\\_en.htm](http://architettura.it/artland/20020515/index_en.htm)>.

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Dan Graham, Alteration to a Suburban House, 1978–1987

# GORDON MATTA-CLARK

New York, 1947–1978

Documentation of *Conical Intersect*, executed in Paris in 1975

6 photographs



Conical Intersect

1975

Gelatin silver print photo collage

26.9 x 31.7 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

R.1879

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**The first thing one notices is that violence has been done. Then the violence turns into visual order and, hopefully, then to a sense of heightened awareness. [...] You see that light enters places it otherwise couldn't. Angles and depths can be perceived where they should have been hidden. Spaces are available to move through that were previously inaccessible. [...] My hope is that the dynamism of the action can be seen as an alternative vocabulary with which to question the static, inert building environment.**

Gordon Matta-Clark, interviewed in Antwerp (1977), in Bruce Jenkins, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Conical Intersect* (London: Afterall Books, College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, 2011), p. 40.

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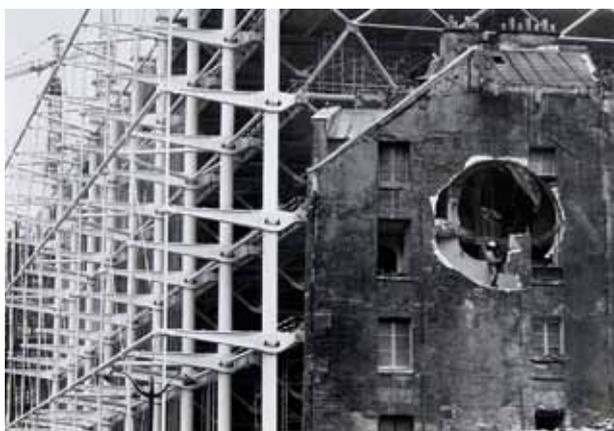
**Conical Intersect 1**

**1975**

Gelatin silver print  
20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection  
R.4132



**Conical Intersect 4**

**1975**

Gelatin silver print  
20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection  
R.4135



**Conical Intersect 5**

**1975**

Gelatin silver print  
18 x 24 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection  
R.4136

Conical Intersect 2

1975

Gelatin silver print

25.3 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4133



Conical Intersect 3

1975

Gelatin silver print

25.3 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4134



Documentation of *Splitting*, executed in New Jersey in 1974  
8 photographs



Splitting

1974

Super 8mm film transferred to video, b/w and colour, silent  
11 min 5 s

MACBA Collection, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Consortium  
R. 3127

**GORDON MATTA-CLARK**  
New York, 1947–1978



**Splitting 9**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.4 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4159



**Splitting**

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.4 x 20.7 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4150



**Splitting 7**

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.5 x 20.2 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4157



**Splitting 8**

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.4 x 20.6 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4158

Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting, 1974



**Splitting 3**

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.3 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4153



**Splitting 6**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.6 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4156

**Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting, 1974**



**Splitting 4**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.7 x 25.4 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4154



**Splitting 1**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.4 x 25.4 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4151

Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting, 1974

Documentation of *Genoa*,  
executed in Genoa in 1973



Genoa Datum Cut 73

1977

Gelatin silver print

16.4 x 24.1 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection  
R.4121

**GORDON MATTA-CLARK**  
New York, 1947–1978

Documentation of *Bronx Floors*,  
executed in the Bronx, New York in 1972–1973



Tenements

1977

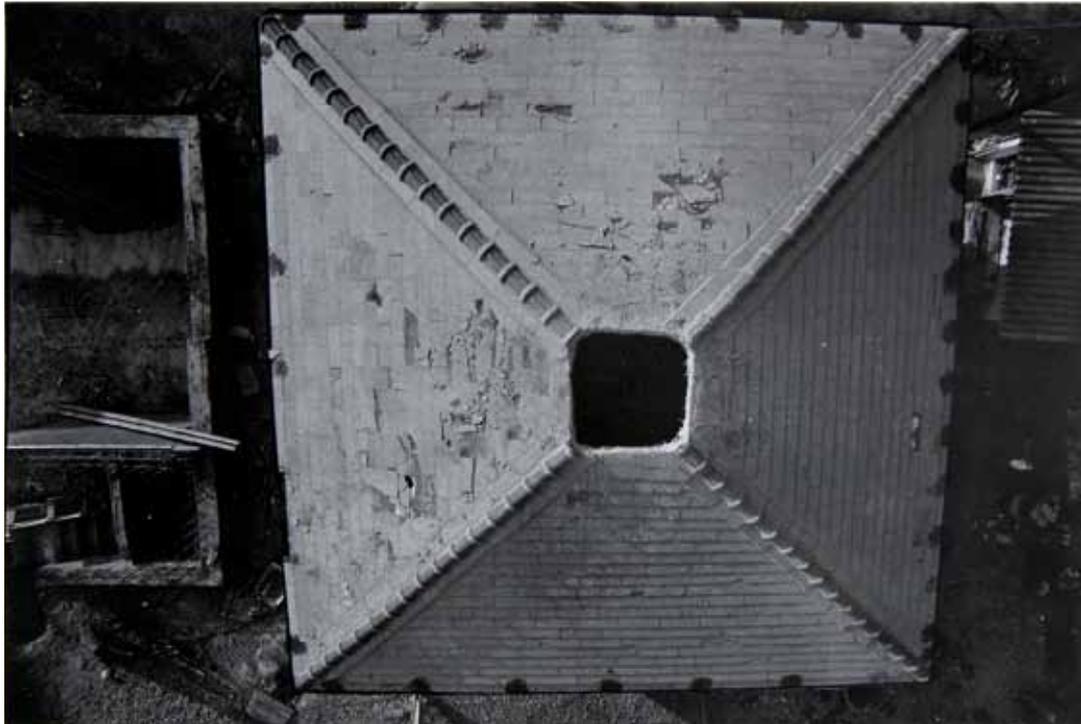
Gelatin silver print  
25.3 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection  
R.4120

**GORDON MATTA-CLARK**  
New York, 1947–1978

Documentation of *Atrium Roof*,  
executed in Genoa in 1973  
4 photographs



Atrium Roof 5

1977

Gelatin silver print

16.1 x 24.2 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4119



Atrium Roof 1

1977

Gelatin silver print

16.1 x 24.2 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4116



Atrium Roof 3

1977

Gelatin silver print

16.1 x 24.2 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4117



Atrium Roof 4

1977

Gelatin silver print

16.1 x 24.2 cm

MACBA Collection

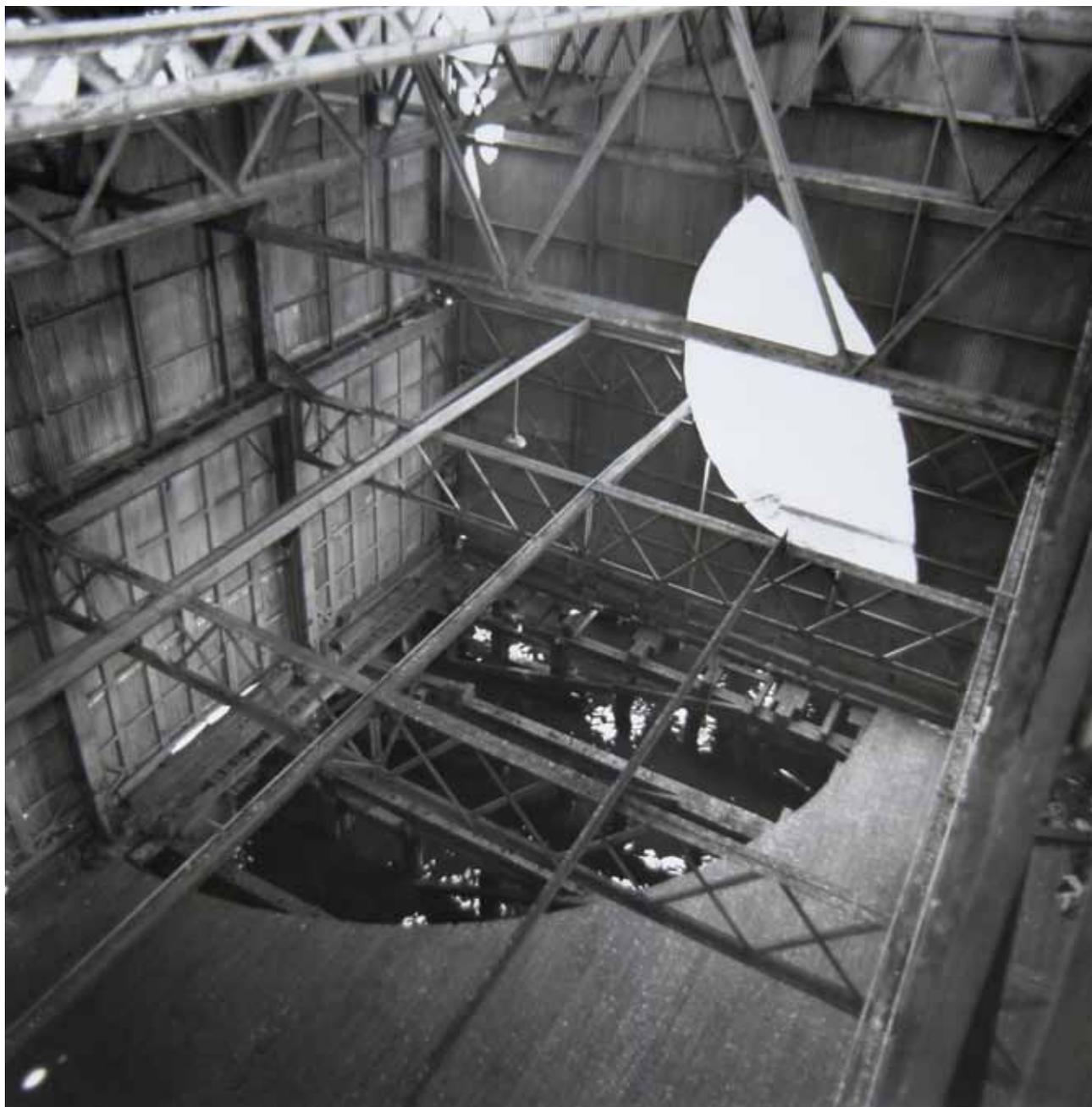
Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4118

**GORDON MATTA-CLARK**  
New York, 1947–1978

Documentation of *Day's End*,  
executed in New York in 1975  
3 photographs



Day's End (Pier 52) 2

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.4 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4139

**GORDON MATTA-CLARK**

New York, 1947–1978



**Day's End (Pier 52) 1**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4138

**Day's End (Pier 52) 3**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4140



Documentation *Office Baroque*,  
executed in Antwerp in 1977  
6 photographs



Office Baroque, Views of 2nd Floor and Removed Section

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, LATA Collection

R.4149

**GORDON MATTA-CLARK**

New York, 1947–1978



**Office Baroque**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4144

**Office Baroque 2**

1977

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4145



**Office Baroque, 3rd Floor**

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.3 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4146

**Office Baroque, 4th Floor**

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.3 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4147

**Office Baroque, 5th Floor**

1977

Gelatin silver print

25.3 x 20.3 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4148

Documentation of *Circus-Caribbean Orange*,  
executed in Chicago in 1978  
5 photographs



Circus 3

1978

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.3 cm

MACBA Collection

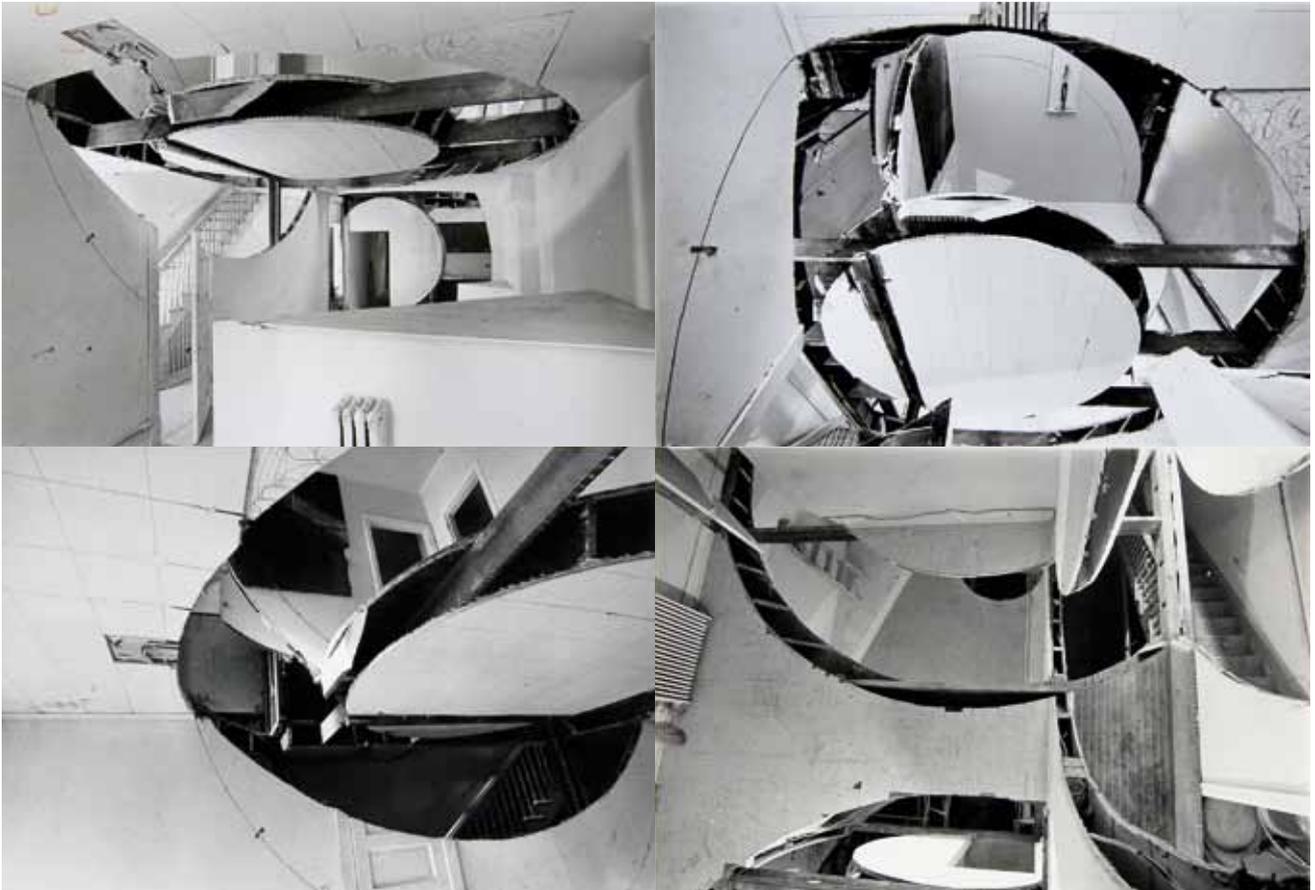
Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

LATA Collection

R.4129

**GORDON MATTA-CLARK**

New York, 1947–1978



**Circus 1**

1978

Gelatin silver print  
20.3 x 25.3 cm  
MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
LATA Collection  
R.4127

**Circus 2**

1978

Gelatin silver print  
20.3 x 25.3 cm  
MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
LATA Collection  
R.4129

**Circus 4**

1978

Gelatin silver print  
20.6 x 25.3 cm  
MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
LATA Collection  
R.4130

**Circus 5**

1978

Gelatin silver print  
20.4 x 25.3 cm  
MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
LATA Collection  
R.4131

## MATT MULLICAN

Santa Monica, California, 1951



Untitled (Folder I, Solway), MIT Project

1988

[Element of the installation MIT Project, 1990–2009]

Offset lithograph on paper

21 lithographs: 55.7 x 38 cm, each

Folder: 59.5 x 40.5 x 5 cm

MACBA Collection

Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

R.3620.010

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**In a sense, subconsciously, I was a perfect choice to make a work at MIT. Because I am in a sense duplicating an artificial world in much the way a school does. To learn the way people do, to make a model of something that's a way of understanding the real thing. Whatever the real thing is.**

Matt Mullican, interview with Michael Tarantino, in *Matt Mullican: The MIT Project* [exh. cat.] (Massachusetts: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1990), p. 32.

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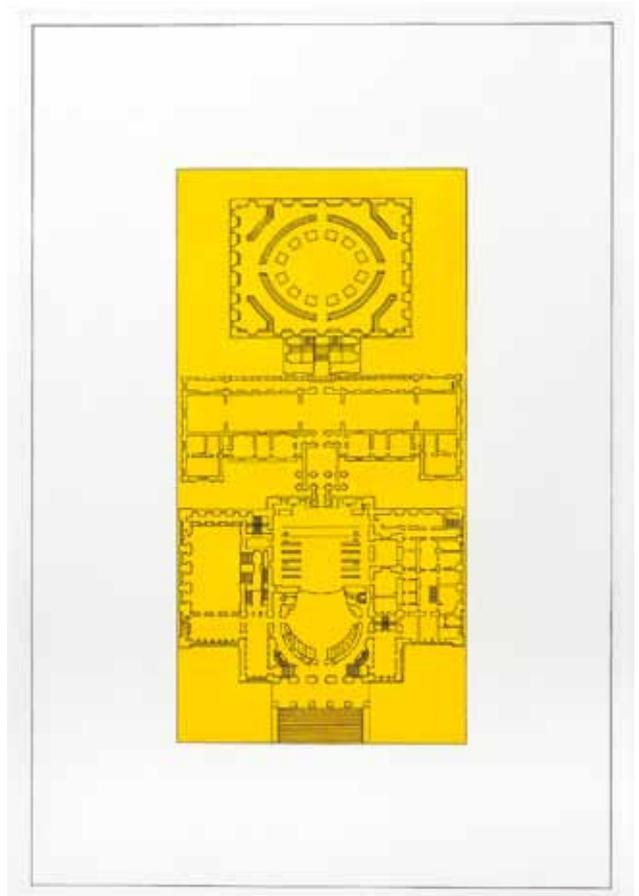


**General view of the installation *M.I.T. Project*  
at the exhibition *Time as Material:*  
*MACBA Collection – New Additions*  
15 May – 31 August 2009**

*M.I.T. Project* was first presented in 1990, shortly after the artist completed *Computer Project*, for which he had used a computer to create a complex two-dimensional map of an imaginary city. In contrast, *M.I.T. Project* is a three-dimensional work that viewers can enter and move around in. The space, divided into five interconnected compartments, is composed of ideograms that are formally organised but have no determinate meaning. In this uninhabited world, different levels of perception, from the tangible to the intangible, are represented by colours. The green zone refers to the realm of material elements. The blue zone represents the quotidian, the city, the day-to-day order of people and actions. The yellow rectangle in the centre corresponds to the arts and sciences. The black space represents language, and a semicircle with red walls represents the subjective realm – pure meaning.



Matt Mullican, Untitled (Folder I, Solway), M.I.T. Project, 1988



Matt Mullican, Untitled (Folder I, Solway), M.I.T. Project, 1988



Untitled

1992

Lead glass window, metal frame

192 x 98.5 x 2 cm, each

Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

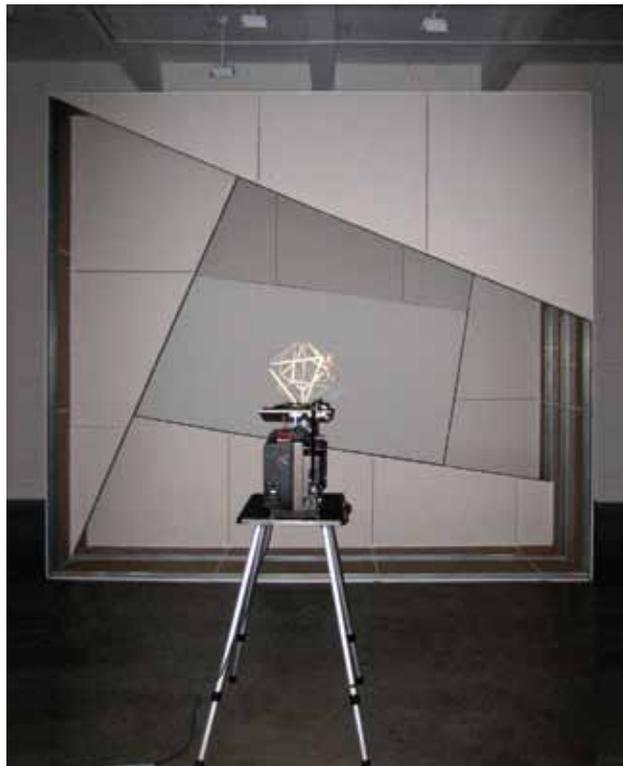
Three pieces (AC956, AC958, AC957)

**MATT MULLICAN**

Santa Monica, California, 1951

## DAVID MALJKOVIĆ

Zagreb, 1973



### Images with Their Own Shadows

2008

16mm film, colour, sound,  
6 min 16 s; plasterboard structure

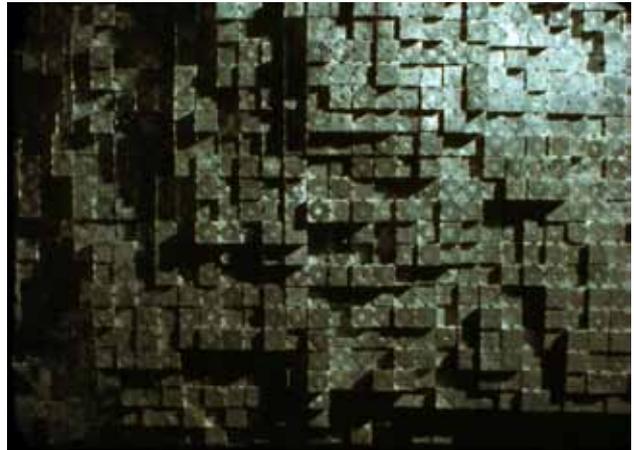
Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation  
AC962

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**If one proceeds in principle from the dependency of the concept of time on the concept of causality, roughly in the sense that the cause occurs before its effects, and the past cannot be changed and influenced from the present, with his idiosyncratic intermeshing of future, past and present, Maljković seems to question these reciprocal interactions. This holds for his own production, which never runs in a linear fashion, but rather in the form of a spiral.**

Yilmaz Dziewior, 'Back to the Future', in *David Maljković: Almost Here* [exh. cat.]  
(Hamburg: Kunstverein in Hamburg, Dumont, 2007), p. 12.

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David Maljković, Images with Their Own Shadows, 2008

## **TEXTS**

### **RECIPROCAL**

Julian Heynen

### **THE GAZE THAT DRAWS**

Elena Vozmediano

### **MINIMALIST POETICS IN EXPANSION**

Peio Aguirre

### **ORTEGA, STRATEGIST**

Sergio González Rodríguez

### **PRIVATE COSMOLOGIES**

Núria Enguita

## RECIPROCAL

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Strange – why do Bruce Nauman’s works make me *think* of the *body* but *feel* its *geometry*? Shouldn’t it be exactly the opposite, with emotions being about the body and thoughts being about the geometry? Yet maybe precisely this reversal of one’s expectations, this crossover of one’s perceptions may take us straight to the heart of the matter: reciprocity as a deeply Naumanesque device in his art and thinking?

### Concealed source of emotion

A game with two balls acquires an added edge by being confined to a square marked out on the floor. A dancer’s movements and rhythms are prescribed by a segmented rectangle. The right-angled corner of a room becomes the scene of a gravitational exercise in attraction and repulsion. And in the grotesque *Slow Angle Walk*, inspired by Samuel Beckett, the right angles of the space have taken possession of the body. These **performances**, without audience, filmed by Nauman in his studio in 1967 and 1968, in fact involved two actors: the body of the artist and immutable geometry. The marked-up space is not only an arena, it is also a partner. It sets parameters that the artist works with and against. By the late 1960s there was already something of a history in modern dance of physical space as an ‘active’ element. And the radically different role of the dance audience also impacted on Nauman’s expansion of sculptural issues. Every so often he rotates the video image by 90° – a sudden

destabilisation of the viewer's perception that is closely related to the performer's own balancing exercises.

In the studio videos, the viewer's attention is initially concentrated on the moving body of the performer. With its at times contrived movements, the body's actions and expression appear oddly distant. There is no story being told here, no emotions transmitted; nor is the viewer being directly addressed by a person. Any attempts on the part of the viewer to empathise with the figure founder in the face of its 'thingness', for the performance plays out different permutations involving items in the studio space, making no distinction between objects and bodies. The geometry in this game does not provide the key to the action, but is rather part of the unresolved tension between perceiving, experiencing and feeling. In stark contrast to its reputation, geometry here appears to be a concealed source of emotion.

### Between fascination and flight

Nauman's approach to his block sculptures from the 1970s began with a text. First, in *Consummate Mask of Rock* (1975), he created a seemingly logically structured reflection on the interplay of revealing and concealing. In the same vein as the game of chance 'scissors, paper, stone', it lists a litany of conflicting human conditions and behaviours. The result is a sense of overwhelming complexity and painful contrariness somewhere between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Samuel Beckett. It was only then that he arrived at a sculpture comprising two groups of eight stone blocks in slightly different sizes. This was later followed by similar works, some in geometric arrangements, some much freer, with the individual elements comprising both cubes and three-dimensional parallelograms. *Black Stones under Yellow Light* is particularly striking for its material and the powerful yellow glow flooding the space and the work. Everything possible was done to prevent the clear geometric forms from being taken in simply, at a single glance. The blocks, close together yet not touching, are arranged in an 'X' shape, corner to corner. Thus the calm shapes of the blocks seem to expand outwards into a dynamic rhombus shape. The blocks themselves are alternately very slightly larger and smaller – so the geometry of the piece palpably seems to vibrate. Placed closed to the walls around it, the unsettling quality of the geometry of the sculpture seems to infect the surrounding space – distorting planes and angles. However clearly individual elements and their configuration may be described, when it comes to the overall

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*Consummate Mask of Rock* → Online text  
<<http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~richie/poetry/html/auoem38.html>>.

*Black Stones under Yellow Light* → p. 40

effect of the work, the geometry of the sculpture and the space seems somehow out of kilter. So what might merely be a restrained game with forms triggers a disturbing psychological moment. Lingering within the sphere of influence of this work, viewers feel a subtle strain on their inner resources. And this is further compounded by the yellow light. With its industrial harshness, it exposes objects and people to all-round observation. At the same time it also emotionalises the experience. Even after viewers have left the room, purple and black after-images still swim before their eyes. The rationale of a precisely calculated and fully comprehensible geometric configuration – along with the physical solidity and authority of marble – suddenly flips into the imponderables of a psychophysical experience. Control and loss of control intersect. For all its potential symbolism (as a cross, as an 'X'), the geometry appears as disturbing as it is factual, triggering a sense of the space and of oneself that vacillates between fascination and the urge to take flight.

## Hand and word

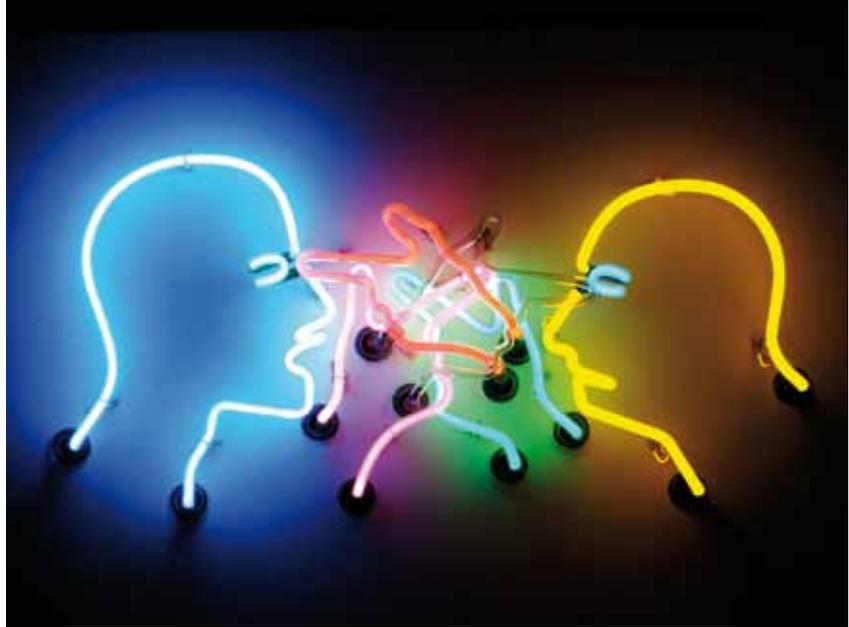
The hand sets language free, to quote the anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan. And vice versa, one might think, in connection with Nauman's work. For in his case language sets the hand, the body, the sculpture free. Thus the saying *From Hand to Mouth* (1967) literally becomes sculpture – a cast of the human body between the hand and the mouth. The result constitutes a continuous, organic connection between touching and speaking, between grasping and articulating, between *physis* and giving meaning. In his early experiments in spatial perception and self-perception, verbal factors often complement (or contradict) investigations into materials and the mind. In this context, hands are specifically presented as interfaces between the body and the intellect, between perception and structuring, between self-reassurance and communication. 'Eloquent' hands hold confusing 'soliloquies' on pressure, touch and duplication, or they feature in neon works as 'communication tools' of a particularly aggressive kind. In videos they demonstrate magic tricks or work in pairs as hyper-realistic bronze sculptures performing a kind of static sign-ballet. Whereas in 1967 Nauman drew a schematic map of his own hand, in **works on paper done in 1994**, the focus is on the possible movements of the fingers and their ability to convey expression and signs. Some of these 'figures' may be aimless games, others could be setting standards or specifying a form, yet others recall everyday coded hand signals used at work or in sports. But none of these finger games is in any



Bruce Nauman  
*Fifteen Pairs of Hands*, 1996  
© Sarah Stierch

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*From Hand to Mouth* → Watch online  
<[http://hirshhorn.si.edu/visit/collection\\_object.asp?key=32&subkey=2754](http://hirshhorn.si.edu/visit/collection_object.asp?key=32&subkey=2754)>.  
**works on paper done in 1994** → p. 42



Bruce Nauman. *Double Poke in the Eye*, 1985

sense cut and dried. Something similar – no less confusing – is seen in the recent video *Combinations Described* (2011). Two outstretched hands, constantly alternating, play out all the possible combinations of eight fingers and two thumbs. At the same time, a series of voices describe the gestures. In one sense it is an exercise in physical self-discipline, playful control of one's own *physis*. In another sense, the hands send out silent signals, which others turn into language. As well as this dual, geometric play of hands, there is also something of an arithmetical subtext, for the fingers also use gestures (varying from culture to culture) to denote numbers. Thus a sister of geometry also comes into play. And in the finger signs, it is striking to see the geometric framework of these gestures involving a combination of acute and obtuse angles. Although these of course derive from the anatomy of the hand, they also call to mind Nauman's predilection for non-rectangular, skewed forms, which – not least in his block sculptures – determine the dynamics of the sculptural event. Even in the organic configurations of the hands there is still an (underlying) sense of direction and a game with geometric figures – in the same way that the body of the performer in the video is also tied to the stereometrics of the space.

## Reciprocal

A reciprocal in mathematics is obtained by interchanging the numerator and denominator. Placed side by side, the two fractions imply an X-shaped figure, with the digits connecting diagonally across the vinculum. The image of a reciprocal could also be used to describe the relationship of body and geometry in Nauman's work. Not only in that the two mutually influence each other, but even more so, in the sense that where one expects the body, there lurks geometry, and where one looks at geometry, a body is revealed. Unsettling, contradictory, engaging – or *Stirrings Still*, to quote the title of Beckett's last text.

Translated from the German by Fiona Elliott

## THE GAZE THAT DRAWS

Elena Vozmediano

Art critic

The works by Francesc Torres included in this exhibition date from between 1968 and 1973, while those by Àngels Ribé were executed between 1970 and 1973. At that time, both artists were very young (Torres was twenty in 1968), but they kept up on the latest European and American art trends. In 1966 Ribé went to Paris to study sociology, and the following year Torres also moved to the city, where he enrolled at the School of Fine Arts. In 1968 and 1969, both artists worked as assistants in the studio of the sculptor Piotr Kowalski (though not at the same time). Kowalski was a role model for them in terms of the work ethic and research skills involved in artistic practice. In 1969 they returned to Barcelona, but a few years later, in 1972, they moved to Chicago, and in 1973 they relocated to New York.

We can observe two distinct groups of works: sculptures and photographs. Apart from the obvious diversity of media, these groups differ in terms of the artist's underlying intention. Francesc Torres's cube sculptures, executed in Paris, are generally regarded as one of the few Spanish examples of late Minimalism. They were created at a time when the movement had barely any followers in Spain: Nacho Criado, Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, Josep Ponsatí, Antoni Abad, and very few others. Kowalski, an architect and scientist as well as an artist, regularly made use of geometric forms. In the late 1960s, when Torres frequented his workshop, he worked on a long series of cube sculptures in various materials. It is also important to note that during the previous decade Jorge de Oteiza had explored geometric forms (emptied cubes) and sparked considerable interest among young artists.

Torres's work reflects the confluence of a European tradition rooted in Constructivism, an essentially American experience of Minimalism, and a new attitude that calls into question this formalist

legacy and advocates a subjective and active experience of the work. In 1968 he executed two series of 'cut-out' sculptures in cardboard. One, made using white-coated pieces, combines geometry and visual poetry made using Letraset letters. The other, in which the sculptures are painted uniform colours, 'perverts' the cubic form by creating clefts, projections, and modifications to the regularity of the dimensions. The works are **prototypes** that Torres intended to use to make editions: forms cut in a sheet of cardboard or Plexiglas, which buyers would use to assemble their own sculptures. In *Sculptura* (1969), a work in the first series, the artist uses letters as plastic elements. The letters that form the title of the piece take on volume and float in a Plexiglas case full of water; they move under the force of gravity, forming nonexistent words. The work, an example of the concrete poetry Torres practised early in his career, reflects the influence of Joan Brossa and some of the artists with whom Torres ended up sharing a studio on Barcelona's Calle Gran de Gràcia before leaving for Chicago.

While the work produced by Torres and Ribé in Paris was mainly sculpture, in Barcelona they took up other artistic practices related to Conceptual Art, which in Catalonia was being pursued by a very active group of practitioners whose work had marked political overtones. Like other artists in these circles, they absorbed a diverse range of influences, from a strongly linguistic tendency to Body Art and Land Art. From the outset, the work of Àngels Ribé (which at the time she signed as 'A. Ribé' to avoid any gender bias) was close to Actionism and Land Art. In most of her work, the artist's own body is seen performing some action, though her pieces cannot be described as performance art. In line with the theme of the exhibition, the works of both artists that are presented have a strong geometric component which lies in something 'that happens'. In both Torres's and Ribé's work these events are ephemeral and leave no trace other than their photographic documentation. Francesc Torres shows us 'visual events'; Ribé uses her body to create 'ephemeral sculptures'. But both make use of an element that is central to these works: light.

In Catalonia their interest was drawn to the four elements as 'materials' for art. Torres, even at this Post-Minimalist stage, had made sculptures using water, wind and gas, and in 1969 Ribé had produced a series of *Intersecciones* [Intersections] created out of light, waves and rainwater. The Catalan group of conceptual artists had embarked on a number of collective projects along these lines, including *1279 m<sup>2</sup>* in Vilanova de la Roca (1972) and *Tierra, aire, agua y fuego* [Earth, air, water and fire], held

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prototypes → pp. 30–31

*Sculptura* → p. 32

at the headquarters of the Association of Architects of Valencia (1973). In the United States, some of the first events in which they participated were related to art and nature. Both were selected for *Outdoors–Indoors*, held at the Evanston Arts Centre in Chicago (1973), and both exhibited at *Nature into Art* at the University of Chicago (1973). There are a number of common features to the way the two artists approach interaction with nature. They are interested in an essentialised form of nature (the four elements) but as manifested in a quotidian environment, whether domestic, natural (though this is less frequent, except in the *Intersecciones*) or urban – a nature that is ‘idealised’ (in the sense in which the word is used in classical theory) through geometry but, paradoxically, revealed by means of corporal experience, whether physical or perceptual. Their work has a poetic dimension that is not unrelated to the rhythm introduced by the sequentiality of photography, and what can be perceived by the senses, sensations, carries a lot of weight in the experience. But this experience is essentially intellectual and closer to scientific illustration than to the romantic expression that tends to be associated with nature. The spatial context in which actions occur conveys a sense of solitude and dispossession, but no attempt is made to conceal its quotidian character. Whether the subject is a visual event or a ‘corporal–sculptural’ one, the medium used to capture it is black–and–white photography. The photos, often a sequence of shots, capture the unfolding of an action.

Turning our attention to light, a key element in the work of these artists, it is important to note that they are interested in both its physical reality – with Kowalski they explored natural phenomena – and in certain symbolic values it embodies. In this context, it is significant that one of the first pieces Francesc Torres took to the *Encuentros de Pamplona* (a cultural event held in 1972) was *Proyecto Prisma* [Project prism] (1970), an unrealisable idea to create a large prism that would cast a vast spectrum of light over a city. The prism was to be installed atop Barcelona’s Montjuïc Hill. One cannot help drawing a connection between this glass pyramid and the **triangles** that recur in the work executed by Torres and Ribé during these years. We see them in the photos by Torres that show triangles of light on the upper floors of New York skyscrapers, emitting powerful flashes that seem to convey something more than simple observation of a form. The images can be interpreted as a testament to a secular ‘revelation’, a reading that may also be valid in the case of *Reflejo* [Reflection], where the figure of the artist ‘emerges’ toward a cloud–filled sky reflected in a puddle.



Francesc Torres  
*Reflejo* (Reflection), 1973.  
 Gelatin silver print.  
 MACBA Collection  
 Barcelona City Council Fund



Àngels Ribé  
*Invisible Geometry 3*, 1973

This sense of the sublime (attenuated and perhaps treated with a certain ironic distance) is characteristic of American Land Art. Robert Smithson, Dennis Oppenheim and Walter de Maria, Richard Long in Great Britain, and Jan Dibbets in his photographic work all imposed a geometric 'order' on nature. What is of particular interest in this case is the idea of a 'drawing' on the landscape. Both Torres and Ribé trace or identify lines [and planes] on the reality around them. In their work and that of other Catalan conceptual artists one sees connections with Dan Graham's and Mel Bochner's 'measurements' of space; and in the three versions of Ribé's **3 punts** [3 points] one notes a resonance with the work of Fred Sandback, who dematerialises Minimalist sculpture and represents simple volumes using string or wire to mark their edges. Reality is crisscrossed by invisible lines that the artist makes visible. Among many others, these lines include the ones that indicate the cardinal points, which were the theme of an installation at the NAME Gallery in Chicago (1973).

Shadow, an effect of light, is another key element. In Ribé's work it functions as a kind of line and has an almost physical consistency. Eliminating any anecdotal content from the image throws the geometrical drawing into relief; cord, shadow and body are put on an equal footing. In December 1972, **3 punts (2)**, also known as *Ombra-corda* [Shadow-cord] was presented at *Comunicació Actual* in L'Hospitalet, one of the most significant events in the history of Conceptual Art in Catalonia. These works can also be seen as reflecting a constant theme of Ribé's work during this period: the difficulty of distinguishing reality from its representation, which she also addressed in works like *Real-Falso* [Real-false] (1974) and *Stimulus-Reaction* (1974). At what level, between reality and representation, are the body, cord and shadow situated?

All these photos, by both artists, find value in something that 'was seen' at a particular moment and has now disappeared, whether the subject is staged or the result of a chance event. The gaze is therefore crucial and the photo becomes a record of this gaze that draws on the environment. This 'method' is particularly evident in *Invisible Geometry* by Àngels Ribé, in which the artist traces an angle with her eyes in the space that lies between her and us, the viewers.

## MINIMALIST POETICS IN EXPANSION

**Peio Aguirre**

Art critic and independent curator

Taking stock of the legacy of currents of 1960s Minimalism and 1970s Post-Minimalism in subsequent decades is a complex and futile task if geographical and contextual considerations are not first taken into account. In the 1980s it was possible to observe a continuity of aesthetic reductionism in distinct and widely dispersed geographical locations. In Spain, the art of Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin and Richard Serra started to be seen in newly established institutions and museums, and the production of these artists was progressively discovered as the market expanded. That decade is clearly marked by a particular cultural and economic condition – postmodernism – in light of which all the cultural production of the period must be read. Postmodernism entailed a critical re-evaluation of the principles of classic and late modernism. At the same time it reinvented art forms that were regressive or had been excised from the modern manual (for example, Neo-Expressionism and the Italian Transavantgarde) in a turn in line with everything suggestive of a return to the past, nostalgia and historicism. In this situation, the Minimalist aesthetic (and I stress that I am talking about an ‘aesthetic’ here, even one that applies at a surface level) was no longer linked to the social and economic framework in which it had initially emerged. However, the ‘utility’ of Minimalism (together with Conceptual Art) offered an interesting escape route for a generation of artists born into a political context where the reception of modernism was subject to various distortions and anachronisms.



Richard Serra  
*Pasolini*, 1985  
Wrought iron  
Collection of Contemporary Art  
"la Caixa" Foundation

The resulting poetics, or impure Minimalisms, served to bridge the gap between a truncated form of modernism and a new postmodern condition characterised by the advent of the information

society. Artists who adopted these formalising approaches were also able to distance themselves from the most subjectivist Expressionism (where decoration and ornament are fictional elements that need to be suppressed in any Minimalism) while boosting the analytical character of works and their cognitive processes. Txomin Badiola, Pello Irazu, Juan Luis Moraza, Sergi Aguilar, Susana Solano and Fernando Sinaga, to name just a few, opted to take this highly productive route.

These artists created 'specific objects', to use a term coined by Judd in 1965, though when Judd wrote that 'half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture,' clearly he did not have in mind the yet-to-be-executed works that would interpret his legacy. A careful reading of **Judd** reveals his resistance to the notion of an all-encompassing system; he avoided falling into dogmatism by distancing himself from any attempt to read the new focus on objects as geographically or temporally exclusive. However, the presence of Minimalist traits in the art of the period was not just a reflection of the fact that artists were following an existing 'users' manual' (self-referentialism, seriality and an industrial approach); it was a full-blown poetics of the aesthetic that invaded the territory of sculpture. The 'new' work was Minimalist, or Constructivist, and at the same time it was not. The Basque artists Txomin Badiola and Pello Irazu are generally situated based on clichés adopted from Minimalism and Postminimalism, or at the crossroads of Soviet avant-gardes, not to mention constant allusions to Jorge Oteiza. It was in part a renewed interest in the ideas articulated by Oteiza (whose personal mythology had eclipsed the social reception of his thinking) that led to a type of sculptural production which served as a bridge to avant-garde tendencies.

Why would anyone want to base their work on Constructivism, Suprematism or Minimalism were it not precisely because what must be taken from these movements serves no other purpose? To a certain extent, and precisely as a result of the postmodern condition I have noted, the manual of patterns available for reuse, the catalogue of all the artistic forms of the twentieth century, is now obsolete as a means of investigating its own limits. In contrast, the poetry that emanates from this stock of forms is a tool for communication: that is where the secret lay. The poetics of avant-garde aesthetics were not superfluous: they were the very condition that allowed the artwork to become a social event as such. *Coup de dés* (1986) and *E.L. El Ruso* (1987) by **Badiola** are pieces from this period when the ideology of form was articulated in sculptural work as the artist adopted formalising methods which, in ideological terms, ran the risk of being misread as formalist. As a result, the debate over formalism acquired new



Susana Solano  
*Fa el set*, 1988  
Iron and granite. Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation



Txomin Badiola  
*Three Eero's Nightmares*, 1990–1991  
 Wood and chrome elements  
 Collection of Contemporary Art  
 "la Caixa" Foundation



Pello Irazu  
*Summer Kisses*, 1992  
 Enamel paint on wood  
 Collection of Contemporary Art  
 "la Caixa" Foundation



Liam Gillick  
*Intervention on the Home*  
 Office government building,  
 London, 2005

currency. The pieces *Tisbe* and *Esquina* by **Irazu** represent another variation in response to the constraints imposed by the *cul-de-sac* of formalism, reflected, for example, in the artist's decision to paint one of the iron faces a warm red or blue colour. In this case Irazu takes an approach that is both sensual and heterodox and makes the most of the margins of freedom in the sculptural field. The joy of the work is in this margin of operation, which is perfectly transferable to sculpture. This joy later became playful, when both artists introduced lighter industrial materials such as plywood into their work, thus incorporating the connotation of prefabricated DIY and distancing themselves from the heaviness of iron. **Sergi Aguilar's** *Metálica* (1987) is equally paradigmatic of this period, though the Catalan artist began his career earlier, in the mid-1970s, and, chronologically, was therefore more closely linked to Minimalism and Conceptual Art. Following the geometric tradition of Constructivism, Aguilar – one of the pioneers of Conceptual Art in Spain – switched from stone to iron and steel at the end of the 1970s, eventually developing a personal poetics in sculpture.

In any case, the rewriting of the Minimalist legacy is unpredictable and has been subject to all sorts of rhetorical twists. At the end of the 1990s, for instance, British artist Liam Gillick short-circuited the autonomy of the object with respect to functionalism and the applied arts in screens and perspex platforms that executed various tasks. Gillick's post-tautology undercut the self-referentiality of Minimalism – in a class of statement that worked by breaking down the previous cohesion of the signifier as a unit of form and content – thus re-narrativising existing forms. After these linguistic manoeuvres, anything vaguely reminiscent of Minimalism, or even modernism, had to be placed in inverted commas. So the key question is: what does it mean for a contemporary young artist to situate a practice in the historical context of these traditions from the 1960s and 1970s? *Bicho gigante I* [Giant bug I] (2009), a work by **José Dávila**, belongs to a time and a consciousness that are completely distinct from those of the other artists who surround him in this section. Dávila was trained as an architect and his oeuvre includes many site-specific works and installations that question the dictates of modern architecture and art, challenging the processes through which this now canonical form of art came to be regarded as high art. In *Bicho gigante I*, the Minimalism borders on parody; it is postmodern without belief, something made explicit in the title of the work. But here it serves another purpose: to question the constitutive foundations of the artwork while affirming its status as an object (and fetish). Apart from showing that the artist has a sense of humour, calling a sculpture a 'bug' because of its size reflects his intention to make an ironic statement about the

Pello Irazu → p. 66

Sergi Aguilar → p. 63

José Dávila → p. 67



Luis Barragán  
*Terrace of the Barragán House*  
 Mexico City, 1940



Mathias Goeritz  
*El Eco Experimental Museum Building*  
 Mexico City, 1953

looting of the catalogue of historical forms I have referred to. In line with Adornian aesthetics, a critique of an object may only be made by means of another object, thus maintaining the constitutive autonomy of all art. The particular formal paradigm of Minimalism, the 'box', is subject to all manner of deconstructions and variations; it literally becomes a large 'drawer', or a series of drawers, where nothing, no secret, is kept or hidden. In a similar way, other works by Dávila, such as those where he 'imitates' Judd, LeWitt or Josef Albers, are symptomatic of this distanced attitude. The explanation for this stance may lie in the fact that the artist is from Mexico, a country whose relationship with the modern project is conflictive, though also highly productive. Currently, this type of relationship is the background shared by many artists who wish to champion an 'other' or vernacular modernity. I have in mind the renewed interest in Luis Barragán, Mathias Goeritz and the muralists.

Art history and criticism have often made connections and found parallels between works that had little or nothing to do with one another, simply because an apparent similarity of form suggested some kind of relationship. This tendency is a chronic source of confusion. The fact that this mistake has been and remains more frequent in the context of Minimalist aesthetics is simply due to the nature of the formal patterns it reproduces and the mechanisation of modes of production. In light of these factors, the constant presence of simple forms in art now being produced should drive us to engage in an ongoing review, narrativisation and historicisation of these forms.

## ORTEGA, STRATEGIST

Sergio González Rodríguez

Writer and cultural critic

If a child were to approach *Nine Types of Terrain* (2007), perhaps he would start jumping over the bricks the work is composed of after gazing at them for a while and thinking about what might have happened: Who put this here? What's it for? Was it another child? And so on. If someone happened to be walking by in the vicinity of *Nine Types of Terrain*, they would see in the distance a rubbish dump made of bricks, a product of the ingenuity of some builder with time on his hands. If a stray dog passed by *Nine Types of Terrain*, it would have a chance to urinate on the bricks, sniff at nourishing smells, and perhaps sit for a few seconds before moving on, its tail wagging restlessly. If an alien landed next to *Nine Types of Terrain*, it would find a puzzle that may seem dangerous because of the way it contrasts with the landscape: convergent things made of matter and energy, frequencies across a broad spectrum, objects of variable weight, consistency, form and texture – except for one pattern: the regularity of each brick. The alien would instantly conclude that it had reached a planet where the difference between unity and multiplicity is regarded as a cornerstone of civilisation – another danger sign. Like the ancient Chinese, the extraterrestrial visitor would come to the conclusion that there are two strategic aspects to this puzzle: situation or configuration (*xing*) and potential (*shi*).

The origin of *Nine Types of Terrain* reflects Damián Ortega's interest in *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. In this ancient treatise, the Chinese strategist explains the theory of movement, forces and tensions that underlies nine different combat tactics. Ortega has explored this theory in his artistic practice and through this particular work. The action unfolds on a specific terrain and is linked to its geographical features. The number of participants in the action and the form adopted by the force define the nine variations. As a result of all the factors and possibilities involved, the physical space becomes protean: pure plasticity.

The thesis was re-articulated when the artist executed the first stage of his work. On a site once crossed by the Berlin Wall, he installed a series of clay bricks that reproduce the nine tactics devised by the Chinese strategist, setting up the bricks like domino pieces. The second stage involved filming a movement that caused the bricks to topple. The result is a shift from stable to unstable – the noise of the falling bricks and the landscape after the battle: no man's land. The third stage comprises the presentation of the work to viewers and its effects: visual examination of the work, matter, energy, scales, play, horror, conjecture, laughter – a disturbance of the predictable, a glimpse of the wonder beneath the everyday.

Territorial construct, perceptual destruct. The process involved in *Nine Types of Terrain* is an intriguing one that involves at least three dimensions of observation: 1) exploration of the analogue work in its real, tangible timeframe, as it was created; 2) the sequential film record of the work in the form of nine projections in an oblong space (this substantive unit that interacts with the environment is crucial); and 3) the viewer's circuitous path through the weave of the installation. Two distinct strands emerge: the analogue and the spectral.

The hillock that is one of the sites for *Nine Types of Terrain* helps us understand how the work is introduced into a particular space. Surrounded by shrubs, with a puddle below, the path followed by the bricks winds along, forming an ephemeral line of dominoes, their fall predestined, part of a process extended in time: deceleration, fall, decline. What remains is the anteriority of nature. Faced with a similar challenge, Robert Smithson decided to explore the dialectic of site and non-site through tectonics, scales that change according to the point of observation, the particulate nature and colouring of the material, and the emergence of a constructed form in what was formless (which at the same time reveals a form-pattern derived from nature). The result was **Spiral Jetty** and its primordial-cosmic challenge to atemporality.

According to Damián Ortega, *Nine Types of Terrain* grew out of the idea of establishing a system for classifying the different types of space that could exist. Based on the strategy of Sun Tzu, he noted that the space where a battle unfolds is not stable but in motion: it becomes fluid. This insight led him to examine contrasts between the natural and the constructed, the topographical, and the geometrical, and the interactions between these factors and the particularity of a construct. In short, the idea was to classify, separate and enumerate the elements that constitute a system. What lies behind this cognitive package is a focus on the binary difference order-disorder (mathematics: nine numbers; language: twenty-six letters;



Damián Ortega  
*Nine Types of Terrain*, 2007  
Collection of Contemporary Art "la Caixa" Foundation

emotion: seven feelings; morality: nine commandments; conduct: nine deadly sins; war: nine types of terrain). This strategic–relational protocol appears to reflect the definition of emptiness articulated in Chinese thought and cited by François Jullien in *Treatise on Efficacy*: ‘were it not for the emptiness of that which is empty [...], an effect could not spread and propagate itself.’

Damián Ortega reworks the nine types of terrain discussed by the Chinese strategist, which relate to specific characteristics: forces in conflict, forces in flow, forces in balance, reversible forces, trifurcated forces, opposed forces, obstructive forces, treacherous forces, and finally deadly forces. To experience these forces, he introduces a basic unit of construction (the brick/container/block that is longer than it is wide) in nine different terrains. The bricks are multiplied and arranged in configurations that create a sense of movement and temporary occupation by means of snaking lines, rectilinear formations, and spiral flexibility.

Transposing this practice from his earth–bound field of operations to film represents a decisive shift in the conception of the work. In *L’Ordre compliqué*, Yona Friedman argues that a film is not a model or a prototype of the object it refers to, because it does not explain how the object works or the rules by which it is governed. He also points out that all science is grounded in images. Even what we call the ‘mathematical model’ is not really a model (it does not work like the thing modelled): it is an image. Sequential representation is therefore the most perfect image we can obtain at present. On this basis, models can be constructed. This is the role of intellect. Damián Ortega invites the viewer to share in this adventure.

## PRIVATE COSMOLOGIES

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In *Páginas de una biblioteca* [Pages from a library], created for a 1995 publication, Matt Mullican offers a series of references that give us access to the source code for his work, to his peculiar and rigorous vision of the cosmos – a precise and complex set of ideas about art, reality, and the everyday lives of beings in the world.<sup>1</sup>

In these 'pages from a library', we find a diverse range of sources related to issues of representation, modes of apprehending an image of the world, systems for organising knowledge, ways of showing the invisible, life, and the meaning of material objects. The pages also reveal Mullican's interest in the element of form that serves to communicate and express meaning, and in structures that mediate the transmission and recreation of knowledge. They include medieval depictions of the devil, Egyptian representations of nature, gods and representations of the universe from aboriginal sources, cosmological charts, magical diagrams, mandalas, and pre-Columbian game boards. We find prints and drawings related to architecture and classic urbanism, engravings by Piranesi, blueprints for modern cities and plans produced by Le Corbusier, together with comics depicting fictitious modern architectures with a futuristic feel. The language of signs and pictograms mingles with the typographic and industrial design of first- and second-generation Olivetti typewriters, calculators, and computers, and virtual representations of the traffic density in a particular city. Illustrations from *Gulliver's Travels* appear alongside tattooed bodies, books on the anatomy of the brain and sense organs, phantasmagorias, and studies of gestures, with particular attention to those of newborn babies. Rounded stones, prehistoric flint tools, fossils, and human remains share space with puppets, altars, war photographs, kitschy representations of God, pages from an encyclopaedia on the subject of insects, and anti-fascist posters.

This series of images – concerned with devices and methods for experiencing the world and extracting information from it – leads us directly to one of the central issues in Mullican's work: the

1. *Matt Mullican* [exh. cat.] (Valencia: IVAM Centre del Carme, 1995), pp. 135–246.

creation of interfaces intended to provide a better and more complete understanding of the reality that surrounds us. But for Mullican, reality is constructed by the imagination; it is always something perceived. Images exist through their representations, their imaginary projections, so there is no dividing line between objects and ideas; both belong to the same context. Neither can fiction, art, fantasy, or even emotions be separated from the real; they form part of the same symbolic universe.

In a seminal article on Mullican's work written in 1972, Allan McCollum describes Mullican's approach as follows:

His work, which is the product of a detailed, near-obsessive introspection, is devised as an elaborate attempt to duplicate externally the vast complex of inner representations which add up to his understanding of the world he lives in. Through the use of all conceivable media – drawings, readings, performances, posters, signs, sculptures, banners, etc – he has undertaken to re-create for the outer senses a multidimensional picture of those normally unconscious, interior processes which are present in all of us. Through his work, we watch a drama unfold – one which we all experience in our day-to-day lives, but unconsciously – as he represents the way he constructs, assimilates, disintegrates, modifies, reconstructs, and generally works to maintain his personal sense of reality.<sup>2</sup>

Mullican's world is made up of relationships. Things, objects, and ideas are surfaces on which to temporarily inscribe meanings that are susceptible to being translated and transformed. The signs and symbols the artist creates are a particular kind of device, a pictographic alphabet which, like hieroglyphics or ideograms, carries information that is encrypted but that we understand as part of a cultural continuum.

**Cosmologies** are one of the forms of organisation most frequently used by the artist. Constantly present from the start of his career, they are manifested in his distinctive visual language, which is based on the line, the point, and simple geometric structures derived from basic forms like the triangle, the circle, and the square. His cosmologies are inspired by plans for modern cities and urbanisms grounded in utopian rationality, or by designs for modern machinery, whose regularity is the basis of its technical efficacy. They enable Mullican to create a system, a method he can apply to understand his world and take a position in it.

His cosmologies are always structured in the same way and consist of five 'levels'. The upper level, in red, corresponds to the subjective, pure meaning, the unconscious and spiritual aspects of existence. The lower level, in green, is associated with the elements,

2. Allan McCollum, 'Matt Mullican's World', *REALLIFE Magazine*, Winter 1980, pp. 4–13.

pure physics and inert matter. The middle level is occupied by man and the contexts that frame his existence: the arts, history, science, and religion – all represented by the colour yellow – are the bridge between the subject and the object. The world, in blue, is everyday experience, shaped by the city, buildings and people. Finally, language, in black, arises as an intensified reality that disengages and becomes abstract, self-sufficient.<sup>3</sup>

Mullican's cosmologies, like the transcendent metaphysical systems on which theologies and religions are usually based, seek to confront the possibility of an ordered way of thinking with the contingency and emotion of everyday life. The underlying belief is that experience unfolds in this struggle. Mullican is acutely aware of this, for he often puts himself at the centre of his cosmology as the observer and the observed, as scientist and subject – an approach that is both a game and a spiritual question. His first cosmologies are defined based on his birth as part of a chain, his expulsion to time and destiny, and his encounter with death, and though he uses a formal interface that is based on geometry and executed using technological methods, he always includes in his models of expression the non-rational worlds of pure matter, art, and ritual (in his particular experience with hypnosis).

The models for visualising the order of things that Mullican applies in his artistic practice are in line with a current of Western thought that since antiquity has sought to understand how the world is organised and how we fit into it. Two key figures stand out in this tradition: Ramon Llull and Aby Warburg. Llull's *ars combinatoria* is a method that encompasses all possible ways of accessing knowledge. To this end, it has a formal structure that is established *a priori* and can be filled with mental content of any nature, which can vary on each occasion. As Paolo Rossi writes in his study on the influence of Llull's ideas – and as we also see in Mullican's cosmologies – his *ars combinatoria*, though configured on the basis of a set of symbols that refer to the structure of divinity, is inextricably bound up with the understanding of the objects which constitute the world. Unlike formal logic it deals with things, and not with words alone. It is concerned with the structure of the world, and not just the structure of discourses. [...] The breaking down of compound concepts into simple and irreducible notions, the use of letters and symbols to represent simple notions, the mechanisation of conceptual combination by means of movable figures or diagrams, the idea of a perfect and artificial language, [...] and the identification of the art with a kind of conceptual mechanism which, once constructed, is absolutely independent of subject matter, have led intellectual historians [...] to compare the *combinatoria* [...] to modern formal logic.<sup>4</sup>

3. Taking this basic model or structure as his starting point, Mullican works specifically on the arrangement of these levels or areas in the formats he thinks are best suited to each particular presentation of his work, whether in the form of drawing, film, virtual reality, wall painting, etched granite slabs or banners.

4. Paolo Rossi and Stephen Clucas, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 32–33.



Matt Mullican  
Partial view of the installation *M.I.T. Project*,  
1990

In *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Warburg proposes a way of ‘knowing through images’, a tool that depends on the ‘imagination’ as its key principle and driving force. Because they are combinatorial, the meanings generated emerge ‘through the secret relationships between things, correspondences, and analogies.’<sup>5</sup> In this context, it is interesting to note Matt Mullican’s use of tables and bulletin boards in his installations as surfaces on which to place objects and materials, including photos, drawings, and documents. The table or bulletin board is a space for chance encounters, a ‘machine’ that works as the panels in Warburg’s atlas do; the meaning things have depends on their arrangement in a system.

Mullican’s kinship with Warburg is not based only on the similarity of their ‘method’. The more primitive and Dionysian aspect of the art historian’s thought – the ideas that led him to put the ‘serpent ritual’, which Mullican also witnessed as a teenager, at the foundation of human symbolic activity – are another point of contact.

Warburg seeks the source of symbolic thought and action precisely where [...] the ‘zoon symbolikon’ is most at risk: where animal primeval fear maintains a closed stimulus–reaction pattern. It is precisely where the development of symbols would appear most difficult if not downright impossible that it also appears most necessary. To play down the phobic quality of the serpent in favour of the symbolic is to wrest ‘thinking space’ from fear.<sup>6</sup>

Mullican also sees ‘art’ as a necessity – a place where magic and logic can be brought together. His experiments with hypnosis, which are concerned with his historical being and his place in the world, his birth and his death; his anonymous, simplified pictograms, which subvert the trafficking of meanings that characterises ‘consumption’ in capitalist public space; and his technological modelling, based on rationality and geometric order, also propose an ideal refuge and a way of succumbing to the terror occasioned by the collapse of reality.

5. Translated from the Spanish text that appears in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Atlas: ¿cómo llevar el mundo a cuevas?* [exh. cat.] (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2011), p. 37.

6. Ulrich Raulff, postscript to Aby Warburg, in Aby Warburg, *Schlangenritual. Ein Reisebericht* (Wagenbach: Berlin, 1995), p. 78.

