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**Rita McBride**

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Oferta pública / Public Tender

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**18 May – 24 September 2012**

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Educated in the United States but based in Germany, Rita McBride is a professor at the prestigious Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Her work explores the production of public space and the reception of culture through sculptures that recreate familiar elements from our immediate environment. McBride sometimes dramatizes objects related to architecture and design, often through the use of unusual materials and unexpected dimensions. As such, she examines acquired notions of form, function, and material in relation to a vocabulary that challenges the myths of progress induced by modern ideology. In her pieces, industrialization, mass production processes, and the laws of efficiency are brought up against the role of handmade artifacts and the sphere of the dysfunctional. McBride thus pushes the boundaries and the qualities of the white cube, a spatial modality that is often considered indispensable for the neutrality required to exhibit artworks. Once they have been inserted into these apparently passive environments, McBride's works question the allocation of functions that define and differentiate the museum, domestic space and the urban sphere. In this exhibition, the museum becomes a further element in the artist's sculptural process, through a specific intervention in which McBride strips MACBA of the additional elements that have altered Richard Meier's original design over time.

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McBride began working in the mid-eighties, a period in which sculptural language was undergoing a process of redefinition. The legacy of Minimal sculpture and the overcoming of institutional critique (which had started in the mid-sixties with artists such as Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Buren in Europe and Michael Asher and Hans Haacke in the United States) defined a new context for arts practice. These practices were based on a critical and sometimes ironic analysis of power structures and the operational rationale of museums. Rita McBride returned to Minimal sculpture—which was the style in which she had been trained as an artist—not only in formal aspects such as the use of industrial materials, but also in the presence that infuses her



*Mae West*, Munich. © Anne Pöhlmann, 2011

works. Nevertheless, her sculptures go beyond merely updating Minimal art. Her way of understanding space and the functional and symbolic elements of architecture link her own practice to Michael Asher's critical intent, although her work could be considered to react more directly against tradition. Influenced by artists such as John Baldessari and Lawrence Weiner, McBride's work examines the conventions of the museum and reflects on the limits of the sculptural object.

On entering the exhibition we immediately encounter a reconstruction of the ground floor of Villa Savoye, the famous house designed by Swiss architect Le Corbusier (1887–1965) and built between 1929 and 1931 in Poissy, France. In *Backsliding, Sideslipping, one Great Leap and the "Forbidden"* (1994–2012) the life-size floor plan of the villa becomes a kind of pedestal for other sculptures: *Double Helix Spiral Staircase* (1990), a rattan spiral that rises up towards the ceiling, and *Glass Conduits* (1999), glass ducts that make their way along the wall until they are interrupted by the architecture of the building. Both of these works invite us to reflect on the relationship between sculpture and architecture: where does one begin and the other end? How is public space defined, and what are the rules that govern it? What are the conditions of exhibition in these kinds of spaces? McBride breaks away from the traditional idea of sculpture—the creation of unique elements intended for contemplation—and instead offers a panoramic, almost filmic reading of space, in which the artworks and the exhibition environment come together and form a complex narrative.

Two aspects that are crucial for understanding Rita McBride's work—scale and materials—are intertwined in works like *Servants and Slaves (Domestic)* (2003), *White Elephant (Wall)* (2003), and *Chair (Smoked)* (2003). These pieces are based on a perception of architecture as domestic space, in which modernity makes its mark by subordinating form to function, and bringing the expressivity of industrial materials into the foreground. Objects thus become linguistic operations, in which references to the origins and materials

that they are made from are the negative of what appears to be visible at first sight.

One of the works that illustrates the manipulation of meaning through the use of materials is *Toyota* (1990), a life-size car made out of rattan, a flexible, lightweight material that is often used to manufacture low cost furniture. McBride's Toyota Celica is the embodiment of an ironic image of the American dream, her own particular version of an intrinsic element of urban life that was also one of the first icons of mass production, which is inextricably linked to the concept of modern architecture and the new society to which its advocates aspired. The scale of McBride's objects is not just crucial when it comes to establishing their relationship to the spaces in which they are displayed, it also contributes to the creation of new meanings. This can be seen in *Parking Structures* (1994–2001), a series of architectural mock-ups of parking lots (key urban design elements in the era of transport and mass consumption), many of which are made out of bronze—an emblematic material in the history of sculpture—with a finish that transforms them into trophies of a past era.

Nevertheless, the work that most forcefully challenges the boundaries of sculptural functionality is perhaps her best-known and most iconic work, *Arena* (1997), an enormous structure that emulates large public spaces designed to hold crowds, where concerts, political rallies, and large-scale events are temporarily held. *Arena* is a kind of huge amphitheatre that is brought inside the museum space and transforms the conventional relationships between subject and object. Its very presence changes a space intended for visual contemplation into another that is ready to host actions, while its circularity favors encounters among spectators, who become both perceiving subjects and objects of perception. In conjunction with the artist, the institution that displays this special work programs a series of activities (lectures, screenings, performances) that are usually excluded from the exhibition space. As such, the neutrality required for the rituals of contemplation of the artistic object disappears and the artwork becomes an animate object with a life of its own.

*Arena* is not the only work by McBride that has attained monumental dimensions. Other large-scale works include *Mae West* (2002–11), a project submitted to the City of Munich, which was started in 2002 and completed in 2011, and which eventually took the form of a 52-meter-high, 32-meter-wide, 57-tonne carbon fiber sculpture. Located in Effnerplatz, on the outskirts of the constantly expanding city of Munich, it openly takes on a colonizing role in relation to public space, both in its scale and its shape. In *Mae West*—which takes its name from the stereotyped figure of the famous American actress—Rita McBride once again reflects on the meaning of monuments in the contemporary world and the capacity of citizens to actively form part of them. The artist herself has described it as “a tool to define the evolution of a relationship between the public and urban ambitions of the city.” A sculpture “that strives to define the extreme outer-limits of where sculpture and architecture meet.” In essence, she says, “*Mae West* is the definition of what architecture is not and what sculpture has become.”

McBride's body of work invites us to reconsider the role of the artist in shaping public space in a context in which it

is becoming increasingly privatized. At a time when debates in the architecture and design field are giving way to questions around sustainability, McBride's works could appear potentially anachronistic. Her project seems both futuristic and archaic, so much so that Antoni Gaudí would not have spurned her formal discourse, while Ildelfons Cerdà would have approved her understanding of the complexity of modern urban space.

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## Activities

**Conversation between Rita McBride and Bartomeu Mari**  
Friday 18 May, at 6 pm  
Free admission

**Presentation of the book *Rita McBride. Oferta pública / Public Tender***  
Wednesday 12 September, at 7.30 pm  
Free admission

**Blind Dates**  
**MACBA invites artists into the Arena**  
20 June: Tamara Kuselman  
18 July: Laia Estruch  
August: Jordi Ferreiro  
19 September: Ryan Rivadeneyra  
20 September: Miguel Noguera  
Museum galleries. Admission with Museum ticket.  
Limited places

**Film**  
*Day After Day*, by Alexander Hick, produced by Rita McBride  
Daily in the Museum galleries. Admission with Museum ticket. Limited places

**Sónar 2012**  
**Game of Life - Wave Field Synthesis**  
**Sound System**  
14, 15, 16 June  
Compositions by Milo McBride, Barbara Ellison, Funckarma, Robert Henke, Ji Youn Kang and others.  
Museum galleries. Admission limited to Sonar attendees only. Limited places.  
With the support of the Mondriaan Fund, Amsterdam

## Publication

*Rita McBride. Oferta pública / Public Tender*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), 2012. The book includes a photographic essay by Anne Pöhlmann and texts by Luis Fernández-Galiano, Mark Wigley and Bartomeu Mari. Single edition in Catalan, Spanish and English.

Exhibition organized by MACBA and curated by Bartomeu Mari.

More information [www.macba.cat](http://www.macba.cat) and [twitter.com/MACBA\\_Barcelona](https://twitter.com/MACBA_Barcelona)

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**Opening times**  
Weekdays, 11 am to 7.30 pm  
(from 24 June to 24 September, 11 am to 8 pm)  
Saturdays, 10 am to 8 pm  
Sundays and public holidays, 10 am to 3 pm  
Closed Tuesdays (except public holidays)  
Open Mondays

**Daily guided tours**  
(included in the admission fee)  
Weekdays, at 6.30 pm  
Saturdays, at 12.30 and 6.30 pm  
Sundays and public holidays, at 12.30 pm  
Available in English on Mondays (6.30 pm)

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