

Department of Plastic Arts

Exhibition

"Sculpture. Parallel Creations (I), Metaphors of the real"

Commissioner: Maria Teresa Blanch

30 November 1995 - 18 February 1996

Objectives

This exhibition -which consists of two parts, the second of which will go on display in the coming month of March - seeks to place the emphasis on the parallel means which form the foundations of the work of the sculptor as highly expressive means which are totally decisive for the development and free exploration of the sculptural concept.

The first part -which bears the subtitle "Metaphors of the real"- is based on large drawings by the sculptor (completely leaving out sketches and projectual drawings), and a small selection of structures, images and a few concept-objects which act as germinal elements in the sculptural conception of the artists presented: Claes Oldenburg, Miquel Navarro, Mario Merz, Jaume Plensa, Jannis Kounellis and Juan Muñoz.

Treatment

The exhibition is the outcome of the prospection in the basic axes of the evolutive discourse of each sculptor, based on definitive works of high quality and categorical physical presence, aside from the sculpture.

Ties are established between early and present works of each artist (which goes to highlight lesser known periods of these creators and counteract the often partialized views of their work). These ties are governed by the intention to place the accent on some very specific aspects of each artist which help to explain the main nuclei of their sculptural proposal over the course of their careers. This exhibition presents works ranging from 1960 to 1995.

Subtle interactions are proposed between the artists shown, in order to evidence confluences and dissensions, common interests and deviations, within the expositive context which has been created. Therefore, the works have been selected according to each individual discourse, but without losing sight of their articulation -in the form of nexuses and contrasts - with the overall ensemble of the exhibition.

Contents

1. Metaphors of the real

C. Oldenburg - M. Navarro - M. Merz - J. Plensa - J.Kounellis - J. Muñoz

Aspects of reality are dealt with through metaphors and allusions which use the irony and perversions of a visual world in continual metamorphosis as expressive vehicles, exploring mythical forms of human communication and elaborating new settings for the "pathos" of the past and the dislocations of the present.

2. Concepts and energy

There is a type of sculpture which, while giving a great deal of importance to "construction", is a sustaining voice for other, internal factors related to manifestations of energy as a principle for sculpture which is capable of holding extreme positions with regard to gravity, unique conceptions of space as a deposit of sensorial psychological or topographical memory, or precise questioning about perception as well as new connections between nature and society.

PRESENTATION

Nulla dies sine linea, the proverb goes. Far from the security of repetition, we must take the road of the unrestricted journey of this exercise of inexperience called drawing, this perpetual vanishing which, probably more than any other means of expression, says something essential to us about our way of being, something essential about the uncertainty of our condition.

In drawing there is something of a love of variation and mutability, of death. Something of a desire to exploit this leisure that the death of an instant gives us, in new instants equally mortal in which we can untiringly judge ourselves, taking up again, correcting, trying out other answers to what we have lived and know; attempting, in short, to defend ourselves against inexistence with joys, just as the living do in the course of their existence. The poetics of drawing is not that of the intimate, as is often said, but that of displacement in which the desire is expressed, probably better than in the finished work, of understanding things, beings, forms. And this is why drawings reach us, this is why it seems to us that they blend with us: the same as we, they partake in all that is born in order to never come to set themselves permanently.

Miquel Molins i Nubiola
Director of the *Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona*

I wish to express my thanks to all the people who have collaborated on this exhibition and quite especially to Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Juan Muñoz, Miquel Navarro, Claes Oldenburg and Jaume Plensa.

INTRODUCTION

SCULPTURE. PARALLEL CREATIONS

Teresa Blanch

There is a general tendency to interpret the drawings of sculptors as a path to somewhere, as a preliminary phase for the clearing of their ideas, for initial dialogues with the intuited behaviors of an incipient formal world, generating preliminary versions of what they imagine and favoring the trial of possible later configurations. In his study notes Oldenburg called his drawings «the place where he gets rid of his first stupid ideas», which are most often necessary in spite of it all in order to reach final ideas and enter states of complete

affirmation and concretion of what is understood as sculpture.

Opposite this consideration of drawings as a prefiguring material, there is another aspect, with its own power of expression, which forms an important resource in the free exploration of the sculptural concept. This involves «existence in movement» as Germano Celant once called it, which many sculptors have developed as a sort of parallel practice endowed in many cases with pictorial fullness and existing as an experimental territory which complements and assists in the advancement of sculpture through its essential association of immediacy and free approach to fundamental aspects of the artist's ideas.

These are graphic territories which become primordial areas in which the main factors of sculptural language are found. Here the artist, on the plane of the paper or any other support and therefore in parallel and as yet without compromise to the categorical three-dimensional presence, makes effective contact with the most substantial nuclei driving him to create art and supporting his own sculptural proposal.

This is the complete profound experience, unbound to the initial digressions or trials, in which drawings are fulfilled as definitive works and as extreme revelations of the sculptor's vision. To explore a drawing and consider its different facets is to meet the other expressive half of the artist where the sculptural vision is objectified and the conceptual elements which cross it are activated.

Considered as a determined and decisive creative action, drawing often involves a surprising, self-standing iconographic domain in its own right which is free of the sculptural images defining the sculptors who do the drawings.

We are thus referring to drawings which act as a sounding board for the thought of the sculptor, with the particularity of their revealing, often without suggesting the sculptural «mark» of the artist, the deepest links and nodes of intersection between sensitivity and questioning. A drawing is an undeniable motor of the three-dimensional work, not because it plans or anticipates it, but rather because it condenses, explores and preserves a fruitful parallel area which belongs, in fact, much more to the foundations of sculpture than to the contingency of its external aspects.

The artists taking part in this double exhibition have been notable appliers of this notion of drawing throughout their long careers. These

are actions of drawing which, in their vigorous development, infuse new life into the most traditional media (we are referring to those ranging from the pencil or charcoal on paper, to the collage), in the same way that they struggle to branch out towards audacious situations which lead them to force the selfsame limits of the drawing: sometimes acquiring -from the starting point of their own instruments- interesting appearances associable with pictorial or sculptural material, and at others converting distant creative means into genuine experiences of drawing, or into reflections on it, thus propitiating a favorable extension of use to the mental -and not only instrumental- phenomenon which characterizes it, as a mechanism or device of direct expression.

The two consecutive exhibitions make an individualized prospection of this intense collateral work of some sculptors who have contributed to transforming it into a highly «revealing» facet of the complex and subtle system of interior networks which cross the mental vision of the artist.

METAPHORS OF THE REAL.

REVELATIONS OF THE DECISIVE DRAWING Teresa Blanch

To interpellate the real world is not the same as to interpret it. The six artists present in this first exhibition have in common the creation of a world of apparent realities, which has sense in the metaphorical systems of deviation and dislocation that support it: interferences, emptying and fragmentation are actions present in the unique re-readings and questionings which they have contributed on the city, the myth, the statuary or the memory contained in history and in nature. These are areas from which they establish interesting measurements with respect to another great underlying subject: the possibility or impossibility of representation in art or, expressed in other terms, images exercising as an absorbing nucleus of meanings or, precisely, as elements irradiating dissuasions.

The sculptors Miquel Navarro (Mislata, València, 1945) and Claes Oldenburg (Stockholm, 1929) are characterized by their approach to the visual world of a city full of fantasies, metamorphoses, raptures and contradictions. The Valencian artist configures a metaphysical world of ironic human resonances. In the Swedish-American artist the world becomes a perverse game of gigantic

objectual animation starting out from the consideration of the city as a living landscape. In both artists the work performed on paper helps to highlight the anthropomorphic background of their sculptural ideas. Jaume Plensa (Barcelona, 1955) and Mario Merz (Milan, 1925) have developed updated mythical visions of the concept of place. The Catalan sculptor has done so in a more anthropological way and the Italian artist from a phenomenological standpoint with respect to nature. Both sculptors share a common interest in making reference to the original place of man, emphasizing the notion of belonging to the original construction, in the form of architecture, of underlying order or of verb. In both artists, these facets are condensed with a charge of high energy (which is why, perhaps, they express themselves sometimes from a position of extreme severity and sometimes from one of extreme excess). Each of them has developed some very interesting and particular relations with the notion of time.

The esthetic conception of Juan Muñoz (Madrid, 1953) and Jannis Kounellis (Piraeus, 1936) is marked by a similar notion of enclosure and muteness of images. Both artists, with their interest in settings of semi-darkness, submerge themselves in the baroque and support themselves on an esthetic of displaced fragments in response to the crisis of historical development and of the subject, devising new metaphorical settings for the 'pathos' of the past (in the case of the Greek-Italian artist) and for the dislocations of the present (in that of the Madrilénian artist).

The world of MIQUEL NAVARRO revolves around the «tower» as the image of life, an erectile image which conveys symbolic potentials of power, warmth, fluidity and vigilance. These are factors in which personal experiences converge and which act as bearers of archaic values related to nature and its life cycles. The social interferes with the sacred and the direct vision of reality with the symbol. Valencia is an area which has favored a special culture of suggestive architectural crowns which the artist evokes with great metaphorical freedom. These architectural structures coexist with swift technological artifacts (visible in «Metro III» and «Amarre IV») and with figures of nature («Aljub», a paradigmatic landscape of irrigations). The industrial world and the rural world join in the creation of a suggestive iconography of transit and penetrations, with settings upheld by a

provisional order whose interior contains the metaphor of the apocalypse affecting our society:

«The cities of Miquel Navarro are a place of debate, a conglomerate of tensions, a place of many voices. They are places where things continue to happen, where rhythms and distributions take place. They surprise, amaze and constantly question everything (...) power and desire are their dynamos: persuasive and inevitable forces».¹

The complex iconography of towers, leaning or twisting like ziggurats, as is the case with the one to be seen in «Benimamet», which derives into the psychodelic cactus of «Saint Michel», into the perverse image of a petrified leaf in «Petxina» or into the expectant hole in «Amarre II», seems to partake of a certain dignifying hieratism, proper to sacred images. There is a much more powerful link with the archaic world in the drawings than in the sculptures of this artist, owing to the possibilities which drawings provide for the creation of anthropomorphic insinuations in the eloquent structures and hierarchizations in the foregrounds. Drawing also permits him to make extreme use of rounded shapes, forming soft fantasies based on the tactile remembrance of pottery (clay), or angular ones, closer to a synthetic and mystical notion of construction, as would be seen in Malevich (and wonderfully confirmed in «Nau Vermella»).

An esthetic somewhere between fearful and scandalous runs through these constructive settings perpetually dominated by the flows of water and irradiations of sunlight and moonlight. The artist's continual interest in water takes him back to his childhood:

«The orchard, criss-crossed with irrigation ditches studded with gates. A geographical and physical reason.»²

Water, projected powerfully into space, has a special mythical-religious value in Miquel Navarro which ties in with a modern, violently destructive seminal discourse which must inevitably be associated today with the idea of vital emergence. It is symptomatic that his favorite fountains are:

«faces with water gushing from their mouths. The image of the medieval gargoyle. This is an element of vital contribution which resembles speech. You speak and «spit it out». The fountain is also associated with the idea of springs, of a place where people go to drink and, in a philosophical sense, where they go to find a cure.

(...) Every discourse implies its contradiction. Therefore, the spring is related to what issues forth from it; and what falls, also comes out and emerges. There are almost constant totemic references in my work.»³

These are juxtapositions within a syntax which reveals a personal cosmovision linking the past and the future, with the wish to present (within the new chaos dominating the city) a not so far off approach of the city to nature and the deities.

In Miquel Navarro's drawings, imagery is not everything. It is what propitiates atmospheres which are, in the end, what endow the images with meaning and which range, in general terms, from protection to threats, from the greatest warmth (as in «Oritge I», the early work in which the artist seemed to be searching for the first signs of recognition of the world, enigmatically situated on a material painted with mud) to the most outright desolation (as in «Battle I and II», where little clay figures hang from desert-like unworked spaces).

The drawing table present in the exhibition gathers constant elements in the setting of his studio, a source of stimuli to which the artist gives the same value and from which he obtains all that is necessary to create his language of ceaseless transfigurations, under the theme of «Mater-Matter» which he has written more than once on his drawings, according to which «matter» lies at the origin of his whole formal and conceptual vocabulary. This is a theory which he makes completely believable, not because of any failure to obey the laws of matter but because of his strong reactive capacity which brilliantly transforms the most elementary bodies such as the drawing instrument which becomes the prefiguration of a fly about to take flight, the cardboard tube which becomes a powerful canal (an item always present in the artist's work), the lead case conceived as a sculptural homage to Malevich or the essential assembled structures which incite him and which are put to real advantage (in drawings and in sculpture) because of their potential functions of «place» with an active life, important germs of the constructions or ruins which configure his «cities».

The architect-man worked in clay, a probable analogy of the artist-builder, is for a few moments the positive metaphor on the table-mind of the artist, while the disquieting presence of the redimensioned stick of

charcoal transformed into a powerful larva which upsets the harmonic organization achieved, acts as an intensely effective exemplification of the disturbing metaphoric sense of all that surrounds us.

On one occasion the artist said the following with respect to this duality of behaviors which drive him:

«Emotionally speaking I am a metaphysician who despairs at the idea of death, who weeps in the dark over death. But at the same time I am a very vital person, and that's why I feel the need to ironize, at least a little, about my metaphysics.

This irony hardly appears at all in the public space.»⁴

CLAES OLDENBURG's drawings, an important mental laboratory of the artist since the sixties, projects the whole universe of imaginary operations which are later cleared out and translated into sculptural forms, concentrating a collection of objects connected with the life of man in the city. From his first visions on the street, the artist went on to display windows and immediately afterwards clothes and food. In the revealing article «Specific Objects» which Don Judd wrote in 1965, on the subject of a whole new esthetics of the object which was appearing at that time in New York and in which Oldenburg was an outstanding figure (he had just presented his celebrated «Bedroom»), he said:

«Oldenburg has taken this anthropomorphism to its extreme and identified emotional form, which is primary and biopsychological with him, with the selfsame form of the object. Through a shrill vulgarity he has subverted the sensation of the natural presence of human qualities in all things.

(...) Oldenburg exaggerates the accepted or chosen form and transforms it into something very much his own. Nothing of what he creates is perfectly objective, purely practical or simply present.

(...) But clearly enough, these new things, such as Oldenburg's techniques and materials, are pluses.»⁵

At that time, coinciding with other artists, Oldenburg emphasized processes of provisionality and non-fixation which affected the construction of images. He tried to inflate the plane of paintings, devoting himself to the creation of large soft sculptures of vinyl and creating replicas of them in papier-mâché. Combining sensuality and imagination, he

devised a complete exacerbated monumental iconography which was soft and deformable under the effects of gravity, and whose perpetually transitional state became impregnated with a special tragic-comic character, while facing what was, for Oldenburg, the «hostile reality of nature». The pneumatic perception, which transformed the hard into soft, has been compared to that of Dalí, because of the common wish to «see visionary objects subject to the forces of nature», thereby reviving the old problem of art vs. nature. Despite it all, as Coosje van Bruggen said:

«Oldenburg's approach is not illusionary; in combining fact and fiction, it is both analytical and symptomatic.

(...) Oldenburg attempts to balance the fantastic with the factual.»⁶

Indeed, Oldenburg's ideas have nothing to do with dreams or with unconscious obsessions. His ideas are conscious reactions to the objects of domestic surroundings and their social value. He fantasizes with these objects—once they have been distanced from their usual functions—and playfully puts them under the effect of what he calls «dramatic relations», through which he projects ironic ideas and notions which float around the meaning of the conventional images with which we communicate daily. Oldenburg himself made an effort of self-definition to avoid succumbing too easily to the reductive conception of surrealism:

«The strangest influence on my thought was Freud but I am not a surrealist of romantic imagery. I may be called an unromantic or scientific realist, a practicing or everyday surrealist, which is what Freud was. Science/Fiction.»⁷

In fact, on more than one occasion Oldenburg has expressed his belief that «mathematics appears», not as an external tool but as an inherent condition to the visual artist which he is. His notion of colossalism is implicit as a perfectly controlled and assumable abnormality, within this sphere of critical-realistic scientism which guides him:

«The view from an airplane clearly expresses my vision of the world: a distant, comprehensive, sensitive (no bombs), pseudo-pious fantasy-imagination of facts, which occur down below, based on evidence and mere suggestion, seen from afar.»⁸

Beneath the plethoric and even sensual game

of shocks and fantasies with respect to a new life of interferences rescued from the most trivial objects, Oldenburg has created what could be considered a genuine action-work from which he tries to express himself as an «authentic wringer of truth». This attitude explains his evident concern that monumental proposals should arise from the demands of the site itself, so that the re-invented presences integrate themselves and establish a convincing tie with the urban setting.

MARIO MERZ's first memory of a drawing is of the day he drew «a portrait of another prisoner» when, for political reasons, he spent some time in jail at the end of the war in 1945. What most impressed him with respect to that experience was the method he used: «Not once did I raise the pencil from the paper». He was later to apply this method in a more complete session opposite nature:

«The period of drawing in the field was the period of marking.
(...) the twittering birds, the falling leaves, the distant rumble of a van. All these things entered the drawing, not in a natural way, of course, but as time, as a recording, as if the pencil lead were the point of certain instruments registering on a sheet of paper: the point keeps rotating, it records the humidity, the temperature, the noises, the sounds».⁹

Germano Celant has called this unique way of seizing the «emotional and environmental seismic movements which stimulate the artist» in Merz's intricate immersions in the natural world, the «seismographic process of drawing and painting».

Since then his versatile blending with nature has an experiential substrate which projects him into the cosmos. It could be said that the theme par excellence in the world of Mario Merz, in which sculpture, painting and architecture are always interpenetrating each other, is the lesson of life which he receives from nature, a life which provides him with fluctuating forms which alert him to the discontinuous and deformable properties which run through reality. As a «director of excesses and violations», according to the definition made of him by Beatrice Merz, he is capable of transforming the meaning given to the most insignificant seed in a cosmic moment, transmuting the bodies into «places» endowed with incandescent energy and cosmic gravitation. The artist himself imagines it in this way:

«If I place the earthly woodland in my hand, the whole silent Western woodland joins with the magnificent Orient, so that, there, the spiral of the cosmos may begin».¹⁰

Beneath the layers of what is finite and decrepit, he causes an imaginary capture of the infinite rüñning through the universe to emerge, superimposed, sealing the created spaces with the endless proliferation of «Fibonacci» numbers (which he first used in 1968) as a form of hope, of ancestral knowledge which comes from the interior of nature and breathes outwards, being and disappearing, like a light that regenerates, awakens and heals the world for an instant, with what it commands in its deepest existence:

«I put myself inside a contradiction between opposites –between empty and full, between life and death, which is I believe, the contradiction between Mohammed and Buddha– the contradiction of a man per se as a fact of life. These numbers do not so much cultivate the contradiction as absorb the idea of the contradiction; insofar as the numbers 5 in 5 are repeated, they are vegetative and biologically natural, considering that they have a sort of father and mother who precede them and produce the subsequent offspring. Thus, these numbers often correspond to the proliferations of natural elements and human elements: for instance, we have 5 fingers, 2 eyes, 1 nose –that is to say, we have 1, 2, 5 and can easily recognize this number, which transcends itself in a divaricating sense.»¹¹

The valued image of dynamic expansion, creator of the ensemble of the «centre and the periphery» which the spiral provides him, would be, in short, the clearest «geometrical visualization of the series of 'Fibonacci' numbers» (series published for the first time in Pisa in 1202).

The testimonies of dynamicity are implicit in the idea of the infinite, an aspect which affects the number but also the presence of bodies. Merz is careful to specify:

«So everything must begin again! (...) No body is iconographically existent iconography!»¹²

In fact, Merz takes recourse to the non-image as the only possible image. The constructions of the igloo (the first one made in 1967) and of the table (which appears in his work in 1973) as sculptural-architectural images which primarily occupy him, are mere syntheses of ideas with

respect to the «place». The igloo would be the reclusive place par excellence and the table the expansive place. The table, as Beatrice Merz said, is a place of «communicative stimulation», «extension of the body itself» and «means of transmission». Both of them are places which transform man into a communitary being who exposes himself to confrontation with others, of the «ego» with others and with the contradictions of the selfsame «ego».

But these images, as is clear in the drawings, come into being mined by their own instability, by the irremediable mutation and interchangeability which affects all bodies inasmuch as they are mere projections of energy.

Merz has spoken of the temptations of transformation which he is unable to avoid:

«Instead of drawing a leaf, the leaf may be the table, and the table itself may become a leaf, a big leaf with a pane of glass and legs».¹³

In short, he can only record on the great canvas the idea of the fragile meeting place that walks on its own. At the crossroads with other possible metaphors in the area of the table-space, like the one which refers to displaced portions of the surface of the earth or man's own back, once again everything is above all impregnated with attributes of driving life, faced with the impossibility of setting the image, as an analogy of the freedom of thought which Merz has always advocated.

JAUME PLENSA is a sculptor interested in what he calls the creation of «indispensable places». He produces drawings with a special wealth of means and expressions. There is a type of physical, almost sculpted drawing, quite close to sculpture, which is not present in this exhibition. This show gives preference to another facet of drawing which has long been upheld by the artist and which strengthens the dialectical relations between the image and the world, in drawings which take the form of internal energy maps which are incapable of being transferred to the volumetric world. He uses the lithographic pencil, india ink, shoe cream or acetylene smoke, more than to define the loaded totem of memory –which would be his sculpture– to formulate poetic images of memory, to work the space of memory not as a direct evocation but as a trail of the unusual, like an unreconstructable archeology that emphasizes the idea of time, unapproachable, dislocated, without rhythmic

quality, which is equivalent to saying nearly extinct. That is why he constantly returns to the idea of the clock. In the work «Les Hores», the disoriented temporality is transformed into an image of disturbing density and in the book «La neige rouge» the clock gets rid of its hours one by one, while the text speaks of irrevocable flows of life and of unexpected cutoffs.

In a time without yesterday or today, the great fossil footprint which Plensa has interrogated from his beginnings is man and his interior: man as an organic container («Suite Baudelaire»), man reduced and surrounded by his own enigmas («Suite del temps») or the selfsame invasive power of the human organism, a simple fragment of hair transformed into a battalion of driving presences which create an impressive «Paysage» around it.

In recent years Plensa has directed his allusions to the generic man and has implied a personal definition in an ironic tone of the man-artist which floats in the vibrating artistic constellation of esteemed names («Loving Frida», «Seurat respira», «73% de mí», «Quié es Blake», «Donde nunca está Renoir», «The Ingres Water», etc). And in a much more savagely realistic act, he has placed a directly photocopied image of his feet against a paradigmatic notion of «Berliner Frühstück» (Berlin Café):

«To speak of mysticism would perhaps be excessive, but it is something that interests me, this wish of contradiction in one's self. It is something that makes one dream of another reality within one's self, helping to understand one's own reality in this way. My culture is full of mystics, such as St. John of the Cross, something which forms part of a Mediterranean lineage, of an ideal discourse full of contradictions, which I have perhaps inherited as an artist of the South. And I am convinced that this is very important today, in the poetic sense, because poetry, in the end, is not written in pink. Poetry is something hard, something sharp as a knife».¹⁴

In his latest series with tracing paper collages («Nest», «Home», «Cave»), Plensa is referring to the unconscious principles of belonging to a protective womb or matrix, as a more primitive mechanism of identification and safeguard of man.

With the photography of small images cut out and arranged on large surfaces of paper which Plensa has been working on in recent years, he is confronting the loss of scale of all objects as

another important approach to memory. With this action he emulates on the plane of the non-hierarchization of memories, the idea that «everything is of the same size in the memory». The threads dyed by the artist's hand will be the orienting guides in the gaze toward the objects («M Vers O» and «Etude pour Born») and the saturated white openings will create situations of construction-concealment («3 H. 10 MN.») which, for the artist, are simply the eternal spaces of dialogue with one's self. They are expressions of the idea that transitoriness and unfamiliarity dominate our experience of the world. As the artist himself has stated:

«We find ourselves today in a kind of continuous spiral in which each thing is successively hidden behind another, so it suddenly becomes necessary to do some cleaning in order to reach what is essential».¹⁵

Man-word-time. The sculptor seems to tell us that while the world takes shape for him through these three elements, it is also dominated by their possible disappearance. For the artist, all three are «matters» subject to an implacable erosion. Images, the meanings given to things, time commanding all, endeavor to be, but of these presences which arise in the process of their selfsame dissolution, all that remains is the enigma.

There is a veiled declaration of principles in a phrase of JANNIS KOUNELLIS which should be given its full value and a suitable explanation:

«I consider myself a mute poet, a blind painter, a deaf musician».¹⁶

The artist, who has always considered himself more of a painter than a sculptor, reveals in this phrase all that forms the foundation of his artistic creation, the permanent confrontation with the tensioned forms of the void, from which the meanings have been expelled with only the emergence of «pathos», of his own dramatic configuration, remaining. This is a sort of essentialism of the radical passions which prevent him from constructing images with their own meaning, and leads him to measure himself with the most profound dimension of the setting of non-meaning. To avoid misunderstandings, he insists that «the important thing is to see what the reasons are which cause an image to be born» (...) «I am not content with an informal image». His pulsional art proposes to offer us dense and unequivocal signals of the underlying forces which dominate Art and History, starting from

an eloquent mutism. Kounellis has created an art of a severe, destabilizing and paradoxical hermetism that is expressed from a hard and variegated silence, attempting to find the intense foundations of diction and, therefore, distancing itself persistently from representation.

From the beginning of his sculptural works one may observe a struggle to create new conditions of spatiality which arise from within the selfsame work of art as the only possibility of confronting the profound «rootlessness» which art experiences in our times.

The sculptural experience of the artist was preceded by an interesting ensemble of paintings which bore signs, numbers and letters and were created between 1958 and 1963. They were already a fascinating pictorial exponent of his imperious need to redimension space, resolved through incipient graphic situations in which aspects of the personal identity of the artist collided with evocations of social poster art, in relation to mute musical beats. Transitoriness and deficiency are incorporated, together with a particular emotional vibration, as visual and ideological values that would form the pillars of his language, which is governed, as Bruno Corà explained, by a:

«dialectic tension which hosts in the work a constant device of contradiction».¹⁷

The first walled-up door, an important decision to give a subversive autonomy to the world of art, was made in July 1969 in San Benedetto del Tronto, the same year in which he inaugurated an exhibition at the Galleria l'Attico in Roma with 11 live horses.

Saturation, the idea of spatial obturation, on which Jannis Kounellis usually works, must be understood from two perspectives, as a frustrating displacement of reasonable expectations and as a new baroque setting where constituent dialectical forces are convoked, where the fragment acts as a vehicle of experience of the world which is impossible to reconstruct again and which Kounellis experiences as an inevitable historical restriction, interpreted by Rudy Fuchs in this way:

«because probably no single form has the capacity or right to contain or express the complexity of this 20th century, which is still evolving around us».¹⁸

The «Teste nere» series from 1980 could be understood as an extension of the role of this notion of a wall overloaded with tension, which

contains in itself the image of «pathos». Piles of skull-fire-faces which unify the vision of matter and of fire, as a medieval image in the dialectical border of death and regeneration. Lynne Cooke refers to the effect of the works of that period in similar terms:

«The viewer stands still, silent and solemn, confronting the object. Nothing is conveyed by illusionistic or narrative means; the fixed hieratic forms have a material presence and allure that speaks directly to the senses. Meditation on the physical and actual serves to disclose a luminosity, sensuality and mutability that cannot be grasped but are nonetheless undeniably present. The spiritual and the material cohere and inhere».¹⁹

Later, the artist himself took up again this series of vertical papers. He has re-worked them, placing some of them in dialogue with the sheets of iron with which he decided to replace the pictorial plane a few years ago. For Kounellis, the re-doing of his own works was an added form of shock which, he admitted, affects the reconsideration of his own creative process. In this work the operation carried out serves to redouble the effect of muted silence which was already found in the bottom of these tensioned walls of images.

In Jannis Kounellis' procedure there is an incipient condensing process of stripping which produces forms of introspection and meditation tied to myths, to the story of man and to the story of painting, as convulsive territories from which to act with a complete defocusing of themes in favor of underlying poetic states from which it is possible for him to directly approach presentation as opposed to representation and, therefore, to develop an implacable denaturing of diaphanous and unequivocal meaning. Kounellis thus tries to reestablish a new syntactic order, to «stabilize language» from eloquent theatricalizations of the obscure (he confesses that the culture of Rome, where he has lived since he left Greece in 1956, is the maximum exponent of this fruitful dialogue with the semi-darkness), with strong roots in classicism and the Orient. Closely related to the great wall built with stones from Athens, which ran all around the walls of Gallerie Jean Bernier in 1985, the wall of sequential papers (conceived before the summer of 1995) which records persistent short traces of the hand, plots vigorous pulsional maps which evoke the elementary organic forces, where all collective memory could converge. In this state of pure graphics, it presents itself as a severe shadow, emulating

the notions of a disturbing lack of hierarchies of the walled-up spaces. In its disquieting flat expansion –from an exacerbated inner life– it convokes the frenzied power of emptied settings which preserve the echo of rites and narration. Chaos in its pure state, paradigmatic trembling territory of muted spaces open to the freest confrontation with the past.

The iconographic world of **JUAN MUÑOZ** emerges in the subtle line of confluence of both the crisis of the subject and the crisis of representation affecting sculpture. The Madrilenian artist chooses to approach the figure of man and real or apparently real settings, as constructions of the unusual, as places of tangential projections which imply a return to the non-meaning of the human figure. He himself has stated in this respect:

«The minimalists have understood the fantastic capacity of the cube as a device. What counts is what is added. I believe that in the human figure, there must be a similar possibility of zero degree of meaning. I am not talking about his physicalness, or corporalness, but of the image of man».²⁰

An elusive improbable narrative, made of phantasmagoria and wonderment, is reduced to silence and highlights the illusory character of the image. On some occasions the artist has associated the tense quietude of external appearances to the idea of «perpetuum mobile» which he admires in the constructions of Borromini. The similarity between representation and reality only goes to increase the drift, and recognizable things become shadows of themselves, creating disturbing splits. He likes to refer to the baroque in a twofold sense which likewise affects his work: on one hand, with respect to the apparent «confusion» and on the other, the «absence of serenity». In fact, however, there is also an experiential aspect to this disarrangement of the real, which the artist explained when referring to his «Raincoat Drawings»:

«When I was a kid living at home, I used to come back to the house every day. Occasionally –I don't know why– my mother changed the furniture around between the rooms. So you came in and opened the door of your room and found that your room was no longer your room –it was your brother's (...) So I grew up with this experience of dislocation. You feel uncomfortable yet it's extremely normal. I suppose that this relationship

between the normal and the discomfoting is part of the territory of the work».²¹

In the changes of the furniture in these uninhabited rooms there is a loss of the object, an aspect which runs through the entire sculptural and pictorial work of Juan Muñoz. According to José Luis Brea, this would be a «total metaphor» transformed into an allegory. It is the broken place of representation, where a new communicative order is structured between the objects. Here, as Brea said:

«Each element remains opaque, closed in itself. It might also be noted that it seems to intentionally designate a «dead-end street», a fragment fallen back on its own limits...»²²

These are unfinished spaces, of a thick silence, where the subject has been laterally replaced by an interplay of disturbing interferences channeled into familiar objects, in order to build a project of a house that leaves out the spectator. House/barrier versus house/womb. Isolated spaces in the selfsame dramaturgy of what cannot be completed from outside (which is the reason for the double box with which Juan Muñoz often works), smothered in their own «critical process of construction».

The spatial relations are based on a subtle interplay of anguishing proximities which affect the furniture, to form settings of a tense wait which is increased by the forms of psychological encloistering which we find in the transit inwards and in the perplexing mental projection which is created in the other paintings within the painting, where picturesque views, bewildering oriental dances or redundant claustrophobic images of the same room are projected.

In this disconnected alienated treatment of images, Juan Muñoz becomes the user of a subtly disguised, slippery, turbid realism which forces the contingencies and the instability of the recognizing gaze of the visual world. The imagery is suspended in a kind of statically terrible and corrosive dream which exudes irrational emotions.

The temptation to reinvent the doubles of the view, new partial possibilities of constructing images of the world, is also present in the phantasmagorical «Back Drawings». These are the silhouettes of the backs of old and young people, which the artist has made in recent years. They thus form a tragic gallery of semi-human portraits, with a cruel deauthorization of the individual, which Juan Muñoz works on with a mysterious cartography of ankylosations:

«A new standard for the human figure is sought on the side of deviation and shadow. Before our eyes arise the surrogates and simulacra for a human nature which has either already ceased to be, or is in the process of ceasing to be human. All Muñoz's figures are examples of deviated figurations».²³

His maximum challenge is to «force the gaze to change the place where it settles», to induce new mechanisms of vision, since the figurative space denies figuration and leaves us drifting fatalistically amid the images of desire.

Jean-Marc Poinot, catalogue «Juan Muñoz. Sculptures de 1985-1987», CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, p. 11.

21. Excerpt from a conversation between Juan Muñoz and James Lingwood, Parkett, No. 43, 1995, p. 44.

22. José Luis Brea, «Juan Muñoz: L'autre parle», Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain des Pays de la Loire, Abbaye Royal de Fontevraud, 1987, p. 4.

23. Alexandre Melo, «The Art of Conversation», Parkett, No. 43, 1995, p. 38.

NOTES

1. Kevin Power, «Miquel Navarro: Les métaphores del poder i del diseg», catalogue «Miquel Navarro», Galeria Joan Prats, Barcelona, 1991.

2. Excerpt from an interview between Mariano Navarro, Alicia Murria and Miquel Navarro, catalogue «Espacios públicos sueños privados» Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, 1993.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Don Judd, «Specific Objects», first published in «Arts Yearbook», No. 8, 1965.

6. Coosje van Bruggen, «Soft and Hard», catalogue «Claes Oldenburg: Nur Ein Anderer Raum», Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, p. 105.

7. Claes Oldenburg, «Los Angeles Notes», 1964.

8. Claes Oldenburg, «Notes», New York, 1970.

9. Excerpt from an interview between Germano Celant and Mario Merz, catalogue «Mario Merz», San Marino, Palazzo Congressi ed Esposizioni, 1983.

10. M. Merz, «Voglio fare subito un libro», Florence, 1986, p. 168.

11. Excerpt from an interview between Germano Celant and Mario Merz, Genoa, 1971, reproduced in the catalogue «Mario Merz», Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1989, p. 109.

12. Mario Merz, catalogue «Mario Merz», Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Prato, 1990, p. 46.

13. Excerpt from an interview between Beatrice Merz and Mario Merz, catalogue «Mario Merz Terra elevata o la storia del disegno», Castello di Rivoli, 1990.

14. Excerpt from a conversation between Jean Pierre Rehm and Jaume Plensa, catalogue «Jaume Plensa. Un Sculpteur - Une Ville», Valence, 1994, p. 12.

15. Ibid., p. 13.

16. Excerpt from an interview between Bruno Corà and Jannis Kounellis, catalogue «Kounellis», ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1980.

17. Bruno Corà, «Jannis Kounellis. El futuro de la forma en la calidad del amor», in «Kounellis», Ed. Polígrafa, Barcelona, 1990, p. 18.

18. R.H. Fuchs, catalogue «Jannis Kounellis. Oeuvres de 1983 a 1985», CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, 1985.

19. Lynne Cooke, «Luminous Penumbra», catalogue «Jannis Kounellis», Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, 1986.

20. Excerpt from a conversation between Juan Muñoz and