

Volume!

Works from the Collections of "la Caixa" Foundation and MACBA

9 November 2011 – 23 April 2012

The Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) presents the first collaborative exhibition combining works from the Collection of "la Caixa" Foundation and the MACBA Collection, as a result of an agreement between "la Caixa" Foundation and the MACBA Foundation. *Volume!* proposes an itinerary running from the sculptural to the acoustic dimension, and emphasising the consolidation of sound and voice as materials for artistic production at the turn of the present century. Included in the itinerary are a series of specific developments that function as separate exhibitions within the Collection. Such is the case in the chronological section of the MACBA Collection, the recently acquired works by Muntadas, Šejla Kamerić and Anri Sala, and the revision of the work of Aleksandr Sokurov.

This initiative provides the ideal framework for investigating one of the Museum's main avenues of work: the exploration of artistic practices from the mid-twentieth century to the present. Within MACBA's programming, this idea has fuelled a long-term project based on an organic and open concept of the Collection, which connects the various presentations with the temporary exhibitions. MACBA is interested in expanding the perception of the arts beyond visibility, toward the fields of sound and voice as creative materials. To that aim we have also developed a programme at Radio Web MACBA, online resources, and a variety of activities within our Public Programme.

Volume! proposes an interpretation of the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century based on a paradigm shift in art in terms of materials, sensory aspects and programming. The exhibition questions the clichés that identify the twentieth century as the 'century of the image', and the 1980s with the supremacy of painting (the 'great irony', as Brian O'Doherty writes in the afterword to his seminal work *Inside the White Cube*, of 'a reconfirmation of all that had been laid bare and rejected'). Instead, the exhibition places the pre-eminence of sculpture and photography at the centre of change at the turn of the present century, by rejecting and surpassing the Minimalist principles that had dominated sculpture until the seventies, and, in the case of photography, by going beyond the concept of the document in favour of a new aesthetic dimension.

Volume! identifies the turn of the century as the moment of consolidation of sound and voice as materials for artistic production. The new model is rooted in experimental video and cinema works that favour a narrative language that gradually frees itself from the image. Precedents for this interest can be found, however, in Dadaist phonetic poetry from the early twentieth century, and in the *poésie sonore* and Lettrist experiments that followed the Second World War. More recently, as well as the reflections of theoreticians such as Roland Barthes and Mladen Dolar, whose contributions steered the visual arts toward a sudden attention to sound, we have had the new technological possibilities for recording, altering and reproducing the voice. The relationship between voice and image, vocal experimentation, the inner voice and the voice of power, are some of the approximations to the human voice that can be found in this exhibition.

Echoing the formal and material innovations introduced by the historic avant-gardes in the early twentieth century, contemporary art has dethroned the eye as the

hegemonic sense and reinstated hearing in a real and contingent body. The white cube, that 'machine for looking' associated to an idea of the museum as inherited from the past, is showing its age. The viewers, re-embodied, have acquired a near-choreographic quality and outstripped its limits through a multiplicity of experiences. The three-dimensional nature of the Euclidean volume (from classical physics) has been replaced by the volume of sound and voice. This change in material has worked radical changes on the perceptive system and on behaviour: based on the convention dominated by what is visual, we can begin to narrate a history of art with a new multi-sensorial dimension.

The itinerary proposed by this exhibition puts forward a circular diagram that connects the different Museum levels. From a chronological point of view, it begins at Level 1, branching out from there in two directions: one leading from the visual space of painting and photography toward sculptural volume, further developed on Level 2; and another leading to acoustic volume, developed mostly on Level 0. Each area contains a series of superimpositions that form the poetic humus of the different narrations and metaphors.

Level 1

The exhibition starts with two emblematic works, recently incorporated to the MACBA Collection, which function as a preamble to the exhibition's thematic axis. *Between the Frames: The Forum (Barcelona), 1983–93*, 2011, by **Muntadas**, is a choral and polyphonic work that contributes 'an extensive vision of the art system in the eighties'. From 1983 to 1993, Muntadas interviewed a significant number of agents involved in the international art circuit, who were asked to express their values, functions, responsibilities and personal opinions. As the critic Eleanor Heartney explains, 'by foregrounding the elements of the art world which usually serve as its invisible background, *Between the Frames* asks us to rethink our own unexamined convictions'.

Contrasting the babelic loquacity of Muntadas's work, the film project *1395 Days without Red*, 2011, recreates the traumatic experience of the siege of Sarajevo from the perspective of the present. The work comprises two films: one by the Albanian artist **Anri Sala**, showing on this Level; the other by the Bosnian artist **Šejla Kamerić**, showing on Level 2. Both films reflect on the construction of memory from a narration without words: a woman wandering the streets of Sarajevo, seen as an individual displacement through collective memory.

Following this double introduction, we enter the core fabric of the MACBA Collection, starting with architectural rationalism and the explosion of pictorial Informalism in the 1950s, a time when matter abstraction occupied centre stage in painting and sculpture. Here we find works by **Antoni Tàpies**, **Joan Hernández Pijuan** and **Pablo Palazuelo**, next to architectural projects by **Francesc Mitjans**. During that time, civil society played an active part in the creation of an incipient spirit of renewal. Art, architecture and design experimented with new forms of interaction, supported by private initiatives such as 'La Ricarda' and Club 49, and culminating in the first Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona (1960–63). Prime examples of those activities are the collaborations between **Joan Brossa** and **Josep M. Mestres Quadreny**.

In the 1960s and 1970s, art breaks from inherited conventions and explores new languages and materials, such as in the work of **Robert Rauschenberg** and **Robert Morris**. Numerous artists incorporate media images into their work, a key aspect in

the contributions of **KP Brehmer** and **Joan Rabascall**, for example. Openly critical voices rise from artistic practices against the ruling climate of censorship, lack of freedom and *machismo*. The appearance of 'underground comix' in Spain marks a milestone in the consolidation of a new language or alternative forms of expression.

Among the protagonists of a return to pictorial abstraction, dominated by stereotypes of savage painting and material experimentation, are **Miquel Barceló**, **Luis Claramunt**, **Luis Gordillo** and **Ferran García Sevilla**, among others. In our context, this return coincides with a moment of deep changes in society, in an atmosphere that favours a new hedonistic culture. In Barcelona there is an increase in the number of 'night haunts' designed in collaboration with graphic designers, artists and architects. Away from the street violence and tension of the seventies, the 1980s become a happy, bourgeois and night-loving decade.

At a time when photography has acquired a new status as a work of art, the city itself becomes an artistic subject. The overview of the urban condition is expressed in the works of **Manolo Lagullo**, **Craigie Horsfield**, **Jeff Wall**, **Thomas Schütte**, **Thomas Struth** and **Thomas Ruff**. From different perspectives and in a variety of contexts, they all turn the city, its metamorphoses and appendices, into the axis of their creative discourse.

Within the proposed itinerary, *Hey Joe*, 1996, by **Kristin Oppenheim**, provides a break that unfolds, with great sensuality, the sculptural dimension of the voice. This installation prefigures many of the pieces on Level 0. In a minimalist language, Oppenheim totally dispenses with images and puts the accent on the potential of the human voice, which acquires a physical and emotional presence: the voice creates physical volume. The artist keeps repeating in a hypnotic and melancholic manner the first line of a song made popular by Jimmy Hendrix during the Vietnam War – 'Hey Joe, where're you going with that gun in your hand?' –, while the spotlights move around the space, creating an experience of sensory litany.

At the beginning of February 2012, these last rooms will host a show of **Aleksandr Sokurov's** cinematographic work. In Sokurov's 'filmic poems', half-way between the documentary tradition and fiction, visual rhythm replaces narrative conventions. Among other productions, two emblematic films will be screened, examining the modern Russian character as a result of the changes in the old Soviet Union: *Spiritual Voices*, 1995, which adopts the form of an intimate diary, devoid of all artifice, to explain the life of a military frontier post; and *Confession*, 1998, a false documentary about the daily life of a Russian military ship in the Arctic, which offers a vivid illustration of the effects of monotony and oppression on the spirit.

Level 2

Sculptural volume proposes the physical occupation of space from a reflection on the architectural space that conditions it, forcing the viewer to walk around the work and interact with it in order to gain a complete experience. The visual component remains, but the near-choreographic displacement of the viewer introduces a dramatic element in the perception.

This requirement increases as we proceed along the different sections on this level. Returning to the pictorial paradigm of the eighties, we find works by **Sigmar Polke** and **Gerhard Richter**, next to a large-scale triptych by **Anselm Kiefer**, *Montsalvat*, 1981–84, in which the artist transforms the uniform surface of modern abstraction into a space that combines and creates a topography of materials. *Saison des pluies*

n° 2, 1990, a pale, almost monochromatic painting by **Miquel Barceló**, and *Black Flower*, 1987, by **José María Sicilia**, evoke a classicism that contrasts with the gestuality of previous years.

In parallel to this tendency, the conceptual currents feed and hybridise sculpture, from the empty frames of **Jan Vercruysse** to the objectual installations of **Haim Steinbach** that question the fetishes of consumer society (his famous shelves echo the debates provoked by Baudrillard on the post-modern condition).

At the crossroads between Conceptual art and the return to painting stands the production of **Art & Language**, perhaps the most heterodox group of the second half of the twentieth century, whose *Paul Signac Dreams of the Future III*, 1983, is shown here. Their reflection on the responsibility of the artist, the place of the museum and the painting tradition, the role of the viewer and the aesthetic canons, developed mainly through their eponymous magazine, affords them a preferential status.

For **Günther Förg**, the concern with space leads him to transform the exhibiting space into a picture frame. Among the many architectural elements that he photographs, stairs have become a leitmotiv, with a high-angle shot perspective that suggests an interest in cinema. Förg often frames his pictures with glass to produce a mirror effect, so that the space behind the viewer will be reflected on the work. This resort is also used by **Tony Cragg**, creator of great towers that invite us to walk round them and retrace them with the movement of our body.

Alluding to Donald Judd, *Standard Edition*, 1988, by **Rodney Graham**, introduces a series of overtly post-Minimalist proposals that question the processes of interpretation and the status of the artwork. Probably the most ironic is that of **Allan McCollum**, who parodies the white cube and Greenbergian 'flatness' in his installations of small paintings, such as *216 Plaster Surrogates*, 1987–88. His critique is also aimed at the figure of the artist, since his paintings, industrial in appearance, always contain an autobiographical element: 'I'm just doing the minimum that is expected of an artist and no more.' The influence of Marcel Broodthaers is evident in these works that postulate anonymity, collective creation, the death of the author, the use of pseudonyms and the rituals of parody.

An autobiographic element is always present in the work of **Reinhard Mucha**, who cannot elude the contradictions and dilemmas of his German condition. *Lingen*, 1987, is a hermetic piece in which the artist, like Förg or Cragg, involves viewers directly by placing a glass that mirrors them.

Corredor suspendido II, 2005, by **Cristina Iglesias**, a near-monumental sculpture that vindicates corporality and the occupation of subtle spaces, is the nexus that connects with the sculptural installations on Level 0. While operating as a conventional device, the work answers to the creative challenges of a forever-questioned perception that re-formulates the inner labyrinth of Iglesias's work and incorporates the shadow of language as an integral part of sculptural volume.

A separate case is made by the photographic works of **Allan Sekula**, **David Goldblatt** and **Xavier Ribas**, invited to participate in the project *Survey Barcelona 2007*. Their projects *Methane for All*, 2007–8, *Connexions globales*, 2007, and *Habitus*, 2007, respectively, documented the industrial architectures and the human environments that coexist in different manifestations of urban transformation, as part of the exhibition *Universal Archive. The Condition of the Document and the Modern Photographic Utopia*. This critical attitude toward collective actions that leave an imprint on the territory and the landscape is also present in (*Ir. T. n° 513*) *zuloa*.

Extended Repertory, 2003–7, by **Ibon Aranberri**, which documents the artist's intervention in the Iritegi cave, a place of high scientific value.

Level 0

With the incorporation of the conventions of cinematographic language into artistic practices, whether through the image, sound, the human voice or other resources, the aesthetic experience gives way to a great diversity of behaviours, which are induced and driven by the work's own dynamic. The emphasis on the narrative character of the object is inevitably associated to the irruption of time and identity. These are the three vertices that define the dramatic action, another performative element that characterises the works in this section.

The narrative thread of the exhibition is retaken by **Juan Muñoz**. *Waste Land*, 1986, Muñoz's peculiar approximation to the poem by T.S. Eliot, presents a theatrical space for a latent dramaturgy that involves the viewer, as is the case in the installations by Oppenheim and Latifa Echakhch. 'You read Eliot, and you have the impression it's a voice in an empty room,' Muñoz says. Through this transposition, the fake voice of the ventriloquist dummy – simultaneously a real object and a representation – lets normality be permeated by strangeness to reveal a dislocation.

With the installation *Modernologie (Triangular Atelier)*, 2007, **Florian Pumhösl** undertakes an aesthetic and ideological revision of modernism's artistic legacy from a more rationalist perspective. The installation is made up of panels 'bound' in black fabric that unfold in the space as diagonal forms. The work refers to the eponymous project by the Japanese architect Kon Wajirō, and to the Japanese avant-garde artist and designer from the twenties, Murayama Tomoyoshi. What this work represents is not a dialogue between cultures, but culture as a dialogue in itself.

From the point of view of epic, the foundational archetype of Western culture, we find the critical gaze of **Joan Jonas** in *Lines in the Sand*, 2002. 'Take my hands in your hands, teach me to remember, teach me not to remember.' The words of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) traverse like a subterranean current within Jonas's videographic palimpsest, a work about the deconstruction of myths based on *Helen in Egypt* by the same author. The analysis of gesture as a symbol of power also articulates *Portrait*, 1994, by **Muntadas**. The work dismantles the voices of power through a slow procession of anonymous hands that, with the hypnotic rhetoric of their movement, reveal the finality of gestual stereotypes.

Representative and interpretative processes constitute a place for reflection in which totally different works can be inscribed. *Hearing Aid*, 1976, by **Michael Snow**, demonstrates that all representations are distortions. In this minimalist installation, it is sound that produces the image. Snow questions the nature of sound, but also memory, space and the limits of representation. In *Nature morte*, 2008, by **Akram Zaatari**, the pervasive voice of a muezzin, amplified by the loudspeakers in the mosque, envelops the close-up shots of two men in turbans cleaning their working tools at dawn. Everything develops with great ambiguity. Only the voice's recitative, as a contextualising element, and a very brief sequence provide any clues for the disambiguation of the image.

If the accentual qualities of the voice are important in Zaatari's work, they are also a prominent element in *So Different... And Yet*, 1980, by **James Coleman**. The contemporary Olympia at the centre of this videographic monologue, in a static shot lasting fifty minutes, speaks with an exaggerated French accent that parodies

national identities; she also parodies gestures and costumes as visual signs defining the identity of the subject. An essential piece in a theatre without theatre, *So Different... And Yet* is inscribed in the experimentation with language that defines the work of this artist, who uses the media of cinema and theatre to question the nature of representation.

The photographs in *Cabinet of*, 2001, by **Roni Horn**, precede the installation by **Latifa Echakhch** *À chaque stencil une révolution*, 2007, of great lyrical power. The silent oratorio by Echakhch stimulates different perceptive areas in the viewer. By using the remains of tracing paper characteristic of the pre-digital era, the work erects a silent chapel to the social revolutions of the recent past, while engaging in a critique of the so-called revolutionary powers of today. The title, taken from a sentence by Yasser Arafat referring to May '68 and the protests against the Vietnam War, aims to be a reflection on the nature of today's activism.

In his monologue, *Face A / Face B*, 2002, **Rabih Mroué** films the time that binds the voice and the memory of a given instant, of an image linked to his own voice recorded in a tape that traverses time and space. The subjective character of all transcriptions is at the base of *Postscript / The Passenger (OV)*, 1996–2010, by **Pierre Bismuth**. The text projected on this work is the retro-writing of the dialogue and atmosphere of the film by Michelangelo Antonioni *The Passenger*, 1975, by a woman about whom all we know is that she is listening to the soundtrack of the film. Bismuth transforms the cinematic experience into a literary one, in a tension caused by the non-cinematic space, and reveals the fragility of image reading codes, the independence of the eye from the ear, and the redundancy of the ear in a world conditioned by the visual experience. Against a silent background, we find the portraits of the Latin Kings' urban tribes by **Jean-Louis Schoellkopf**.

Without any direct political connotations, but dealing in the concept of subordination, **Bruce Nauman** proposes a reflection on the nature of power in *Shit in your Hat – Head on a Chair*, 1990, in which an invisible voice gives absurd orders to an alienated character (a mime) who obeys it blindly.

The suggested itinerary ends with *Not I*, 1972, by **Samuel Beckett**. This is a key work in Beckett's oeuvre because it allows the author to turn language into the motor of dramatic action. This 'machine gun of words', the incandescent mouth that talks about itself in the third person while repeatedly denying its identity, synthesises with great formal purity the central thesis of the exhibition: the importance of the voice in the artistic production of the early twenty-first century and the change it has brought to the way we relate to works of art.