



Fest für Leda, 1977.
Ceremonial.
Documenta 6,
Kassel

Paris 1967-75. Ethics/Aesthetics

Miralda's story begins in Spain in the Sixties during his military service in the university militias under Franco's dictatorship. His drawings of that period, heavily charged with caustic humour, obsessively analyse movements, military tactics and notions of good and evil. Leaping from paper to object, his soldiers — white plastic miniatures — soon invaded all his work: photos, frottages-collages, posters, furniture, cupboards, tables, chairs, walls and the streets of Paris where, from 1962, he lived, when not stationed in army camps. In 1972, he made *París. La Cumparsita* with Benet Rossell, a film about the adventures of a great soldier searching for his pedestal in the streets and public squares of the city. This is also the period of his *Soldats-Soldés* (Bargain Soldiers), *Dibujos geométricos* (Geometric Drawings), *Essais*

d'amélioration (Improvement Essays), *Toile de Jouy*, his *Cenotaphs* — those public, tourist monuments to generals — and *Cendriers-tombeaux* (Ashtray-Tombs).

From the Object to the Event: Ceremonials / Rituals

The withdrawal of Miralda's armies marked the start of a period when his work began to focus on a fascination with aspects that are continually overlooked in the process of artistic creation, such as food as an artistic experience and audience participation in the creative act itself. Miralda uses ceremonials and ritualised events to stage meticulous choreographies, celebrations of the senses and life. The ritualising of food, its preparation, colouring, offering and consumption are all turned into magnificent celebrations of the imaginary, made real by hundreds of participants. In 1969, in conjunction with Dorothee Selz, Joan Rabascall and Jaume Xifra, Miralda organised *Noir, mauve & barbe à papa* (Black, Mauve & Candyfloss) at the American Center in Paris. This was to be followed by many others, as can be seen in the films and installations partly re-created here, such as *Fest für Leda* (Feast for Leda) from Documenta 6 (Kassel, 1977) and *Taste Point Charlie* from 1979.

Miralda moved to New York in 1972 where, in 1973, he developed the idea for *Patriotic Banquet*, a menu composed of edible flags designed to

rot after several days on show. But this sort of call to order was hard to swallow at a time when the Vietnam War was everyday fare trivialised by television, and it never got off the drawing board. Produced here for the first time, its current validity is all the more disturbing.

American multiculturalism proved a gateway to discovery, and Miralda's work dialogues with this cultural "melting pot" and its popular manifestations, including culinary traditions. In Houston, his *Texas TV Dinner* installation (1977) featured the cuisine of local restaurants; in Kansas City, the heart of US farming, he invited the whole city to take part in the harvest festivities and cattle fair with *Wheat & Steak* in 1981. Parading along a street we find, amongst other things, the *Tri-Uni-Corn* and a massive crown made of several tons of fat; the Board of Trade, the famous grain exchange, also gave a banquet of coloured bread and golden leaves.

Food is closely interwoven with the affinities and customs of any community and, as such, is replete with symbolism and connotations. Eating is not merely the satisfaction of a physical need but an opportunity to give, share, communicate and celebrate. In food, everyone can find the living memory of their community. Even the Orishas of the African pantheon are, according to tradition, what they eat. *Santa Comida* (Holy Food) made in the Museo del Barrio, New York in 1984, spontaneously integrates into the heart of the district's Latin community. The seven altars evoking both African ancestors and their Christian "masks" — the saints and virgins in Afro-Cuban and Brazilian *Santería* — are kept supplied with their favourite foods. Not a day goes by without more anonymous offerings being deposited, in keeping with tradition.

Between the Old World and the New: the Honeymoon Project (1986-1992)

True to his fascination with monuments, in a metaphor which married the Statue of Liberty overlooking New York harbour to the monument to Christopher Columbus in the port of Barcelona, Miralda explored the concept of conquest and liberty — or loss of liberty — and the cultural comings and goings between Europe and America since 1492.

The celebrations kicked off in 1986, with the official project launch — *The Engagement Ceremony* — at the New York Convention Center where a giant engagement dress, TV Ring and *Ba-Ca-Llà* (codfish) scrolls signed

by the mayors of Barcelona and New York consenting to the marriage, all went on show. This intercontinental project, developed over a six-year period, was inspired by European wedding traditions but was finally carried out the American way in Las Vegas. From trousseau to wedding presents, thousands of hands worked on the preparations: the media encouraged young and old alike to help write love letters (more than 2,500), whilst fashion schools vied with one another to make the bride and groom's outfits. Miss Liberty's petticoat and stockings — on show at this exhibition — were made in Terrassa, Miralda's home town

and Catalonia's great textiles centre. The *Mediterranean Necklace*, with its three lighthouses, was a gift from the city of Sète, whilst the *Eternity Ring* was presented by the City of Birmingham in England, where it was made with the help of Chus Burés, who also designed the wedding rings containing water from six seas and oceans. Household and monumental elements merge together to evoke a fusion of cultures and time, turning the archaic into the link between present and future.



Santa Comida (Holy Food), 1984.
Installation.
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) Collection, Barcelona

From Edible to Virtual: the FoodCulturaMuseum Sabores y Lenguas (Tastes and Tongues), a project first presented at the Istanbul Biennial in 1997, was taken up again in Miami in 2002 with the participation of the Latin-American communities living side by side in the city. It became a work in progress, exploring the urban culinary landscape, the traditions and vocabulary found on the street, in kitchens and in homes, as

well as interactively at exhibitions organised in different towns, where blackboards were set up for visitors to note down popular expressions, recipes or comments. These were subsequently compiled into a series of catalogue/log books for each town, and into a set of plates resulting from the experience. *Tastes and Tongues* toured thirteen Latin-American cities and fifteen European cities and was to be the FoodCulturaMuseum's first project. This poetic journey through popular tastes and lore became one of the conceptual cornerstones of the Food Pavilion Miralda made for Expo 2000 in Hanover.

This time on a global scale, the FoodCulturaMuseum was designed as an open infrastructure, a sort of a museum/archive/research-centre which, in addition to its multidisciplinary activities, was to become a



Honeymoon Project, 1986-92. *Combinación Santa María*, installed on the Wolfson Campus, Miami Dade College, Miami

living memory of gastronomic culture and a documentation centre which would bring together the thousands of documents in Miralda's archives and catalogue his collection of objects. At the same time, it would invite the creation of "satellite kitchens", as the artist calls them, where creative and culinary concepts could be explored or re-invented. One of these kitchens, the *TransEAT*, opened its doors in Miami (2003). This was followed by another in Barcelona

(2007) which subsequently became the headquarters for the FoodCultura Foundation and home to its archives and enormous collections. These are stacked meticulously in hundreds of translucent boxes like the ones Miralda has installed at this exhibition, in the form of a gateway to another reality, perhaps to the revalidation of the "modern art culture system" as portrayed by James Clifford in the diagram of what he calls the "Machine for Making Authenticity". In the meantime, Miralda displays a selection of pieces in fridges: the perfect metaphor for a museum in waiting. This exhibition also presents *Stomak Digital*, a project fostered for many years by the FoodCulturaMuseum. It will regroup activities, exhibitions, videos, and archives and propose a transverse reading of this material, by theme or subject matter. It will also be posted on the Internet in the near future.

For some, Miralda's oeuvre defies classification. Historically though, his work is very much in tune with his age and has parallels with the rebellious Dadaist mindset of the early 20th century, which re-appears in many forms throughout the century and pervades the oeuvre of many contemporary artists. Pierre Restany, an art critic and friend, sums him up as follows, "With his relentless gentleness, Miralda will continue to show that play is the essence of the world and that celebrations are the tireless guerrilla forces of freedom".

Miralda

De gustibus non disputandum

24 June – 11 October 2010

Palacio de Velázquez

Parque del Retiro

Images

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Palacio de Velázquez hours

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Miralda

De gustibus non disputandum

The Latin proverb chosen by Miralda (Terrassa, 1942) as the title for this retrospective proposes a reflection upon the richness of a unique and pioneering body of work that takes us — with an at times caustic sense of humour — from the modest object to the grandiose celebration, from the private space to the public arena, from the intimate to the monumental, and from the local to the universal.

Anchored in a social and political context, like a field study verging on ethnology, his work is both witness and tool in the breakdown of prejudice and pre-conceived ideas about form. One of the first artists to spurn the spatial constraints of studios and museums, Miralda stages his activities out on the street and in other places outside regular art circuits. The works exhibited here should be seen as landmarks on a journey which explores the most complex and fundamental issues of our society, codifying them in a singular iconography — sometimes on a colossal scale — in search of a vibrant and engaging language based on a celebration of the senses, colour, life and the imagination.