

Hans Haacke

Castles in the air



Imagen de la instalación de Hans Haacke "Castillos en el aire" en el Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. 2012
Fotografía
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DATES: 14 February – 23 July 2012

PLACE: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.
Sabatini Building, 3rd floor

ORGANISED BY: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

CURATED BY: Manuel Borja-Villel

COORDINATE BY: Patricia Molins

*A democratic society must promote critical thinking, including a constant critique of itself.
Without it, democracy will not survive.* Hans Haacke

Hans Haacke (Cologne, 1936) has been one of the main exponents of institutional critique, an aspect of conceptual art that focuses on the critical analysis of the reality that is concealed behind the institutions. His work, however, transcends this horizon and operates in the vast and increasingly complex territory that establishes new relations between art and life and art and society, at a time when the romantic vision of the artist as a lone and inspired being is on the wane. Haacke taps disciplines hitherto unrelated to art, such as sociology or economics, and uses their tools: archives, newspapers, surveys, minutes of meetings of boards of directors, and property registration files, all of which, in democratic countries, are accessible to the general public although seldom consulted for public purposes. Employing these tools, his work uncovers and draws attention to specific issues, questioning the notion of art as a pursuit removed from society and it follows the course that revived art from the sixties onwards.

The exhibition unfolds in two interconnected spaces. The first section displays works produced between 1959 and 2009, and the second is reserved for *Castles in the Sky* (2012), a project devised in Spain specifically for the exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofía. Instead of bringing together a selection of works from the past and adding a new project, Haacke extends his concerns into the present. The social impact of his early works reverberates in the new project, reflecting the extent to which the present is indebted to past actions and decisions. In this show, Haacke continues to pursue his goal of violating the romantic conception of the artwork and testing the limits of the institutions that welcome it.

In order to reveal the conflict-ridden nature of the art system, Haacke resorts to an analysis of certain aspects such as sponsorship of art institutions by large corporations, which is a common practice since the seventies. Works such as *Thank You, Paine Webber* and *Der Pralinenmeister* (The Chocolate Master) reveal the conflicts of interest of those who occupy positions of responsibility and the impact of their charitable interventions: real estate speculation, self-enrichment, unemployment, dubious interests in dictatorial regimes, and hidden political connections of patrons and

collectors. As a result, the art object appears as a screen behind which truths are concealed, or as a consumer object, governed by market-conditions. Along these lines, Haacke recreates avant-garde discourses such as that of Marcel Duchamp's *readymade*, and reveals how institutions alter the economic value of art and neutralize its subversive potential (*Broken R.M...* and *Nothing to Declare*) or how they perceive art as a "social lubricant" and a remedy for societal conflicts (*On Social Grease*). Notions that were previously foreign to artistic practice such as inflation, surplus value and appreciation, come to the surface: the hand of the market, using the metaphor of Adam Smith, demands, in movement, the viewer's attention and appears as a farce, like a corporate logotype (*The Invisible Hand of the Market*). With this gesture, Haacke stages the imminent bursting of the "art bubble" that will match other forms of unsustainable *inflation*.

In 2010 Haacke found in Madrid's Ensanche de Vallecas suburb a site that encapsulates such fears. Frozen in time, a large urban development, dominated by skeletons of buildings whose construction was abandoned when the housing bubble burst, looms as the surplus of arrested development. The almost deserted streets bear the names of 20th century artists and art movements. A failed economic and urban model is associated with a nomenclature stripped of all discursive potential and converted into a registered and monumentalized trademark. In contrast to the absence of life in the buildings, their plans, used as a guide for potential buyers, together with the property registration files and the waving movement of nylon threads, seem to reanimate the invisible market trickster, and they expose the vulnerability of artistic and economic projects that have turned into fantasies and castles swayed by oscillations as imperceptible as they are decisive.

CATALOGUE

On occasion of the exhibition, Museo Reina Sofía will publish a catalogue, in both English and Spanish, where the artist's whole trajectory and images of the project he specifically developed for the Museo will be represented. The volume will include an introduction by **Manuel Borja-Villel** and **Teresa Velázquez**, and texts by **Alex Alberro** and **Nora M. Alter**, **Marta Buskirk**, **Vicenç Navarro**, **Silvia Herrero** and **Chema García-Pablos**.

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