

## Minimal Resistance. Between late modernism and globalisation: artistic practices during the 80s and 90s



FISCHLI & WEISS

*La mínima resistencia*, 1980-1981

Filmación / DVD

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

Archivo fotográfico del Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

- DATES:** 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 – 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2014
- PLACE:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (Spain)  
Sabatini Building. Third Floor
- ORGANIZATION:** Organised by the Reina Sofia Museum as part of “The Uses of Art” project by the European museums network, L’Internationale
- CURATORS:** Manuel Borja-Villel, Rosario Peiró and Beatriz Herráez
- RELATED ACTIVITIES:**
- \***Seminar:** *Dance in the 80s: The first steps of contemporary dance in Spain.*
    - Round Tables** (25<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 at 7:00pm, and 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 at 12:00pm (midday))
    - Lectures/Projection** (13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November and 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2013, 7:30pm)
  - \***Film and Video season:** *The image is a virus. Stories of Cinema. 1980s - 1990s* (11<sup>th</sup> November – 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2013, 7:00pm)
  - \* **Performance by Matt Mullican** (12<sup>th</sup> November, 2013, 7:00pm)

The Reina Sofia presents a selection of important works from its Collection in order to bring the public into closer contact with the artistic languages that developed during the 1980s and 1990s. The exhibition, curated by the Museum's Director **Manuel Borja-Villel**, Head of Collections **Rosario Peiró** and Art Historian **Beatriz Herráez**, was organized by the Museum as part of the "Uses of Art" project by the European museums network *L'Internationale*.

Highly rewarding dialogues have been established between works that for the most part have never been exhibited in the Museum's rooms, being recent acquisitions or long-term deposits. Taking the inevitably fragmentary nature of the starting point of all contemporary art collections as a given, it should be explained that this is only the first view of a series of new presentations of the Collection planned for the future. This particular approach is centred on the search by artists for new spaces of resistance in a globalised world. Modernity as the past, theatricality as a principle and the importance of the document all mark this era. The 1980s and 1990s are of great importance both in this country and across the world: everything we are today, everything that happens, can be traced back to those times.

***Minimal Resistance*** takes a close look at the series of dualities that polarized the period being dealt with, from the global economic crisis to financial capitalism, from the power of the collective to the recuperation of the myth of the artist, from interventions reclaiming public spaces to discourses revolving around memory and the body, from a form of theatricality that emphasizes staging and architecture, to performative languages and relational models, and from the rehabilitation of traditional genres to the appropriation of images from mass media and mass culture. These tensions translate into a multiplicity of overlapping practices and discourses, and into a renewal of art codes and languages.

Below we take a look at the most significant lines developed throughout the exhibition, which deals not only with the crossover points, but also with the points of discord and friction between the art produced in Spain during these decades and its relation to the international globalised context.

These years saw a number of **political changes closely connected to the conservative governments** of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the USA. The stock market crash and the recession that hit during the 1970s brought about various plans for economic reform that had worldwide repercussions that inevitably pointed towards a progressive dismantling of the welfare state. **The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991** marked a turning point between the two decades in which the USA returned to its position of hegemony, a situation which would be confirmed by events such as the international consensus over the **invasion of Iraq during the Gulf War** and which set in motion a period of upheaval that brought about a number of conflict situations such as **the Balkans War and the fall of longstanding Latin-American dictatorships**.

The world which artists were confronted with as they looked at this new geopolitical map was a complex one, where the *pensée unique* seemed to be emphatically consolidated; the time of Francis Fukuyama's famed thesis on "The End of History". This feeling of being faced by a new kind of transitoriness was intensified by the **accelerated spread of information through the growth of new technologies and the appearance of the Internet in Western**

**countries.** After the times of fervent protest that defined the 1970s, Felix Guattari's "spring that promised to be endless", the neoliberal politics of the early 80s would give way to a time which he would refer to as the "winter years". The loss of a vision of worldwide social change could not, however, stop collective mobilisation initiatives taking root, like the organised responses of the art world to the AIDS crisis, growing militarization and gender discrimination.

The early 1980s in Spain are always identified with the **transition to democracy**: it was a decade that started with events like the **arrival of Guernica**, the **opening of the ARCO contemporary arts fair**, and the **creation of the Reina Sofía Museum**. Then came the 1990s, with celebrations like the **Universal Exposition of Seville** and the **Barcelona Olympics**. These are just a few of the milestones that marked the journey towards a democratic state, and the aspirations towards 'modernization' were obvious in the development of plastic art languages whose principal references could be found in international trends – often dictated by the market – which established dialogues with their own genealogies. These years also saw a range of proposals with their sights clearly set on the processes of the institutionalisation of art. So a number of **critical experiences grew up in response to the non-stop celebrations** organised around 1992.

Painting took on a new radicalism in direct opposition to the gradual 'academisation' that certain conceptual practices were going through, setting out a wide range of uneven proposals that ran along disparate channels. So there emerged groups that embraced the critical capacity of the New Figuration, setting themselves against a wave of voices calling them authoritarian. This brought about **in-depth reflection on the practice of painting and its various genealogies**. The exhibition features works by an important group of artists using large-format painting: **Georg Baselitz**, **Leon Golub** and **Sigmar Polke**. It also includes the work of **Miguel Ángel Campano** (Madrid, 1948), one of the key artists in the group behind the renovation of Spanish painting, to whom the Palacio de Velázquez is dedicating a collective exhibition in parallel with this one.

**Reflections on photographic work** occupy a central place at the exhibition. The evolution of the language as the inheritor of the style and the social applications of work photography of the 1930s can be seen in works by artists like **Allan Sekula**, who features in the exhibition. **Candida Höfer** and **Thomas Struth** show images whose references are modernism and institutional spaces, the places where the photographic "New Objectivity" was formed, which interconnected architecture, knowledge and power. Such links are also present in the sculptures, installations and projects of artists like **Reinhard Mucha**, **Lothar Baumgarten**, **Jordi Colomer** or **Isidoro Valcárcel Medina**.

The exhibition picks up on certain lines of investigation that were opened in previous exhibitions of the Museum Collection, such as the **reformulation of the artist's role** and the **exploration of a new institutionality**, through the spaces of resistance defined by artists like Fischli & Weiss. In what is a clear reference to the rehabilitation of the myth of the artist in the 1980s, this pair of artists champion amateurism in art and the transgressive potential of parody and the absurd. This is a stance that is also shared by names like **Guy de Cointet** and **Mike Kelley**, who bring new languages into their work through the use of references found in mass media and mass culture, in a subculture that is celebrated in the face of high art. Other non-models of artist and critic are those developed in **Les readymades appartient à tout le**

*monde*, with its radical disappearance of the artist, or the parodic proposals of collectives such as **General Idea**. This is the place for a compendium of publications, videos, performances that establish relationships with music (post punk), television, and other alternative means of broadcasting ideas – fanzines, periodical publications and cable channels.

Beyond this, the exhibition also extends routes of work already well-trodden in the Collection such as **the new feminisms** that exploded onto the scene in the 1990s. While in the 1970s feminist artistic practice centred their analyses of questions like artist visibility or the idea of excellence connected to the male sex, in the 1990s a new epoch began marked by the problematisation of the category of woman as a socio-cultural construct defined by the very patriarchal presuppositions that the movement was attempting to combat. This theme was enhanced by the appearance of texts such as *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (J. Butler, 1990) and of movements like what was known as Third Wave Feminism that arose in the USA. Debates on **identity, sexual difference and gender performance theory** would be at the core of a large number of works produced during the period.

The advent of **AIDS** in the 1980s was a painful and violent wake up call for a whole generation. In the world of artistic production, actions like “Carrying” (1992), by the artist **Pepe Espaliú** (Cordoba, 1955-1993), were created as **condemnations of the marginalisation** suffered by those affected by an illness that would take the artist’s life only a year later. These years also saw the appearance of a number of collectives fighting for gay and lesbian rights; projects that would build up a militant political Imaginery, at the root of which were the proposals of international activist groups like **Act Up** in New York and Paris, and which would develop a significant body of critical work attempting to raise the visibility of the problems facing the collectives, through publication of periodicals and actions carried out in public spaces. **The transgressive potential of showing the ill body, the excluded**, is also championed by artists like **Pedro Lemebel** and **Diamela Eltit**, through actions that smash the areas of consensus and political correctness within the framework of Chile’s dictatorship.

**Artists and collectives included in the exhibition include:** Ignasi Aballí, Agustín Parejo School, Pep Agut, Txomin Badiola, Ángel Bados, Georg Baselitz, Lothar Baumgarten, Dara Birnbaum, Cabello/Carceller, Miguel Ángel Campano, Jordi Colomer, Guy de Cointet, René Daniëls, Hanne Darboven, Moyra Davey, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Marlene Dumas, Diamela Eltit, Erreakzioa-reacción, Pepe Espaliú, Estrujenbank, Marcelo Expósito/Arturo Rodríguez/Gabriel Villota, Harun Farocki, María Luisa Fernández, Fischli & Weiss, Peter Friedl, Pedro G. Romero, Patricia Gadea, Dora García, General Idea, Jack Goldstein, Leon Golub, Dan Graham, Guerrilla Girls, Federico Guzmán, Candida Höfer, Jenny Holzer, Cristina Iglesias, Peio Irazu, Sanja Ivekovic, Joaquim Jordá, Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger, Louise Lawler, Pedro Lemebel, Rogelio López Cuenca, LSD, Les readymade appartient à tout le monde, LTTR, Mark Lombardi, José Maldonado, Allan McCollum, Miralda, Juan Luis Moraza, Reinhard Mucha, Matt Mullican, Antoni Muntadas, Juan Muñoz, Paz Muro, Itziar Okariz, Ulrike Ottinger, Marc Pataut, Raymond Pettibon, Sigmar Polke, Preiswert, Radical Gai, Martha Rosler, Helke Sander, Allan Sekula, Cindy Sherman, Fernando Sinaga, Jo Spence, Hito Steyerl, Thomas Struth, Rosemarie Tröckel, Juan Ugalde, Juan Uslé, Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, Eulàlia Valldosera, James Welling, Franz West.

*Exhibition organised as part of the "The Uses of Art" project by the European museum network L'Internationale*

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