

Miralda

Cenotaphs (1969–1975)

Miralda's interest in public space and the concept of monuments as a formula for political interference in daily life gave rise to a number of sculptures that he called *Cenotafios. Monumento de interés turístico-cultural* (Cenotaphs. Monument of Touristic-Cultural Interest, 1969–1975). These architectural structures – actually models of possible monumental constructions in a public places – are festive and visitor-friendly, providing a fun alternative to institutionalised tourism based on guidebooks and traditional monuments.



In the late 1960s, Antoni Miralda (1942) was living in Paris. As Spain went through the final spasms of General Franco's oppressive dictatorship, this Catalan artist was enjoying a level of freedom in the neighbouring country that was unattainable in this one.

Obligatory military service awoke deeply anti-military feelings in him that would play a major role in his work of this decade: military fashion drawings – exhibited at the ICA in London in 1966 – or using toy soldiers invading everyday objects and monuments *Soldats Soldés* (Bargain Soldiers). These preoccupations would also result in a film, *París. La Cumparsita*, 1972, which he made with Benet Rossell (1937). In the film, the plastic soldier took on human size and was carried around the French capital on the artist's back, looking for a place. This created a kind of mapping out of the city, beginning with a military parade and continuing in the search for a pedestal or the monument to the unknown soldier. This particular journey ended up at the cemetery. In parallel with these works, Miralda's interest in public space and the concept of monuments as a formula for political interference in daily life led him to build a number of sculptures that he called *Cenotafios. Monumento de interés turístico-cultural* (Cenotaphs. Monument of Touristic-Cultural Interest, 1969–1975). These architectural structures – actually models of possible monumental constructions in a public places – are festive and visitor-friendly, providing a fun alternative to institutionalised tourism based on guidebooks and traditional monuments. Miralda's starting point was the concept of the cenotaph, a monument to the memory of a deceased person, differing from a tomb in that it contains no human remains. Miralda stuck to the terraced pyramidal form of 19th Century monuments, showing his fascination with the geometric architecture of Viollet-le-Duc and

military cemeteries. However, the Catalan artist's cenotaphs have no complex coding of historical iconography, so he can construct easily understood allegories using objects of everyday use, objects used ornamentally and semantically.

The first cenotaph, which no longer exists, was from 1969. It was built to coincide with the death of General Eisenhower, and was shown at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, under the title of *Cenotafio de los generales del pasado, presente y futuro* (Cenotaph of the generals of the past, present and future), 1969–1975. This is a work that the artist himself has referred to as "an archive of generals". In this work, he uses the soldier mentioned above alongside plastic horses and portrait photographs of various generals, including Francisco Franco, who was still alive. The final part of the piece was a mass grave full of soldiers painted black, protected by an urn-shaped plexiglass structure. The four cenotaphs on show in this room were done between 1968 and 1975, placed together as an installation by the artist with audio and slide projection for the *Desacuerdos* project (MACBA 2005). Miralda portrays the opulent lifestyle of an unnamed general by showing the remains of his funereal legacy: the animals he hunted in the jungle, the numerous but clone-like lovers he had, his favourite meal and his victims. The feeling of a room for socialising that these monuments have is clearly evident in the *Cenotafio del plato favorito del general* (Cenotaph of the General's Favourite Dish,

1969–1975, a terraced building, access to which is through a maze-like palm grove; the crowning glory is an artificial lake with canoes in which visitors can enjoy turtle soup, the deceased's favourite dish, while feeding live turtles. The prelude for recent converts at the *Cenotafio de las queridas del general* (Cenotaph of the General's Darlings), 1969–1975 is some daring dance and seduction classes, along with a sentiment detoxification course. This is fanciful, visionary architecture, with critical social comment, that Antoni Miralda commentates on in the audio-guides. These 'visits' accompany the sculptures as a kind of tutorial to bring us imaginarily into these unusual theme parks for the dead. In the background, one can hear *L'hymne du general* (The General's Anthem), 1969–1975, a sound piece composed of fragments of national anthems recorded backwards.

For the meaning of this work to be understood, mention needs to be made of pieces that Miralda was working on at the same time, which function as parallel and complementary themes. In 1969 he created his first memorial at the Centre Artistique de Verderonne (Oise, France) as a prologue for his innumerable works in social participation and interaction. The idea of a ritual journey around homage to the deceased and the liturgy of death set out in cenotaphs comes is fulfilled in a project he works on with Jaume Xifra, Joan Rabascall, Dorothée Selz and Eliane Radigue (music) with collaboration from one hundred and fifty people. The memorials, along with works of "edible art", were the beginnings of his investigation into food rituals.

It is also important to point out how the form and concept of the Cenotaphs is carried on in other anti-monumental pieces, the *Cendriers-tombeaux* (Ashtray-Tombs), 1972. In these pieces there was a movement from the idea of a monument to a household object. The end result was utilitarian: it could be used as an ashtray by its owner for an action which, as part of the production process, would lead inevitably to his extinction.

The cigarette ash should take over the space occupied by the objects, landscape and the image of the general, thus rendering the *Ashtray-Tomb* useless.

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