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## A conversation with Martí Peran

Martí Peran

You've sometimes said you were reluctant to have your work translated into words as you were convinced that if a work is effective it should need virtually no explanation. With this in mind, I'd like you to say something about the titles of your projects - many of which you've changed for this publication. Sometimes they act as a first, basic pointer to the key to the work, albeit through onomatopoeia. But at the same time, you use your titles to bring in a good deal of irony. All of which suggests that, despite their apparently minor role, your titles actually play a very important part indeed.

Luís Bisbe

I can never be completely convinced of the effectiveness of my work. If I were, I'd have to say it had come to an end, although I do pay a lot of attention and put a lot of distrust into that in the hope of it leading to a certain degree of communicativeness. I'd love explanations to be superfluous, I don't trust artworks that need them. I've also changed the titles so that they'll be more similar to what I call them and so avoid confusion. I've changed them just as I'd change some things about the works themselves if I were to exhibit them again and because I want to eliminate preconceptions forced on the work by the title. Once a work is on display, its interpretation is up to the observer. I don't want him or her to feel at a loss because they don't know what the "official interpretation" is. That's why the titles are descriptive more than anything else, a starting point to direct observation. It's also why I use onomatopoeia, which is less abstract and representative than other words. What's really ironic is trying to get a work to mean only what you want it to mean. Things give off meaning all the time.

MP- This stress on direct communication with as little as possible in between is really an aspiration that art tried to fulfil by appealing to "interaction". Through projects demanding direct participation on the part of the spectator, even in a physical sense, it tried to emphasise use value over and above the sustained value in correct interpretation and understanding. In your case, this possibility is translated into a need for the spectator to move around inside the space you've manipulated but he never has a chance to trigger mechanisms that could change the way your devices behave. Moving around in space, multiplying perspectives, are the only tools you offer the spectator as he views the work, but the heterodox profile of your architectural structures gives me the sensation of something similar to a tour of Piranesi's drawings, of structures apparently impossible to translate into three dimensions. Something like this can be seen in *Trampolín blanco* (1999) and especially *Pisopiloto* (2001), where the invitation to actually move around inside a supposedly impossible space (the larger inside the smaller) is a reality.

LB- I've always been reluctant to co-operate in situations where the spectator's participation was required. I feel like a lab mouse observed - and sometimes recorded - by the artist as it pulls a lever. When I go to an exhibition I prefer to be the one observing rather than being observed. I don't need the visitor to act in any particular way but of course I do prefer him to wander around the space rather than give him a single point of view - as with photographs. But the works you've mentioned aren't just for looking at. You can stretch the rubber bands, make them vibrate and momentarily distort the drawing. In themselves those drawings are incomplete, they're surfaceless structures. And as you walk around them, you begin to see them as volumes and therefore little by little fill in the image you're getting of them. The space people reconstruct is more mental than physical and being able to cross the representation and move through doors or walls as in *Puertarroja* (1999) reinforces the representation's character as a mental structure. What I find interesting is the wandering through a space where the physical and mental are superimposed exaggeratedly so as to displace that mechanism in the direction of the rest of the world, where the two have always overlapped.

They aren't completely impossible spaces. They could actually be built and in fact they aren't on a 1:1 scale so as to avoid a degree of representation, or what comes down to the same thing, to lie a little less. The *Pisopiloto* (2001) building isn't any bigger - yet - but it is under construction, the germ of something that could become larger. The aspect of being perpetually under construction - both the representation and the structure represented - is what they have in common with *Carcen's* work,

which is also continuously under construction. However, the motif isn't so grim because *Pisopiloto* (2001) makes a reference to a place that could become anything. A recently started work is a perfect place to project - as Balzac said - a promise of happiness.

MP- To refer again to what we said about the literary in your work, I'd like to ask you another question. Nearly all your projects can be seen as explorations of the ways in which time affects space - reconstructing previous scenic moments in the same space (*Pretecnología punta*, 2003), contrasting projected images of objects from a time that has been frozen with the real time of the same objects (*Enchufe proyectado*, 2001, *Ventilador proyectado*, 2003) or simply recording the spatial mobility of the actual passing of time (*Tictac*, 2006). Following the minute effects of time on space as it moves forward involves a logical narrative very close to literary narrative. In a way, the character of many of your works comes close to the traditional poetics of Oriental literature on the minute.

LB- I like your use of the word "explorations" as opposed - as I see it - to "reflection", which seems to be more closely linked to the idea of a result, a conclusion, which I'm not interested in. Very few of my works can be regarded as not connected with time and space. Let's say they're like a frame where everything happens, because one can't exist without the other. I find getting away from those two coordinates difficult, I'm always in a more or less specific place and time. I suppose some people are capable of finding another sphere, but it doesn't come easy to me. I'm bogged down in those coordinates.

I don't pay any attention to the literary *a priori* and that was what I meant before when I mentioned open interpretation. I try to give my work immediacy - a kind of exaltation of the here-and-now rather than a "narrative logic". But if that's what you see, I'm sure it's there. Anything that appears unwittingly in an apparently controlled work is relevant.

As for the poetics of the minute, like some Marxists I believe there's treasure everywhere. The insignificant and the everyday are my laboratory, where I spend most of my time, getting involved, drawing back, as much as I can. Much of my work is the result of shifting between the two.

I don't think the scale of what we observe completely determines the scope. The interesting thing about paying more attention to the way of looking at an object than to the object itself is that such a process can go on working in our subsequent experience.

MP- Your saying that treasure is everywhere leads me to a supposition I always made about your work. You often build artifacts through which energy that causes feedback or is productively distributed circulates. Electricity, air or the circulation of water are the embodiment of a kind of entropy power. That's often the case. Electrical energy produces an image of itself (sockets or fans), the circulation of water unleashes reactions (*Blindate*, 2005) or actual sculptures (*Fuente demieeerdá*, 2006). In any case, it's the distribution brought about by that power that seems to be the central issue.

I even think that that sort of energy saving could be interpreted as a crossroads where space and time meet. Space as a place full of devices which, when turned on, can change everything.

LB- Almost always my starting point has been an exhibition space and a date and the question I often ask myself is something like: "What can I do at this time in this place that could only be done here and then." But that is only a starting point, a line of work which as things develop sometimes fades. It's only a question that often isn't even answered. Most of the spaces dedicated to art are usually almost empty and apart from the white walls and the odd door, the only things you tend to find are the electrical system, water sometimes, partitions, lights, air conditioning and security cameras, (all of which I normally use in my work, except - so far - for the cameras) and these connect the space with the outside world and underline their dependence. The beginning of many projects is what's already there - and that means time and space simultaneously. But by making a provisionally different use of things and bringing in another order, I also point out both the change and the previous order, whose inflexibility and permanence I also want to draw people's attention to.

MP- Your answer brings us back to the question of the dynamics of time. But with that idea on energy distribution I wanted to point out a kind of suggestion of economic processes, the distribution of power, the optimisation of resources... a range of issues in which the actual use of the things that are already there (a door, a tap, an electrical connection...) becomes a form of recycling.

LB- When you play around with those things, you come to realise that they are there and that they can act in other ways, follow other strategies. When I mentioned dependence on energy, that was just what I was talking about: the use of the exhibition space, who pays the bills and who benefits from the money that's spent (needless to say, me for one but the Ministry of Culture or Caja Madrid too).

That awareness of the use of energy flows can be seen from various points of view in *Enchufeprojectado* (2001), *Fuente demieerda* (2006), and in others, but especially in *Summertime* (2006), which wastes a lot of energy in order to give information that's too powerful and makes it hard to receive the message. That's completely different from the idea of recycling. I use what's available because it's what comes to hand. If recycling only means reusing then yes, I am a born "recycler", but if you take the energy I put into recycling into account, I'm a squanderer, a very bad example to others.

MP- The concept of the installation is awkward and tricky. Although it's been explored in many different ways, I think the most interesting is the one that links it to the tradition of criticising institutions. It's very simple: insofar as the installation can easily become a work that takes the space it's assembled in as the object it reflects, by underlining the institutional as the most characteristic thing connected with that space, it becomes a narrative and critical strategic model of museum spaces and the rules of acceptance, exhibition and collection. In spite of this enormous potential, in *Dingdong* (2005) you only took up this point of view explicitly, making the project revolve around the issue.

LB- Yes, actually I do feel a deep aversion to meta-art and as far as I can I try to resist the temptation to make references to everything surrounding the artistic as I just end up by getting bored. I think I have to focus my attention more on the positive side. I'm not at all interested in how countries manage their museum spaces - most of them are disciplinary - but rather how I can use that structure to the advantage of my own freedom. By constantly referring to it, you give it more importance and power than it deserves. But the way Art is shown in museums and exhibition rooms has been the direct object of my attention and often the subject of my work.

In a case like this it's very revealing when you look at the problems of opening a door onto the street can cause a museum. Museums - and institutions in general - are places for preserving things, stopping time or trying to check it. For me that's profoundly anti-artistic and fetishist. Which is why I like working outside museums so much. I find it refreshing.

MP- Perhaps in *Pinpanpum* (2003) there was also a duplication of space that clearly affected the nature of institutional places. In that game of the "representation" of space, the original structure lay within the area of the artistic, whereas the new representation gave the impression of a flight towards reality.

LB- In my last few projects I abandoned representation even more. At the same time I felt the urge to work with objects that are the most perfect representations of themselves. And I suppose that, since the art rooms are empty, I've drifted towards where things really are: outside. A street is a much more complex space than an exhibition room. There are no security guards or white background, but there's noise, changes in light, temperature, humidity level, and you're judged on everything and by everybody, but that's what I find so interesting. On the other hand, I think public spaces sprinkled with works of art are horrible.

MP- I completely agree with the view that self-absorbed art has become totally boring. On several occasions I've described it with caricature, as a kind of joke poetics whose ultimate aim is to ridicule the world of art itself. As you said, there's hardly any of that in your projects. Yet I do believe that irony plays a very important part in your work, at least as a strategy to relax things, bring down expectations and put people in the right frame of mind for building an experience without too many prejudices.

LB- I won't deny that there is irony there, but perhaps I find it hard to see because it's such a part of the way I am that I can't draw far enough away from myself to appreciate it. It's true that I do like playing down the drama, so perhaps I use irony to start off from some basic level or, as you so aptly put it, bring down expectations, because then there's no limit marked out in advance for the observer as far as interpretation is concerned and he can decide for himself how far he wants to go. Irony is the first step in helping to draw out of the spectator what he already knows. I see it as a kind of screeching that puts us on guard and sharpens the senses in the face of what we're witnessing. I think it's necessary to doubt the obvious, even through

distrust.

MP- I'm going to ask you another question rather directly. About the idea of tension. On the one hand, you have taut cables almost like the strings of a musical instrument, capable of giving sound to space... But what I'd like to talk about is that idea of tension seen as a specific moment between two extremes. I mean, many of your pieces lie on the thin line between reality and representation (*Doubleroom* 2001, *Retournage* 2002), representation and repetition (*Pinpanpum* 2003), attraction and repulsion (*Fuente demieeerda* 2006) with no need for synthesis between them. I think it's a very important issue. Whereas modern thought tried to resolve contradictions dialectically, the contemporary paradigm demands that the two extremes of paradox be kept open, with no solution. You've often said that when you play with two mutually antonymous notions, you're actually trying to get them to neutralise each other. I understand the idea but I think that you're actually more interested in seeing if contradictory extremes can be active in the same place and time than in deactivating the notions you bring into play. Sorry, perhaps I'm overstating things, but I think this *mise-en-scène* of the need to keep contradictions open like a paraphrase of the experience of contemporaneity is crucial.

LB- To a certain extent, holding those representations up by stretching them from all the opposite ends of the room at the same time can be compared to a representation we could make of the world that's built and kept in tension thanks to all we think we know about it (and whose caricature is what people call "reality", which itself is held up actively and militantly by those who coincide in it). When I said that the two extremes of contradiction are neutralised, I didn't mean that they cancel each other out but that the coinciding in time and space of two opposite concepts becomes something new and heterogeneous that brings and cements together the two opposites.

I live, eat and sleep contradiction. For me it's not so much a question of a need to put up with it but to state it, make it more evident.

MP- It's significant how you prefer the tradition of suspicion as opposed to reality, and not only from the political point of view, which forces people to see through fabrication but from an ontological point of view. On several occasions your installations have been interpreted as spectral figures, ghosts issuing from the visible body of space. According to this line of thought, any attempt to reveal opens up new concealments. This is particularly obvious in *Ssaammeetthhiinnggss* (2007). The enigma is guarded inside an infinite process of revealing/concealment.

LB- The way the media builds reality is gradually turning it into a representation of itself, a substitute for itself, and also spectral. All I do is give examples of this process. I'd love to think that I was trying to sabotage it, but I know my limits. At the most I try to give the spectator another chance to look at the glimmers of the world that manage to squeeze through into persistent old reality. This is also very evident in *Pantallablanca* (2001). The original colours of the room are covered and are shown in the projection although at the same time the screen used for showing the colours in the video hides the original ones. In order to show any representation of reality, it needs to occupy a physical space which at the same time hides another. You can't see the museum for the pictures.

MP- Drawing. It's true to say that in spite of the volumetric dimensions of your projects, these are actually drawings in space, whether with ropes (which were white at the beginning and ended up in colour), beams of light or lines of running water. If accentuated, this kind of drawing could lead to different effects. The most important, if we keep to the truest tradition of what drawing means, would force us to interpret your projects as "mental spaces", as *disegno* projecting an inner experience of a place onto real space.

LB- One of the main differences between drawings and paintings is that drawings are often easier to finish and remember. A drawing doesn't need to fill the whole space, it doesn't need to cover a surface or refer to more than one idea. Therefore something drawn is more easily extracted from a background, which hardly counts, and is therefore easier to think about. Drawings belong to the kind of images than are less of a drag on the computer and are therefore easier for the processor to cope with. It's a bit like when only a few instruments are playing: you understand the music better, but you enjoy it less. *La pittura è una cosa mentale*, sure, but drawing even more so.

I think that most of the drawing side of my work is due to trying, as I said before, to make a piece capable of being

communicated. As my teachers used to say, "I'm not going to make an effort to understand you; you're the ones who must make the effort to express yourselves." With painting I began to learn things and though that may not be obvious in my work, I owe it a lot.

MP- As we're on the subject of your training period, let me ask you to go back over that a little more. It might seem banal to you, but I think your case is very interesting. People seem to have a kind of obsession to get into circles where their work can be promoted right away, but you were particularly slow about that.

LB- There's probably too much material there, enough for another conversation, but in a nutshell, I think when I finished my fine arts studies I was scared and sort of paralysed through a fatal combination of shyness and arrogance, as well as feeling that I couldn't find any meaning in Art and that it was a particularly inhospitable field. After several years of doing nothing and turning into a vegetable, I started working again because I realised that doing things was my way of thinking about the world around me. I had this reverential respect for the spectator that made me so hard on myself with my work - and other people's too - that there was nothing, I didn't have any work to show anybody. I took part in an exhibition by chance and since then I've worked as fast as the offers have come in. I don't know if I'd have been able to go any faster and now I'm glad I didn't do everything that crossed my mind. My path's been slow because I've never been able to work for myself - I depend solely on the direct results of my work - and to offset that I've taken advantage of almost all the opportunities I've had to do something new, although there are a lot of pros and not a few cons to that.

MP- *Pisopiloto* (2001) and now *Interrorismo* (2008), one of the new projects you've devised especially for this occasion, go back to the conventional models offered by architecture to act as a setting to our lives. With *Pisopiloto* it's the title that does that, but with *Interrorismo* the direction taken by that interpretation is much more explicit, as you deconstruct a prefabricated house. In *Moooooore* (2007) you also mentioned the growing standardisation that submits and disciplines life's worlds. On the reverse side of the same issue, *Mismamente* (2008) dealt with how a same expectation or need can be resolved with different solutions.

LB- The principle of architecture is intimately linked to the invention of the difference between inside and outside. When the first shack was built, the limits defining that separation were set. Refuge has always been connected with protection, protection with fear, fear with safety and safety with discipline and control. Breaking down those limits or at least questioning their excessive perseverance and suitability is somewhere I often return to with different tools. I suppose I do that because I haven't been able to make a single crack in them. Nevertheless, I keep on trying.

Another milestone in architecture was when a fire was lit in the middle of a hut, suddenly turning it into a home. In modern-day houses, domestic energy has replaced fire and its task of giving light and heat, and the idea behind *Mismamente* (2008) was to bring these two estranged extremes back together again in the same piece.

MP- The two new projects (*Exterrorismo* and *Interrorismo*) are naturally complementary. Whereas the watch post is a reference to the protocols of control, the prefabricated house concentrates on the obedience growing out of that control. With their titles, those processes of governed life identify with the worst and most subtle form of terrorism. You don't need to be a documentary maker to channel such obviously political ideas.

LB- What I said before about treasure can sometimes be applied to low-intensity terror, which sometimes comes watered-down in the form of charity and protection. There's a similar theme in *The Seven Samurai*, where the villagers end up exchanging "terror of the criminals" for "terror of the protectors" in a kind of vicious circle of submission. I've always found total collusion between fear and protection inadmissible. For the artist almost any tool is good/beautiful if it achieves its purpose. Art in itself has no theme. We look around in all directions and occasionally coincide. That's healthy, there's a choral touch to it. But each of us chooses his weapon for the fight and I haven't chosen the word. I feel that language overrules my message and places excessive limitations on me. I find it uncontrollable. I have every confidence in the potential of the visual, it's an infinite field. I never read very much at exhibitions, and when I do, I prefer to do it sitting down, and I hardly write. I know nobody will believe me.

MP- Yes, but let me just say... Despite the fact that your work has given rise to you being considered a "workman" who handles things and spaces, despite the fact that you arrange your "ideas" apparently as you go along, and despite your aversion to language, the whole of your work is impregnated with premeditated purposes. You're a worker-with-spaces, but full of "bad" intentions, prepared to turn everything upside down and ultimately that can only cause a sensation of uneasiness. The visual experience is not a point of arrival but a trampoline with springs of language.

LB- I understand and share what you probably mean by "bad" intentions, but I think those intentions are actually "good" ones. In these circumstances, I prefer to feel uneasy rather than numb.

Although the welfare society was achieved with a good deal of violence, I'm still more in favour of a watered-down form of infiltration "like they do" than a head-on collision (although I must admit I can think of several examples contradicting that). Coarseness and vehemence can easily cause a gut rejection in the unaccustomed spectator capable of preventing him from approaching the work without preconceptions. Moving an object from its normal place, "upsetting the order of things", tends to bring with it a new way of looking at that object, almost equivalent to changing one's point of view, to shedding new light on a subject. And that's what it's all about.

Of course I see the visual experience as a starting point for moving towards language, but towards other experiences too. As I said before, my act ends when the doors open and the lights go on in the exhibition room. My shift is over, now it's up to whoever wants to look.

Mararó – Barcelona 2009

## FREDERIC MONTORNÉS INTERVIEW LUIS BISBE

As an artist interested in working with what surrounds us in order to appreciate its expressive and experimental potential, Luis Bisbe has conceived a work for the Santa Mònica Art Centre focusing on making the invisible visible. This is an installation based on recycling the centre's wastewater.

Starting with the water drains on the first floor and finishing with the pipes in the ground floor culverts, his work assumes its maximum splendour and beauty in the fountain, which is situated in the exact centre of the cloister. It invites the viewer to participate in the spectacle of light and movement, which in a clear contradiction to what flows through it, is presented as something marvellous. By making what is loathed into something beautiful, despite its links with the scatological part of Catalan popular culture, the artist's aim was to use his *fuente de mierda*<sup>1</sup> to show that the factors which nourish and justify art are a series of contradictions, which are often unknown, but despite this are not non-existent. This is the source of their wealth and by extension, their complexity.

**Before considering your installation in the CASM in depth, I would like you to tell us about your early days in the art world.**

My beginnings were somewhat absurd. I think that in psychology they are called parallel motivations, which means that in reality, this was not what I wanted to do: I was more interested in the side-effects than in art itself. In fact, I'm an unbeliever, although I suppose this lack of faith has led me to be quite demanding in terms of a certain degree of communication in my work. Despite being an unbeliever, I got the bug without knowing very well how. I suppose it's because this is one of the few jobs in which not knowing anything can be useful.

**Where does your interest in space come from?**

For me, space is a metaphor, if you can call it that, for the world; it is a way that I refer to it. Space and the world share many characteristics. We are immersed in them, and their size is directly proportional to the curiosity of the person exploring them. Space is defined by the architecture that separates us from the outside, in the same way as it encloses us inside it. I think this relationship between safety and isolation is very dangerous and paradoxically, an issue of burning importance.

**What are you trying to show in your works?**

Firstly, it's not something you can completely put into words, because if that was the case my work would be even more unnecessary than it already is.

But looking back, and trying to interpret the things I've done as a viewer, if it's possible to change sides, I think that I have a lot of prejudices against what is normally described as real, normal, natural, legitimate, etc. I mean that I perceive a

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<sup>1</sup> Originally named *Join us*.



general trend which tries to impose an interpretation of the world which I often feel included in without my consent. I suppose I do the same as the others: I say what seems real, normal, natural, etc. to me, although I avoid using those expressions.

**In a lot of your works, there is one factor that stands out from the others. This is the ability that they have to make us see everyday things from a point of view that has been freed from convention and is closer to the world of imagination. What would you say to that comment?**

I like working with everyday things as a raw material, as a starting point; it gives me a feeling of easiness and immediacy which makes me think of my ideas in closer, more easily communicable terms. I think the fact that anyone can do it or it could happen to anyone is an added value. Sometimes I think a bit like Michelangelo, that what I am looking for in an exhibition hall was already there in some way, taking away what was unnecessary - it's a bit of an exaggeration, but I can see some parallels. I think that treasure, if it exists, is not hidden, you just have to know how to recognise it.

I suppose that moving away from the point of view that everyday life gives you is a requirement. Questioning reality is an attitude of curiosity and mistrust towards what we take for granted, which seems healthy to me. Although personally I don't see myself as very close to the world of imagination, because it gives what you do an escapist and dreamy nature, which in my opinion acts as a substitute and ends up confusing us, because it places other parallel worlds, yet more layers, between us and the world. And the aim of the art that I am most interested in is to remove filters.

**Let's talk a little about the work you have done for Santa Mònica. What made you decide to use the centre's wastewater?**

I often start works by visiting the place where I'm going to exhibit them, trying to think about what can and cannot be done there. Before, I worked above all with representation of space, and now I find it is more thought-provoking to work with the things inside it and what they represent. A traditional mechanism in art is to uncover what is hidden, and another is to try and find the most beautiful side of it, even if it is something a bit squalid. Playing with what you're not allowed to touch it is a childhood temptation and I've let myself get carried away by it.

Exhibition halls are generally empty, so there are not so many things to play with. Looking over the imaginary list of what was left inside the cloister, I thought the room for manoeuvre for things that I could work with and wanted to work with was narrowing.

**Despite using this wastewater, one of the most surprising things is the beauty they take on when they are shown in public. How important was it for you that your work led us to reflect on a concept considered so infrequently as beauty?**

Right from the beginning, I wanted to have a contradictory spirit, mixing attraction and repulsion in a single object and in a single moment; I wanted them to neutralise each other, so that both parts needed each other, they were inseparable in this work, or whatever you want to call it.

Beauty has been associated with goodness for more than two thousand years, and since then, it has not ceased to be used as an instrument, especially by those needing legitimacy. Making a fountains and sewage systems, is a typical gesture by governments to show their generosity to the people, and their power to tame the elements and the abundance of what is necessary, moreover the elimination of the unpleasant.

On the other hand, coloured lights are an old show business trick: they use them in fairs, in *pick-up joints*..., they use them with water in magic fountains and events like the Olympic Games and Universal Exhibitions; they are always there. Beauty often acts as a lubricating gel which enables us to commune happily with millwheels. For all that, it still fascinates me.

### **Have you obtained the result you expected? Do you have anything left to do?**

I haven't got anything left to do, and I'm not saying that in a conclusive way, but instead, because of the type of project this is, I preferred right from the beginning to be open to the changes that could arise on the way because of technical requirements. The limits that take shape also contribute to giving the project a form, as much as my initial wishes do. The result doesn't have to be the same as the initial idea; basically because I don't like being a wage slave of my previous self, the person who one day had *the idea*, and because countless decisions have to be taken while it is being executed. The moment when it is carried out is the most important time, although sometimes one is not aware of it.

As far as what I have left in reserve, it will have to appear if it is important, and if it doesn't, it will be because it is not important.

### **What would you like the viewers looking at *fuentedemierda* to see?**

Everything they are capable of. I can't imagine it, much less define it. My work ends on the day it is unveiled, and consists of transmitting what I can. If I said what I was aiming for, some people might think I have achieved it or they are confused, and nothing could be further from the truth. I can only say what I see. After I hand over a piece of work, I'm part of the public. I think that if we stick to what there is in *Fuentedemieerda*, the interpretation is relatively limited and sufficiently open. Anyway, I think I have left the door open to voluntary participation by the public who want to exhibit something of their own next to others, and they can see it: 90% of the work is transparent.

### **To what extent do you think that *fuentedemierda* has affected the development of your work? What aspects do you think other works have contributed to it?**

It is still too early to say that, I'm lacking perspective. But it is important to say that there is no sudden leap; it is part of a process which has been conceived and taken shape almost at the same time. The thing is that I have done the works in between in places very far apart, which prevents you from having a view of the whole.

At the moment, I only notice the changes which affect my own relationship with the projects. On the one hand, I am interested in the results and, on the other, the execution is becoming more like management and production, more like office work, and I don't like that so much. Perhaps the newest part for me in this process has been that of insisting on the

initial idea, despite the logical reluctance at the beginning, and that encourages me to persevere.

*Join us (renamed as fuentedemierda)*

Altering the perception of reality and offering new forms of apprehending it is one of the objectives that Luis Bisbe (Malaga, 1965) addresses in his work. That said, if the tendency to propose new approaches to reality is something he has in common with those artists who think of art as a way of understanding life and, as such, a proposal rather than an imposition, what distinguishes the work of this artist is the path he takes to reach the spectator. These are paths that, through the use of considerable quantities of irony and humour, positing equivocations between the object and its image, evidencing the impossibility of representation, duplicating reality or acting on the space on the basis of that which, visibly or invisibly, is intrinsic to it, lead us to question the solidity of the place in which we find ourselves, the supposed impossibility of seeing things from a different perspective or the idea we have of ourselves in terms of the concept of intimacy or of the more public side of our persona.

Interested in putting forward a new perception of space and, on that basis, a different vision of each one of us, the work that Bisbe has conceived for the cloister of the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica is an act of reconciliation with the original contemplative and meditative purpose of this space and an invitation to see his proposal as the need to show one of the final stages in life before disappearing into the waters of a city as they flow toward that place where, without exception, all end at last: the sea.

Given that this artist's intervention consists in diverting the course of sewer water in order to show within the framework of a decidedly ludic spectacle that he calls *Fuentedemieerda* —a spectacle that, depending on how one looks at it, can be seen as a metaphor of our disappearance or of the space to which all that we discard is relegated— another of the considerations that derive from this work, clearly influenced by that scatological strain so characteristic of much of Catalan popular culture, is the desire to invite the spectator to reflect on the legitimacy of an art that makes transformation, recycling or the re-utilization of existing elements the core of a discourse pervaded by a large dose of conscience/consciousness, political, ethical and personal.

Inviting us to contemplate with the restraint proper to a cloister the beauty of a fountain whose origin is concealed from us, the movement of waters at an intermediate point in their course or the fantastic power of lights that blank out any immediate reference, what Luis Bisbe proposes with this work is to make the invisible visible by means of the beauty of a sculpture that confronts us as spectators with our reality from the most secret facet of our persona, the most intimate part of our fragile existence questioned in the public light and oriented toward participating in a choral and festive proposal.

## Pin-pan-pum

The projects conceived by Luis Bisbe (Malaga, 1965) are very often based on an out-of-the-ordinary perception of space. At times he achieves this by making spatial drawings, produced with elastic bands and steel cables that criss-cross the room from wall to wall. These drawings create columns and doorways (Pilot apartment, Galería Salvador Díaz, Madrid, 2001, and Artforum Berlin, 1999), tables, staircases and scaffolding (Advanced pretechnology, CAC Malaga, 2003) and even trampolines (Tararí, La Capella, Barcelona, 1999). This gives rise to a dislocated architecture - or rather, two architectures, one of which is displaced. At other times his work with the illusions of perception is materialised in drawings on the wall of the exhibition space - for example, duplicating an electric plug and giving it an animated expressiveness - or by projecting a specific object on to the object itself. In Ping-pong (1999) he projected the image of a plug that fitted perfectly on the surface on which it was projected: the plug supplying electricity to the projector. In Drink me (2003), two projections superimposed the images and the shadows (with small alterations such as changes of scale and/or angle of filming) of a number of lamps on to the same objects. In this way Bisbe creates an ambivalence between the object and its image, thus demonstrating the impossibility of representation.

In Pin-pan-pum, designed specifically for the Espai 13, the artist opts for a duplication of reality in order to question our perception and our memory of the place. Pin-pan-pum replicates two portions of the architecture of the Espai 13, in which the columns, windows, stairs and other elements can be recognised, and projects them onto the original spaces. The two projections of these reconstructed items onto the original architectural elements creates an ambivalence between the object and its image. The replication at a scale of 1:1, a scale that contradicts the notion of representation and reinforces the idea of a duplicated architecture, recomposes the image of reality, accentuating the equivocal nature of the boundaries and consequently the ambiguous relationship between art and reality.

As Luis Francisco Pérez has so rightly said, Luis Bisbe deals with "the dilemma of the visible". This tension is made even more evident when the constructions of the space are subjected to a violent process of destruction. Construction and destruction thus become allusions to life itself. Construct/destroy, conceal/reveal appear here as metaphors of life.

However, having reached this point, the artist quashes any attempt at excessive transcendence, with titles that bring us back to the immediate reality, devoid of ponderous significance: Tararí, Ping-pong and now Pin-pan-pum have an immediacy and a freshness that in fact belie the artist's method of work, in which everything is meticulously thought out and put together in the most minute detail.

Pin-pan-pum forces the viewer to approach the projections from different positions. When we come down the stairs of the Espai 13 we find ourselves entering a "porous space", as Bisbe likes to call it, which surrounds us and envelopes us in one of the projections. The artist invites us to wander through this space, to experience perception from different angles

and distances. In this apparently simple way of duplicating reality and at the same time questioning the duplication by destroying the artifice and directly involving the viewer in the process, he compels us to question our perception and memory of the place and makes us aware of the fragile nature of certainty.

**Montse Badia**

Barcelona 2003

## The dilemma of the visible, or the game of influence

### (the architecture of emptiness)

Luis Bisbe. *Pretecnología punta.*. CACmálaga, 2003

*SPIEGELFUGEN* (or Mirror Fugues),

that is to say, the Fugue, and within it, its inversion from The Beginning to The End and from everywhere.

*Art of Fugue*, considerations by J. S. Bach

I demand the chance to only create objects that speak of loss, of destruction, of their own disappearance and that of their shadows.

It is not you I have lost,

But the world.

Ingebord Bachmann

Read (or *revisited*) in the present say, almost forty years after they were first published, the theoretical texts of Donald Judd help us (or call us) to a consideration of contemporary artistic production (not in its entirety, obviously!) from the viewpoint of its own visibility, or to be more exact, they invites us to position ourselves at a determined angle, and with respect to the spectators from whose viewpoint the quality of a fictitious and susceptible object (from *object, tout court*) can be seen in all its richness and complexity, to the point at which it overcomes the iconographic dictats of traditional sculpture, and even the *illusion* of all painted surfaces. In one of his best known essays, "Specific Objects"<sup>2</sup>, Judd writes: **"One would have to construct an object that neither presents itself nor is represented by anything other than its own volume as an object –a parallelogram, for example–, an object that invents neither a time nor a space beyond itself"**. The *desire* of Judd, analysed in the light of current artistic production, especially that produced by younger artists, does not reach its consummation as an operative and practical project, given the current neurotic obsession (one that has been with us for far too long now...) to create *things* that are endowed (or impoverished) with a

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1975-1986*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1987

narrative that is as inflated as it is false and is subjective to the time and space of the created object. In order that we might understand each other, I am referring to the *ventriloquist's* object, that which is always commenting on its owner's domestic failures and successes. But luckily there are other creative attitudes, other situations that are derived from a more rigorous respect for the mechanisms involved in the production of aesthetic forms, that as such, equally question not only the natural status of their physical identity but also the territory of their own transparency and invisibility, thus awakening a "dilemma of the visible" which returns us to the very fact of what is left unsaid, or to put it in the words of Wittgenstein in the introduction to his *Tractatus*<sup>3</sup> "**The inexpressible surely exists. It shows itself...**". Between this sentiment expressed by the Austrian philosopher and Judd's desire to create an object that generates neither time nor space, a pictorial plane is established where multiple diagonals of diverse expression and intention converge. We shall see it very shortly.

Coming closer, or even *on top of* the work that Luis Bisbe has created for the recently opened Centro de Arte Contemporáneo in Malaga, we would first like to make a minimal analysis of what is meant by the term "installation", or at least what we understand, or might one day understand it to mean. We will probably never come to an agreement on a definitive definition of what this term means, and maybe it is better that this is the case, for at least this semantic difficulty, this interpretive opaqueness constitutes an element that enriches more than the instrumental complexity of what is being exhibited. But even so..., we can ponder, without fear of being too wide of the mark that any artistic installation is essentially the *positive squatting* of a particular space, normally (but not always) in a predetermined or pre-assigned interior. In fact, any installation is an architectural *otherness*, a Form that dreams of itself as an "inhabited language" belonging to cosmological diagram; and, of course, on the banks of or even *beyond* physical and concrete materialisation (every installation is the manifestation, if not the *consummation* of an unsatisfied desire) of that architecture devoid of cement and structure, of that *cosa mentale* that is recorded and tattooed on the imagination with the happy brutality with which we realise those acts, and only those, that permit us access to the absolute marvel that is the refuge, the greatest Form, the greatest Architecture. It was none other than this very idea of constructing an impossible "refuge" that led Paul Celan, in that most beautiful yet saddest of waltzes dedicated to his mother, a prisoner in Auschwitz, entitled *Todesfuge* (Death Fugue), to speak of that wonderful architecture that only the blue of the sky can project and realise when, converted in his mother's body in grey smoke escaping from the chimney of that oven crematorium, he "congratulated" himself, from this most dramatic of defeats because "**we dig our tombs in the air, mother / there one tightly lies**". Celan, the son, who since the activation of his memory (that malign and obsessive nocturnal melody that will only cease to play when the artist decides to cast his body into the Seine), since the terrible recorded image of his mother entering the infinite shadow land of an infinite house, will finally be able, with words, the only tools at his disposal, be able to build the final refuge for his mother, the poem *Todesfuge*. An impossible architecture (*Installation*) of music and silence... And yet equally; (Wittgenstein) the *inexpressible shows itself...*, as well as Judd's refusal to renounce the creation of objects that produce neither time nor space. Once at this point we can almost touch *Pretecnología Punta* (*State of the art Pre-*

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Alianza, Madrid, 1973



technology), The installation / refuge created by Luis Bisbe.

With only steel and elasticated cord to work with, Luis Bisbe has created a group of geometric forms (a step ladder, a trestle table, a two storey scaffold structure, two boards and a bucket, if my memory serves me right), that was to become the installation entitled *Pretecnología Punta*, alongside two projections (*Drink me*), in reality only one video, situated at opposite ends of the space that serve as a philosophical and emotional counterbalance, in relation to the acceleration / disintegration of the image, to the unifying impulse that controls the (false) statism of the pieces constructed in steel and pink cord. The filmed image in fact, provokes what we have on an earlier occasion<sup>3</sup> defined as the action that produces one's own exit, once that (and what follows here is a theory that is valid for almost all Luis Bisbe's work) the universe that is the artist's point of reference never comes even close to playing out its role universal referential utilizado por el artista nunca desempeña el rol, aún pareciéndolo, of nostalgia for a determined illusion of reality or its model, rather quite the opposite, such as the exiled shape of the Form or an earlier shadow or precedes the Figure from which it springs forth and is projected de nostalgia por una determinada ilusión de realidad o de su modelo, sino, bien al contrario, como el de la forma exiliada de la Forma, o como una sombra anterior, o que precede, a la Figura desde la cual surge y se proyecta. With respect to the title given by Bisbe to these pieces, let us let the artist himself explain: Con respecto al título dado por el artista a estas obras dejemos que sea él mismo quien lo explique: **"The title *Pretecnología Punta* refers to the willingness to advance simultaneously in two opposing directions at the same time, and to the tension that is thus created in the middle. Like the 'scratching' that refers to the sound that is made when a record is spun forward and backwards by hand in such a way that within the to-ing and fro-ing there must be a moment, however brief it might be, when the hand and the turntable are travelling at the same speed in such a way that sound and sense are suspended almost imperceptibly"**<sup>4</sup>. This "suspension" of sound or sense, or of sound and the communicative quality, is of particular interest to us as in many ways, this false, empty space, although not empty in the communicative sense could be understood to be part of the general system that groups together all the constituent pieces in play, to be like the elements of a mosaic, in which each part is on the one hand fixed and set apart from the others in its uniqueness, whilst on the other hand is charged with a dynamism that is strictly related to whole of which it is a part. Neither should we forget that all "suspension" is by its very nature a form of ellipsis, or one that at least act as the Form of the ellipsis, as this figure has always been associated with the mechanism of darkness, and of course, with its struggle with *decentralisation* –the annulment of the sole centre – that in *Pretecnología Punta* is brought almost to the extreme of baroque episteme in the way that the occupied space does not exist beyond the function of the bodies that *turn* in this same space, whilst our perception of them remains static. This "decentralisation" of the whole installation created by Luis Bisbe should have its most convincing and effective argument in the emotional response to what would be the double video projection: its insistent appearance / disappearance would play the part of Kepler's baroque Sun: the dazzling *logos* from which emanate the concentric ellipsis of the planets,

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<sup>4</sup> Text from a conference given by Luis Bisbe in the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

accepting thus that the until then admitted contemplation is over, that is to say, the heavenly firmament of the fixed stars.

The question must be asked: The (non) objects that make up *Pretecnología Punta*, in their form of ghosts of a domestic and nearby reference point: are they geometric forms that are drawn in space, or sculptures in their own right that aspire to map out their own pictorial plain where that which is represented does not contribute to the creation of time and meaning? Once again we refer to the words of Bisbe: “**Looking back, I realise that in a number of ways I am making representations that work in the opposite way to their supposed given function, I mean, I project slides that can’t be seen and columns made out of elasticated cord that instead of supporting, stretches downwards, like they were some kind of anti-images**”<sup>5</sup>. In this installation, there are decidedly geometric forms, of course, and yet essentially they are structures that submerged in the conservative logic of language may only possess a nominal sense of “reference point”, as what we have in effect is the external *dorsality* of this figure of reason, and what we *do not have* is, paradoxically, that which has been created, the internal reason and desire – their structure not absent but *hidden*– of these geometric forms that in their relationship with space do not renounce their willingness to “be a refuge”, the sole *locus* where the object is freely able to manifest itself as an “anti-object”, but also the closed space where that which is inexpressible *shows itself*...

All signs unfold to reveal their content, their forms of expression, that we can accept, yet the *problem* comes, as in the case of Bisbe’s installation, both tributaries converge in the same river, the content *is* their form of expression.

Considering that thinking of an *exterior of the image* is always extremely complex, if, indeed, it is possible *to think of* this figure, as in reality an *exterior* of the image itself does not exist, it would therefore be necessary to analyse the entirety of Luis Bisbe’s installation as a collection of false representations (and this “falseness” is worthy of being defined or saved as the sole *truth* in itself) that desperately try to overcome the connection between the thing and its representation, or between content and expression. We can, of course, talk about the “spectrality” in his steel and cord figures, and even in a large part of his earlier work because in the same way that all *spectrality* is a phenomena in which neither is belief guaranteed, nor is it called into question when it manifests itself as a *phantasm*, in other words, that which refers as much to the image as it does to what has *appeared*.

In almost all Luis Bisbe’s work there is a condition present that whilst we have defined it as being the “dilemma of the visible” in the title, as indeed we believe it to be, it now interests us more to refine this epigraph by appropriating a phrase cum idea from Godard that refers to the necessity of the artist to present his or her discourse “**under a certain form of the visible**”<sup>6</sup>. Godard’s phrase interests us not so much as pure intellectual inspiration, as the fact that it can be

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> “Le bon plaisir de Jean-Luc Godard”, in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, Volume 2, *Cahiers du Cinema*, Paris, 1998

taken as *interpretative action*, that therefore grants us the chance to *read* Bisbe's installation on a triple communicational front: the image as the text of a language of the visible, the representation, or "iconic suspension of that same image as a *language of Adam*, or language of the impossible and lastly, the image as a scientific point of reference of itself, or as an intervention, *a certain form of the visible* in the very interior of the parameters inherent to its own action concerning the investigation and analysis of its natural premises.

*The image as the text of a language of the visible*, or equally the *constructed* image as a result of a concentration of meaning, an "emphatic action" or scientific glance, that belong to a process of distillation of images as if they were syntagmas of a brutal language where the (non) syntaxis would arrive underlined and brutalised by the communicative action of the effigy, the icon, the *spectre*, and with it, the "iconic suspension" of what is represented, its discursive autonomy, but also its tribal dependency with respect to a constellation of image, all of which are peppered, as Teresa Blanch has rightly identified as "**situations of saturated meaning**"<sup>7</sup>, and from which, the stadiums of recognition confront the dramatic verification that their own reflection is that which detains and controls the (non) operative functionality of their own image, where solely via the semantics of their interpretation (beyond the visible form, beyond their formal representation) we can catch a glimpse of a hypothetical solution to the enigma. All of which is undoubtedly supported by a conceptual and philosophical structure in which notions or imaginary qualities present themselves as autonomous singular forces, without the parasitic dimension of that which is imaginary with respect to the contingent that receives it, Imagination. The finest architecture, the finest Refuge.

**Luis Francisco Pérez**

Barcelona, 2003

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<sup>7</sup> Teresa Blanch, *Sans thème, se glisser dans la réalité*, L'espace d'art 3, Valence, France