

EXHIBITION
KARMELO BERMEJO

ENTERING THE WORK, 4

23 September – 27 November, 2011



DATES

23 September – 27 November, 2011

VENUE

First-floor galleries

VISITING HOURS

Tuesdays to Saturdays (including bank holidays)
from 11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.
Sundays, from 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.

CURATED BY

Agar Ledo Arias and Iñaki Martínez Antelo

PRODUCED BY

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

Karmelo Bermejo
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Solid gold nugget painted in false gold
2011
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: MARCO/María Urrutia

PRESENTATION

The Karmelo Bermejo exhibition is the fourth project in a series entitled ENTERING THE WORK, on display in the first floor galleries of the museum. The title of the series is taken from the famous work by Giovanni Anselmo, *Entrare nell'opera* (1971). The paradox that surrounds the concept of spectator and which situates the latter somewhere between passivity and action is the departure point of this series of projects, which analyses the public, the visitor, the viewer, the audience, as an integral part of the work.

WORKS ON DISPLAY

Karmelo Bermejo's exhibition, titled . — a full stop, a punctuation sign that, on its own, functions with new meanings — is conceived as a 'work in layers'; layers which are superposed, erased or complemented through their invisibility. Drawing on the idea of the museum as a generator of value, it aims to stir reflections on the power games that surround the art work, its production and public reception. The show comprises 10 pieces — including the work . in the title of the exhibition —, two of which are located outside the exhibition rooms.

SUMMARY OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

'Entering the Work'

'Entering the Work' is a series of exhibitions on display in the first-floor galleries of MARCO. The title is taken from Giovanni Anselmo's renowned work *Entrare nell'opera* (1971), a photographic emulsion on canvas in which the artist photographs himself crossing a hillside in an action we interpret as revealing of the relationship between the artist and his work and between space and time. Grilo alters his role to create a situation of integration, also producing a reaction in the spectator, who, despite not physically entering the work, still participates in it as a witness of the blurring of the limits traditionally dividing subject and object. The piece's ultimate meaning, therefore, resides in the viewer's reaction to it.

In recent decades the fundamental role of the viewer in the creation of the art work has informed discussions and essays. Throughout the twentieth century there arose a number of concepts apropos the open work, the emancipated spectator or the death of the author, and the role of the public became essential for an art work to become considered complete, either by virtue of its physical presence or its need to involve itself actively. The artist ceased to be the pivot of the process and, as Douglas Crimp has noted, the coordinates of perception were defined not just by the encounter of spectator and work but also by the space they occupied. To what extent do audiences actually need to stand before an art work? Isn't the simple fact of looking important enough?

The paradox surrounding the notion of spectator, who stands somewhere between passivity and action is the starting point of this series of projects, which analyses the condition of the public as an integral part of the art work. The direct relationship between the two, that is, their physical exchange and immediate reciprocity, generates a new dimension in which time and space alter the conditions of reception and perception.

The cycle 'Entering the Work' has included projects by Loreto Martínez Troncoso, Wilfredo Prieto, and Rubén Grilo, and continues now with Karmelo Bermejo, followed by proposals by Judi Werthein (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1967), and Amaya González Reyes (Sanxenxo, Pontevedra, Spain, 1979).

Karmelo Bermejo

Reflections regarding the institutional context in which works of art are displayed have fed an ongoing interest for adherents of the first wave of Institutional Critique which, in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to subvert the role of the institution by questioning its limits and power relations within the context of the museum. It is in this critique of the system, which has since expanded to include not only the institution but also the agents of the entire art production system — amongst which the spectator and the director, at opposite ends — that Karmelo Bermejo's new proposal, titled ., is placed.

A full stop is a punctuation sign that marks the end of a sentence. On its own, as in the title of this exhibition, the full stop implies a negation of the word, or sequence, that preceded it. Indeed, Bermejo employs negation, a constant in the artist's work, as a strategy with which to question conventionalisms or, in this particular case, the rules shaping traditional museum practices. The full stop appears here as something outside the narrative context, and it is in this abstraction that it acquires the format of any other piece, with a place of its own within the scope of the display: the exhibition title.

CURATORIAL TEXT

"In 1971 Daniel Buren alluded to the economic function of the museum in the following way: 'The Museum gives a sales value to what it exhibits, has privileged/selected. By preserving or extracting it from the commonplace, the Museum promotes the work socially, thereby assuring its exposure and consumption'¹. Reflections on the institutional context in which works of art are displayed have fed an ongoing interest held not only by Buren but also by other exponents of the first wave of Institutional Critique which, in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to subvert the role of the institution by questioning its limits and power relations within the context of the museum.

It is in the light of this allusion to the role of the museum as a generator of value described by Buren in his *The Function of the Museum* that many of Karmelo Bermejo's works can be viewed, since they critique the system to spark a discussion about the power games that surround the art work and define its market value. They reference the strategy that has expanded over time to include not only the institution but also the agents of the entire art production system (which has the spectator at one end and the museum director at the other) and which Bermejo uses to articulate a series of pieces that have in common negation, occultation, and non-presence.

A full stop is a punctuation sign that marks the end of a sentence. On its own, as in the title of this exhibition, the full stop implies the annulment of the word, or sequence, that preceded it. Indeed, Bermejo employs negation as a tactic to question conventionalisms or, in this particular case, the rules shaping traditional museum practices. The full stop appears here as something outside the narrative context, and it is in this abstraction that it acquires the format of any other piece, with a place of its own within the scope of the display: the exhibition title.

. (2011) is also the representation of an end. It is the annulment of a narrative, the absence of a beginning, a development and a *dénouement*. But above all, the full stop is an intervention in a space, a political transgression, the rupture of a conventionalism.

This decontextualisation, together with invisibility, is another of the characteristics recurrent in Bermejo's work and which are played out in the exhibition space that the artist appropriates in a clear allusion to the 'phagocytosing' power of the institution. *Museificación. Tarifas de entrada del Guggenheim Bilbao aplicadas al MARCO Vigo* (2011) functions as a metaphor of this power and alludes to another of Bermejo's strategies — self-sabotage — by fixing an admission fee of 13 Euros, which is the price charged by the most expensive museum in Spain. The piece has an element of 'contribution', which comes from a series of early works the artist made called *Aportación de trabajo gratuito al Grupo Deutsche Bank*, *Aportación de vigilancia al Museo del Prado*, *Aportación de ruido al ruido* and *Aportación de fuel a la Costa da Morte*. In this new piece, by fixing an admission fee — entrance is usually free — money is paid into the public coffers.

¹ Daniel Buren, *The Function of the Museum*, 1971

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This performance piece shows the same duality that is present in all of the artist's works: on the one hand it annuls the exhibition because access to the gallery is blocked, and on the other it represents the artist's entire oeuvre, by physically and conceptually encompassing all the other works in a built institutional context that modifies the public's perception of them.

Since its beginnings in the 18th century, the modern museum has rested on the concepts of conservation, acquisition and education. Already since the Renaissance, the museum was conceived as a utopia that encompassed the entire world, like a microcosm of the macrocosm², or like an accumulation of time, a place inside another place, or like a 'heterotopy' as Michel Foucault would later describe it³. Between the first and second waves of Institutional Critique the object of analysis expanded out from the institution to other spaces, and it is this relationship between the subjects cohabiting within the institution that particularly interests Karmelo Bermejo. Working from the inside, he analyses this orthodoxy that characterised the mission of the museum since its origins and critiques, not without irony, the functions of ideology and representation attributed to it.

By accepting as true all that we see in a museum, the spectator becomes part of the conventional mechanisms of reception of the artistic work, thereby assuming a role that changed with the avant-guards when the artist moved away from the centre of the artistic process and allowed the spectator to step forward. The piece <. *Pepita de oro macizo pintada de oro falso* (2011) condenses this antagonism between true and false. It addresses the idea of value in an art that 'always turns the real into a façade, into representation, and into a construction'⁴. Unpolished gold, as extracted from nature, is confronted with its own representation in a strategy we encounter again in *Postcolonial Layer. Pieza arqueológica precolombina proveniente de un expolio, adquirida con dinero público en una subasta europea y cubierta posteriormente con una pátina de falsa antigüedad* (2011), where the artist denounces the increase in value that happens to certain archaeological finds with the passing of time.

The exhibition is conceived as a 'work in layers'; layers which are superposed, erased or complemented through their invisibility. A genuine piece painted over to look (falsely) ancient — a bogus falsification — speaks of how museums can re-set the value of objects; but it also alludes to the decontextualisation characteristic of 'ready-made retrospectives'⁵. Bermejo's pieces have a transversal quality that suggests multiple meanings as well as a political dimension. In *Attachment. Cabeza de toro disecada girada 180º y empotrada en la pared* (2008-2011) and - *0. Mástil de bandera girado 180º y clavado en el suelo* (2011), two sculptural pieces, the symbols of patriotism in each (the bull's head and the flagpole) are used in conjunction with a technique of occultation and inversion of symbols, which is also the case of the earlier pieces *Escarpias de oro macizo para sujetar obras de arte. Las escarpías quedan ocultas por las obras de arte que sujetan* (2009), o *Componente interno de la aspiradora del director de un Centro de Arte reemplazado por una réplica de oro macizo con los fondos del Centro que él dirige* (2010). Regarding the technique of inversion,

² Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum. From Boullée to Bilbao*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2008, p. 16

³ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, Routledge, London, New York, 2006, p. 1

⁴ Mike Kelley cited by Nicolas Bourriaud in *Postproducción*, Adriana Hidalgo editor, Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 48

⁵ Karmelo Bermejo in conversation with the curators

Bermejo seeks 'to break the natural order of automatic understanding and to force the viewer to participate in an event'⁶, as Joseph Kosuth said about his inverted images known as *Cathexis*.

Along the same line as the aforementioned piece, in which Ferrán Barenblit's (director of the CA2M, Madrid) vacuum cleaner was intervened upon and the funds he was responsible for were supplemented as a result of the project, enriching him in the process, is *Jacuzzi instalado en el despacho del director con los fondos del Museo que él dirige* (2011). Again we encounter the technique of negation, since the public is denied access to the piece and is left to trust the statement that appears on the information card, which is presented in a 'de-materialised' way and projected, life-size, on a wall, in a simulacrum of fetish that introduces fiction into the exhibition as well as the concept of physicality and presence/absence. We see the information card's meaning expanded, for in addition to being something that provides information, it is an intrinsic part of the exhibition, of the construction of the work for Karmelo Bermejo opts to leave the card next to the piece, in the director's office, and move the projection to the exhibition space.

The irony underlying these works is also present in *Transparencia 0. Réplicas en plomo macizo de las obras de arte de la colección personal del director del Museo* (2011). Here a series of lead monochrome pieces are made in a foundry using moulds obtained from pieces in the private collection of the institution's director. The polychrome is eliminated, the image is faded, and with it the work's authorship is also hidden, as are its value and the director's personal tastes. In the gallery, the replicas are presented as an accumulation, as booty, without any information to help the visitor form an idea of the individual tastes of the person responsible for choosing which artists and works are to be shown in the museum. A conflict between public and private arises from these strategies of occultation of content and cancels out the pieces' true value.

Public money is the central pivot of the works *0. Devolución de una subvención del Ministerio de Cultura por no haber realizado ninguna de las obras de arte para las que fue otorgada* (2011), and *+ 0. Abono de los intereses por un año de demora en la devolución de la subvención* (2011), both of them consisting of two official documents and two bank documents stating that the artist gave back, after previously accepting, a grant from the Ministry of Culture and assumed the 75.34 Euros incurred through interest rates during the process. Had he rejected the grant he would not have been able to secure the money, and by accepting it he prevented other artists from benefitting from it. An artist's private space should not be the object of public appreciation until he decides to stop doing the work for which he is paid. Like *Bartleby*, the writer in the book by Herman Melville, Karmelo Bermejo 'preferred not to', not to carry out the work for which the Ministry gave him 2000 Euros. Again the negation, this time as a response to bureaucracy and red tape; it is the same negation that lingers in the air of *Bartleby's* office and which permeates Bermejo's work, in this case because the artist chooses to defy the rules and regulations dictated by the structures of power and remain inactive.

⁶ Roy Boyne, *Subject, society and culture*, SAGE Publications Ltd, p. 85

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In 1920 Man Ray photographed Marcel Duchamp's *Le grand verre*, also known as *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, one of the most commented, disputed and interpreted works of the 20th century. The photograph was taken at a time when Duchamp's 'installation' had already gathered some dust due to a pause in the artist's productivity when he was busy playing chess. Entitled *Élevage de poussière*, the photograph can be described as an accumulation of dust reflecting a conscious process going on in Duchamp's mind: dust as a *ready-made*. Bartleby's negation and Duchamp's deliberate inactivity are equivalent to Bermejo's absenteeism from work, which, by giving back the grant introduces in his work a reference to the mechanisms of (self-) control in the public sphere of public money.

The public sphere and power relations is where the meaning of - *10.000. 10.000 euros de la Fundación Botín enterrados* (2011). The project consists of burying 10,000 Euros, awarded by the Botín Grant for the Plastic Arts, in a public place. Placed inside an airtight box so that the bank notes do not deteriorate, the money is rendered inaccessible and we know of its existence only thanks to a bronze plaque put up at the site of the 'treasure'. The spectator witnesses the result of an action negated by the impossibility of seeing or verifying it. Like the aforementioned *Jacuzzi instalado en el despacho del director con los fondos del Museo que él dirige* (2011), it is an *État donnés* with no chance whatever of voyeurism".

[Extract of the curatorial text for the exhibition catalogue]

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Karmelo Bermejo

Karmelo Bermejo, born in 1979, is an artist from the Basque Country. His work seeks to reveal the economics of value, whether commercial or of prestige, that influence the structures of visibility/invisibility sustaining the contemporary art work and its private and public financing. Informing his actions and works is the desire to invoke a critical waste: the luxury economy's manipulation of the art market. Karmelo Bermejo has had exhibitions in the Liverpool Biennial, Galería Maisterravalbuena (Madrid), Bloomberg Space (London), Artium (Vitoria), Tea (Tenerife), Young Artists' Biennial of Bucharest, Galería Marlborough (Madrid), Para/Site Art Space (Hong Kong), and the espacio ONG (Caracas). In 2010 he won the ARCO Award.

Education

- 2010 Resident artist at SOMA, Mexico DF, MX
- 2009 Resident artist (Grant Hangar) – FONCA- Cenart, Mexico DF, MX
- 2006 Fine Arts Degree, Universidad del País Vasco, ES

Solo Exhibitions

- 2011 . MARCO, Vigo, ES
- 2010 *La traca final*. Galería Maisterravalbuena, Madrid, ES
- 2009 Art Basel Miami Beach Art Positions. Stand galería Maisterravalbuena. Miami, US
Booked The Movie. Torre de Ariz, Vizcaya, ES
Solo Project. Arco'09. Galería Maisterravalbuena, Madrid, ES
- 2007 *Ostentación y gasto improductivo*. Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Vitoria, ES
- 2006 Galeria Marlborough, Madrid (Photo Award El Cultural, El Mundo), ES
Geist. El Ojo Atómico, Madrid, ES

Group Exhibitions (selection)

- 2011 29th Ljubljana Biennial, SI (curated by Beti Zerovc)
Nuit Blanche Paris, París, FR (curated by Alexia Fabre and Frank Lamy)
Fetiches críticos. Museo de la Ciudad, México DF, MX (curated by Cuauhtémoc Medina)
Zona MACO,11. Stand Galería Maisterravalbuena, México DF, MX
Arco'11. Stand Galería Maisterravalbuena, Madrid, ES
- 2010 Liverpool bienal 2010. *Touched*. Liverpool, UK (curated by Lorenzo Fusi)
Fetiches críticos. CA2M, Madrid, ES (curated by Cuauhtémoc Medina)
Art Basel Miami Beach 2010, US
Arco'10. Stand Galería Maisterravalbuena, Madrid, ES
- 2009 *The Grand Finale*. Art Basel Miami Beach, Art Projects, US (curated by Patrick Charpanel)
La Colección 2. TEA, Tenerife, ES (curated by Javier González de Durana)
Insert Coin. Para/Site Art Space, Hong Kong (curated by Enrique Miguélez)
- 2008 *Re-construction*. Young Artists' Biennial, Bucharest, RO (curated by Ami Barak)
No más héroes. Artium, Vitoria, ES (curated by Daniel Castillejo)
Arco'08. Stand Galería Trayecto, Madrid, ES
Doméstico08, Madrid, ES (a project curated by Amelia Aranguren)
- 2007 *No future*. Bloomberg Space, London, UK (curated by David G. Torres, Sacha Craddock and Graham Gussin)

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Awards and Grants

- 2011 Premio artista emergente Zona MACO 2011, México DF
Beca de Artes Plásticas Marcelino Botín 2011
- 2010 Beca artes plásticas Gobierno Vasco
Beca Diputación Foral de Vizcaya
Premio ARCO 2010
- 2009 Honourable mention. Caja Madrid, Generaciones 09
- 2008 Resident artist Fonca/Cenart, México DF (Grant Hangar)
3rd Award Ertibil
MadridProcesos 2008 (AVAM)
Beca Juan de Otaola y Pérez de Saracho
- 2007 1st Award Injuve 2007
Acquisition Award Museo de Pollença 2007
Beca Intermediae 2007
Selected Ertibil'07
Finalist Premio Miquel Casablanca 2007 (Work Category)
- 2006 Photo Award El Cultural, El Mundo 2006
Creation Grants, Centro Cultural Montehermoso 2006
Premio Malagacrea 2006 (CACMA)
Beca Propuestas X, Fundación Arte y Derecho 2006
Finalist Premio Miquel Casablanca 2006 (Project Category)

Work in Public Collections

Collection Zona MACO, México DF
CA2M, Madrid, ES
TEA, Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, ES
La Panera, Lleida, ES
Collection Caja Madrid, ES
Collection Purificación García, ES
Museo de Pollença, Mallorca, ES
Artium, Vitoria, ES
Diputación Foral de Bizkaia, ES
Universidad del País Vasco, ES
Colección Feria Espacio Atlántico, Vigo, ES

Bibliography

Pastor, Judith. 'Entrevista a Karmelo Bermejo', *Taxi Art Magazine*, Guadalajara, Mexico, January 2011
Hernández, Edgar Alejandro. 'Estética del dinero y su carencia', *Excelsior*, Mexico, March 2010
Reguera, Galder. 'Karmelo Bermejo. El sueño del arte produce monstruos', *Lápiz*, March 2010
Garbayo, Maite. 'Karmelo Bermejo. La desaparición no es posible', *Exit Express*, February 2010
La Font, Isabel. 'Ironía gruesa contra la recesión', *El País*, 11 February 2010
Marín-Medina, José. 'Actuaciones de Karmelo Bermejo', *El Cultural, El Mundo*, 5 February 2010
Díaz-Guardiola, Javier. 'El arte queda fuera de las leyes sociales y morales', *ABCD*, 23 January 2010
Reguera, Galder. 'Pequeños apuntes sobre dos obras de Karmelo Bermejo en seis movimientos', catalogue of the exhibition *Booked The Movie*, 2009
Vozmediano, Elena. 'Karmelo Bermejo gana el VII Premio de fotografía El Cultural', *El Cultural, El Mundo*, 27 July 2007
Achiaga, Paula. 'Mi principal fuente es la realidad' (interview), *El Cultural, El Mundo*, 27 July 2006
David G. Torres. Interview, catalogue of the exhibition *Entornos próximos*, Artium, Vitoria, 2006
Abel H. Pozuelo. 'La aportación de Karmelo Bermejo', *El Cultural, El Mundo*, 29 October 2006
San Martín, Francisco Javier. 'Economía política del derroche', catalogue of the exhibition *Ostentación y gasto improductivo*, Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Vitoria, 2007
Fito Rodríguez. '¿Se pueden hacer obras de arte que no sean Aportaciones?' (interview), *Mugalari*, June 2007

Should you need further information, please contact:
MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo
Press Office (Marta Viana / Pilar Souto)
Príncipe 54 - 36202 Vigo, Spain
Tel. +34 986 11 39 08 / 11 39 03 / 11 39 00 Fax. +34 986 11 39 01
Email: marta.viana@marcovigo.com pilar.souto@marcovigo.com