

EXHIBITION

SANTIAGO SIERRA

May 1st – September 27th 2009



DATES

May 1st – September 27th, 2009

PLACE

Exhibition halls on lower floor

Exhibition HOURS

Tuesday through Saturday (including holidays)
from 11.00 am to 9.00 pm
Sundays, from 11.00 am to 3.00 pm

Work action HOURS

Tuesday 28th, Wednesday 29th and Thursday
30th of April
From 8.00 am 11.00 pm

PRODUCTION

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea of
Vigo

CURATOR

Iñaki Martínez Antelo

Santiago Sierra. *Work action*. Photo: courtesy MARCO

INTRODUCTION

After more than six years producing exclusively group shows, in 2009 MARCO is initiating a new line of **solo shows**, either retrospectives or specific projects, as is the case of **Santiago Sierra's** show, which will occupy the spaces of the museum's lower floor.

The exhibition, which will be opening on **May Day, International Worker's Day**, is preceded by a "**work action**" open to the public, which will take place on the 28th, 29th and 30th of April, **from 8 in the morning to 11 at night**.

Santiago Sierra (Madrid, 1966) is one of the most interesting artists in the international art scene. His work, involving social or political structures, is intended to question established power relations, in the realm of art as well as society at large. In his works he directly interrogates viewers regarding the limits imposed by contemporary capitalist globalised society through themes of significant political and social connotations such as worker exploitation and marginalisation.

www.santiago-sierra.com

WORKS ON EXHIBIT

INSTALLATION OF 54 CEMENT BREAKWATER TETRAPODS AND AN EPILOGUE ON POLICE AND WORKER SENSITIVITY

INSTALLATION OF 54 CEMENT BREAKWATER TETRAPODS

Former courthouse and prison building in Vigo, Spain - April 2009

Cement breakwater tetrapods were chosen for this project. These elements were selected because of the facility with which they can be assembled and the way they “naturally” hook together to form strong water-containing barriers or breakwaters. We installed the tetrapods on the radial axes of the old jail-turned-museum at equal distances with respect to the axes extending outward from the centre marked under the dome. They were also put in places where the space fans out, in the old patios as well as the old galleries. In the latter more open spaces we acted upon the convergent sub-axes with the same placement pattern as with the main axes. The number of tetrapods was determined by the sizes in which we were ultimately able to obtain them; the larger they were the fewer elements and vice versa. In general we will seek to fill the space without overloading it with objects. We aim to lend a sense of order that visually unifies the space, so that visitors are left with an impression of the building’s original structure, which is usually superseded for the sake of the exhibitions.

Before installing these modules we covered the floor with the thick white plastic commonly employed in construction work, with the double function of protecting and unifying the floor surface, since in some cases it is made of stone and in others wood. We removed all the temporary architectural elements from the showrooms —false plaster walls and so on— in order to strip the rooms and bring out their original layout. We left these elements in the rooms next to the walls, underscoring the fact that elements were indeed removed, yet aiming to prevent them disturbing the general arrangement of the tetrapods.

From the moment the installation tasks are begun until the show closes the rooms are not to be cleaned, considering that the remains of work activity are proof of the fact that it has taken place.

This proposal will be shown at two times: mounting and exhibiting. Announced as a “Work action” we invite visitors to attend the mounting from the upper floor. Reproducing the guard-prisoner relationship as a spectator-worker relationship, visitors will occupy the space originally meant for guarding convicts. We will therefore remove the elements that block this view from the upper floor. The lower floor, where the work will be carried out, will be closed off and safe from visitors. Nothing should bother the workers during the mounting process.

PRESS RELEASE

1st EPILOGUE

HANDING OVER THE EXHIBITION SPACE TO THE AUTHORITIES FOR THE ANNOUNCEMENT AND DEMONSTRATION OF CONFISCATED GOODS

Former courthouse and prison building in Vigo, Spain / May 2009 – May 2010

The museum conference room will be transferred to the National Police for one year for them to show the confiscated goods they normally show in the way they normally do. We are referring to any type of confiscated goods, ranging from weapons to clothing fakes, drugs to falsified documents. It will simply be a transfer of the space. No attempt will be made to vary the way in which they announce or display the confiscated goods. Nor should the material be shown longer than necessary. The museum will collaborate fully by facilitating the agents with the elements needed for exhibiting the items, such as tables and lights, in addition to the infrastructure needed for accommodating the press. In exchange, the authorities will allow me to photograph every confiscated article as conceptual appropriation. The year-long transfer will not entail a decrease in the other conference room activities. The confiscations that are to occur by surprise will presumably remain for a brief period of time alone. Nonetheless, the museum should be equally expeditious in taking down and putting up signs or other elements that may hamper the authorities.

2nd EPILOGUE

TRANSLATION OF A COLLOQUIUM

Former courthouse and prison building in Vigo, Spain / May 1st 2009

Colloquium by José Luis Velasco titled "FOR WORKERS THERE IS ALWAYS A CRISIS"

DVD video, black-and-white, 80'

Santiago Sierra

TEXT BY THE CURATOR

'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to begin.'

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*

"This is how Peter Brook began *The Empty Space* and this is how Santiago Sierra has also found an empty space, an empty museum, for actors to start coming onstage, in this case the workers who are to install the pieces that will comprise the exhibition and whom visitors will be able to observe as they work, as they perform their work action. The result of that action will be the first solo show held at MARCO, which will remain on exhibit until the end of September. The exhibition, titled *Installation of 54 Cement Breakwater Tetrapods and an Epilogue on Police and Worker Sensitivity*, is one of the most ambitious projects the artist has presented in Spain.

Much has been written about Santiago Sierra's work in recent years, and 'serialisation' and 'minimalism' are two of the terms to which the critics often have resorted when discussing it. Since his earliest pieces with containers and elemental geometric forms, however, Sierra has surpassed the legacy of minimal art, whose formal postulates he takes on but whose conceptual reductionism and semantic content he constantly questions. Throughout all these years the artist has developed one of the most solid bodies of work in the international arena and he has done so remaining coherent with his own method.

Ten years ago, in 1999, he presented in Los Angeles the work titled *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers*, one of the interventions that best encapsulates the artist's interests and that most resembles the new piece created for the MARCO: *Installation of 54 Cement Breakwater Tetrapods*. In both there is an industrially manufactured object and the action of paying people to perform physical labour. After that day in which the workers moved the blocks around the gallery spaces, the result was shown to the public during the exhibition period with the marks made on the floor of the gallery and the traces left by the workers.

In the show presented at the MARCO, which occupies all the exhibition spaces on the lower floor, the elements used are tetrapods, concrete pieces consisting of a central core from which four truncated cone feet extend, forming 120° angles with each other. These blocks are customarily used as breakwater blocks and due to their shape they hook together when turning over each other, like Tetris pieces, thus achieving greater resistance to waves than other prefabricated concrete models. During the three days in which the workers are placing the tetrapods in the exhibition halls, visitors are denied access into the halls where the actual exhibition is to take place —a resource used by the artist on other occasions— but they are invited to see how the work is done from the upper floor of the museum, throughout the labourer's workday.

Prior to the action, the halls were intentionally left in disrepair after the previous exhibition was dismantled. The remnants of works by other artists (painted walls, wires, holes...) were left in sight and the spaces have been stripped of all the added elements that have been accumulated over the years in the museum halls, exhibition after exhibition —drywall partitions, patches, drop ceilings, even artificial lighting— so that for the first time they appear just as they had been originally conceived by the architects, allowing circulation through some of the halls that have never before been seen, as they had been closed off for the MARCO's opening exhibition and never opened again afterwards. All these elements were not removed but left leaning on the walls or spread about the floor of the halls in anticipation of the installation of the tetrapods. The entire floor has been covered with white plastic to visually unify the space, hiding from view the different floor surfaces made of wood, granite and marble. Jeremy Bentham, the ideologue of panoptic architecture, recommended that "...if the floor of the cells is made of stone or brick it should be covered with a layer of plaster, for not having cracks it will not conceal filth or breed disease..." In this case it will be white plastic that will collect all the dirt accumulated during the months of the exhibition, since the halls will not be cleaned and all traces of the visitors will be left on the plastic.

The repetition of the form, an industrially mass-produced object, and its placement in an artistic context, introduce the Duchampian coordinates of the ready-made, but it turns out to be a perversion of those statements when we add the principal reading Sierra's works elicits by revealing the social dimension of the performative act. Santiago Sierra's work is very different from Duchamp's, and its scope can only be fully appreciated when his entire career is considered. Plays on words, semiotic quips, absence of colour with the use of black and white, repetition, and the literal explanation of the works in their descriptive titles all structure a body of work in which the processual condition of the actions are the fundamental part of the works, or are the works strictly speaking. The voyeurism of the viewer, who watches the action from a previously established point of view, leads us once again to evoke the Duchamp of *Étant donnés*, an assemblage only visible through some small holes drilled in a wooden door. In the actions planned by Sierra, the movement of the objects becomes the work, at the specific time defined by the artist.

He recently presented at the Helga de Alvear gallery in Madrid *The Penetrated*, perhaps one of Santiago Sierra's most complex works, a video in eight acts that shows hired men and women of white and black race, performing all the possible combinations of anal penetration between each other. The projection insists on the repetition of an act with a surprising and not at all arbitrary treatment. The sordid quality of the action is camouflaged in a choreography that distracts us from the pornographic connotation by showing us the couples copulating in a fixed frame, without sound and in black and white, reducing them to almost geometric moving forms. The projection was accompanied by a series of photographs of the action taken from above, in the same way that the placement of the tetrapods in the MARCO halls will be recorded from the same point of view as that from which the visitors will watch the action. Whereas in *The Penetrated* the action was private, at the MARCO it becomes public.

The combination of geometric forms and the hiring of workers serves for us as an example to illustrate the respect for the purest minimalism and the social connotation these works contain. *111 Constructions Made with 10 Modules and 10 Workers*, presented at the Peter Kilchmann gallery in Zurich in 2004, is perhaps the closest formal referent. To this reading, we must add that which spurns the established power relations, reiterating an account of the pyramidal structure, marginalisation and cultural prejudices. In the documentation of *The Penetrated* it is observed how, depending on the races and the combinations, there are more or fewer people willing to be hired to fulfil certain sexual roles.

Some of Santiago Sierra's pieces are very well-known, particularly those in which people, either prostitutes, the destitute or illegal aliens, are paid in exchange for specific jobs that are determined by the artist. At the MARCO, the workforce commissioned to move the 54 cement tetrapods, hired by a company that usually does this kind of job, has an exchange value determined by the law of supply and demand. What is being addressed here is work in a system of the production of goods, as opposed to other pieces in which what is questioned is the type of work being paid for or who does it, preferably workers in precarious situations.

In his intervention at the MARCO, the workers are what are shown to the audience, which is invited to watch the action. The spectator participates, as voyeur, but now establishing a game of relations with the panoptic floor of the museum, recalling its past as a prison. As we observe the development of the action from the upper floor of the museum, we assume the functions of the guard, unconsciously checking whether the will of power is carried out. 'It is more profitable to guard than to punish' wrote Foucault; guarding facilitated by the panoptic and that Sierra takes into account when determining the location of the 54 tetrapods, following the radial arrangement of the building's rooms. The leisurely visitors are those who guard the workers and who can express their opinions about the way in which they are doing their job, as in any street scene where workers are observed by passers by. These workers have been hired by the museum to set up the exhibition with some specific instructions, but it is the company—rather than the artist or the museum—that has determined how many days, in what shifts and how many workers were necessary to distribute the tetrapods throughout the space in an arrangement previously agreed upon by the artist and the museum. They also have instructions not to pick up or clean the remnants of their work or the footprints made on the floor during the movement and handling of the tetrapods in the exhibition halls.

The action takes place during the days preceding May Day, the day the result is presented to the public. It is no coincidence that the artist has chosen International Worker's Day, as a gesture of respect for the union organisations that demonstrate that day all over the world since its inception at the Socialist Workers Congress of the Second International (Paris, 1889). In 2003 the artist had already used the date May 1st when he documented, without an audience, the work *Hooded Woman Seated Facing the Wall*, at the Spanish Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, an iconography referring to punishment, to the image of the executioner or to work as penitence, direct heir of the moral oppression imposed by the Spanish Catholic Church.

PRESS RELEASE

Handing Over the Exhibition Space to the Authorities for the Announcement and Display of Confiscated Goods is a work that functions as an epilogue, closing the process and at the same time prolonging it in time. For a year MARCO's conference room —a space where the press conferences, other conferences, concerts, courses, projections and even presentations of commercial products are usually held— will be turned over to the National Police for them to display the goods or consignments confiscated in the city. These presentations will be held by surprise; here the artist does not aim to modify the times or the way in which the National Police usually displays the confiscated goods, acknowledging police sensitivity in arranging the objects (drugs, falsifications of clothing or documents, pirated copies of discs, etc.) in the same way in which we arrange the works of art in a museum showcase or upon a pedestal.

These presentations will be photographed by the artist and they will therefore embody an archive of police activity in the city during a one-year period. It is no coincidence that this process is taking place in the MARCO building, which was a courthouse as well as a prison before it was a museum, so it is not really all that strange that law officers should be demonstrating the evidence of crimes in our facilities. The communications, exhibitions, mounting and security personnel will collaborate with the corresponding departments of the National Police to make this photographic series that will directly depend on the police activity during this one-year period.

As a second epilogue of the exhibition, on May Day, coinciding with the opening, a video found on the Internet will be shown in the conference room. The video is of the conference given by José Luis Velasco approximately a year ago, titled 'For Workers There Is Always a Crisis'.

Iñaki Martínez Antelo

Curator of the exhibition

ABOUT THE ARTIST

SANTIAGO SIERRA (Madrid, 1966. He lives and works.)

www.santiago-sierra.com

SELECTED SOLO SHOWS

- 2009** *The Penetrated*, Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid
Imperial Buildings, Wellington, New Zealand
Santiago Sierra, Magasin3, Frihamenn, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2008** Remake of *Group of Persons Facing the Wall and Person Facing into a Corner* Lisson Gallery, London, United Kingdom. October 2002 / Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom
- 2007** *The Trap* and *The Adults*, Centro Cultural Matucana 100, Santiago de Chile, Chile
1549 State's Crimes, Former Building of the Department of Foreign Affairs in the Plaza of Three Cultures, Tlatelolco, Mexico City, Mexico
Submission, Juárez Project, Mexico City, Mexico
Santiago Sierra, Prometeogallery di Ida Pisani, Milan, Italy
- 2006** *Santiago Sierra*, CAC, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo of Málaga, Málaga
245m3, Sinagoga de Stommeln, Pulheim, Germany
- 2005** *The Corridor of the House of the People*, Museo Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo, Bucharest, Rumania
House in Mud, Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, Germany
- 2004** *120 Hours of Continuous Reading of a Telephone Book*, Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid
Santiago Sierra, Lisson Gallery, London
300 Tons, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria
- 2003** *Covered Word*, La Biennale di Venezia, 50 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, Spanish Pavilion, Venice, Italy
- 2002** *Hiring and Arrangement of 30 Workers in Relation to their Skin Color*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria
3.000 Holes of 180 x 50 x 50 cm each, Montenmedio Arte Contemporáneo, Vejer de la Frontera, Cádiz
2 Maraca Players, Galería Enrique Guerrero, Mexico City, Mexico
- 2001** *20 Workers in a Ship's Hold. 3 Urban Interventions*, Barcelona Art Report 2001, Barcelona
- 2000** *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes*, Kunst-Werke, Berlin, Germany
A Person Paid for 360 Continuous Working Hours, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, United States

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Iñaki Martínez Antelo (Santiago de Compostela, 1969) has been Director of the MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea of Vigo, since November 18th 2005.

He has an undergraduate degree in History of Contemporary Art from the University of Santiago de Compostela, a master's degree in Aesthetics and Theory of Art from the Aesthetics Institute attached to the Autonomous University of Madrid. After a period working in the exhibitions department of the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea of Santiago de Compostela (1996-1998), he was Exhibitions Coordinator at the Auditorio de Galicia (1998-2002) and Coordinator of Cultural Activities at Casa Asia, Barcelona (2002-2003). Starting in the year 2003 he fulfilled the post of Head of Exhibitions at MARCO, until, through public tender, he was nominated its director at the end of 2005 by the Board of Directors the MARCO foundation.

At MARCO he has curated the exhibitions *Urbanitas*, *Taking Time/Tempo ao tempo*, and projects by the artists Carlos Rodríguez Méndez, Diego Santomé, Rita Rodríguez, Carme Nogueira, Oliver Añón and Suso Fandiño.

Since February 2009 he has been Secretary of ACACE, Association of Directors of Contemporary Art Museums of Spain.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Members of the museum staff are available in the halls to provide visitors with information, in addition to the regular guided tours:

Every day at 6:00 pm

'A la carte' tours for groups, by appointment at the tel. 986 113 900/11

BIBLIOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION. Santiago Sierra

Library-Documentation Centre

Selection of catalogues of solo and group shows by the artist

From May 1st to September 27th 2009

Hours: Tuesday through Friday, from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm and from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm

REQUESTS FOR GRAPHIC MATERIALS

EXHIBITION

SANTIAGO SIERRA

GRAPHIC MATERIAL AVAILABLE TO THE PRESS:

CD including texts and photographs of the exhibition in different formats.

IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE DOCUMENTATION, PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND SEND IT BY E-MAIL, FAX OR MAIL POST TO:

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

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