

EXHIBITION

THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO

29 January – 2 May 2010



Piero Golia. *Going to Tirana*, 2001. Instalación (fotograma vídeo). Cortesía del artista

DATES

29 January – 2 May, 2010

PLACE

Exhibition rooms on the first floor

OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Saturday
(holidays included)
From 11am to 9pm
Sundays, from 11am to 3pm

PRODUCTION

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo /
MEIAC, Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, Badajoz

CURATORS

David Arlandis and Javier Marroquí

ARTISTS:

Julien Berthier (Besançon, France, 1975)

Gelitin (Wien, Austria; from 1993 they began exhibiting internationally)

Piero Golia (Naples, Italy, 1974)

Leopold Kessler (Munich, Germany, 1976)

Yamashita+Kobayashi (Chiba, Japan, 1976 / 1974)

Enrique Lista (Cambre, A Coruña, Spain, 1977)

Aleksandra Mir (Lubin, Poland, 1967)

Gianni Motti (Sondrio, Italy, 1958)

Paola Pivi (Milan, Italy, 1971)

Wilfredo Prieto (Sancti Spiritus, Cuba, 1978)

Tere Recarens (Barcelona, Spain, 1967)

Xu Zhen (Shanghai, China, 1977)

WORKS EXHIBITED

The group exhibition 'THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO' is part of a research that analyses the presence of humour in current art. The exhibition brings together twelve artists, all share the same artistic references, and, above all, share a work methodology. The works here exhibited are remnants of actions, records, documentation, or devices that speak of their projects.

SYNTHESIS OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

MARCO of Vigo opens its 2010 programming with a group project coproduced with MEIAC of Badajoz and curated by David Arlandis and Javier Marroquí. 'THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO' arises as part of a curatorial research which since 2005 analyses the presence of humour in contemporary art, from different perspectives.

Here, the project focuses on the rise of certain artistic attitudes where humour shows up in nearly absurd manner. The exhibition brings together works by a twelve artists, who insist on projects that entail a great effort. An irrational and disproportionate effort in relation to the end result.

In the curator's words, 'To undertake an absurd, or out of context action always implies a comic charge for the observer, but when, furthermore, that action is carried out with intensity, with an absolute dedication and with a huge effort, and in full awareness that this effort is totally useless, we have a square-cubed absurdity, and, therefore, a square-cubed comic charge. The effort acts as an element which reinforces absurdity, its function is that of exaggerating. Exaggeration has always had an important role in humour, by being an element of distortion which removes us from reality and takes us to the comic realm through incoherence.'

'THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO' deals with the evolution of the concept of an artist, with their place in society and with the reconsideration of the function of art. What is it that makes them reach extremes where absurdity and humour are stronger than practical reason? Without a doubt, it is a new attitude, a new way of facing their creation, and a way of situating themselves in the world. The artists present in this exhibition share the same references, and, above all, share a work methodology, which is far from the production of objects and that tackles the action itself. The pieces shown in the galleries are most of them results, consequences, documentation or vestiges of an action.

Piero Golia's installation, remembrance of his canoe crossing through the Adriatic; **Yamashita+Kobayashi's** video, *Infinity*, register of an action without human presence; **Wilfredo Prieto's** installation — a plant, a wheelbarrow and a photograph — , trace of the performance executed on the island of Curaçao; **Xu Zhen's** video and photographs, showing the 18-day 'feat' on a van; **Gianni Motti's** stroll along the tunnel of the CERN LHC hadron collider in Geneva; **Tere Recarens's** video, showing the artist 'sweeping' the clouds over Berlin; the video-prologue of the 1999 performance by **Aleksandra Mir**, or the one with goldfishes on a plane, by **Paola Pivi**; the mail of the unfruitful action by the **Gelitin** collective; the balcony leading **Julien Berthier's** proposal, or **Leopold Kessler's** installation, *Diplom*, which registers the unwinding of a 1,200m cable along the city. And as an example of work in progress, **Enrique Lista's** installation, which began back in September 2009 with the drafting of an agreement on work production, and which will go on until August 2010.

TEXT BY THE CURATORS

"This exhibition is inscribed within the framework of a research we began in 2005, and which has focused on researching the uses of humour in contemporary art. Since then, we have curated three exhibitions, in which we have engaged the subject of humour in contemporary art production from a variety of points of view: humour as a result of an attitude which identifies art and life, humour as a tool for connecting with the audience, by shortening the distance that separates them, and humour as a vehicle or transmitter of critical content. 'THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO' is the last project in this series, and, in this case, humour comes hand in hand with the absurd.

The exhibition brings together up to twelve proposals, crazy all of them, twelve fully mad projects. These projects are more appropriate for characters like Sisyphus than for an artist, and this is so for two reasons: because of the absurdity of the action necessary to produce the project, and because of the proportion of the effort required for its execution in relation to the result. Of course, none of the actions is due to a punishment; rather, the case is quite the opposite. It is a case of an individual, mediated decision, a labour which each artist produces by their own will, and with great dedication. Neither the time required to carry out a project, nor the means one has to mobilise, nor the result, the non-productivity of the labour, the absurdity or ridiculousness of an action matter here. The artist invests a blind effort in their labour, a great effort, sometimes an intellectual one, and sometimes even a physical one. But, regardless of the kind of effort, in all cases it is beyond reason. [...]

Although they are still a minority, since the appearance of Duchamp, there have been many artists who have decided not to take the creative act so seriously, have given up working on the great ideas, in order to dedicate themselves, body and soul, to small occurrences. Anyone can say that we all have occurrences, but the artist is the only one obstinate enough to go all the way and dedicate herself to them regardless of their absurdity, or their lack of productivity. The artist stands out from the crowd the moment they are capable of setting aside reason and going all the way.

We should also mention that there are things that only an artist is allowed to do. If anyone else did them, their sanity would be suspect; nevertheless, an artist can do them and even receive an applause for his deeds. Socially, they have been granted certain licences under that old Romantic excuse of creative insanity, licences which the artists in this exhibition, and many others, conveniently take advantage of in order to achieve their goals. [...]

To spend five days rowing through the Adriatic, in order to become the first Italian illegal immigrant to enter Albania seeking asylum; to dig a huge hole in the sand all day long, only to fill it in and dig it out again the following day, repeating the same action for a week; to invade a neighbouring country by crossing its borders with an army of remote-controlled toys; to jump from an aeroplane at a height of four thousand metres, armed with a broom, trying to sweep the clouds and getting some sunshine through to Berlin are only a few examples of the projects which

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can be seen in 'THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO'. After reading a short description of some of the actions, it is inevitable for many to ask themselves the classic question: is this art? [...]

It would be hard to imagine these projects were it not for the existence of Dada, of the Fluxus movement, of happenings, and even of performance art [...] One has to go back to these referents in order to find similar attitudes and methodologies to the ones we can find in this exhibition. Although intentions are not the same, the language, the strategies, are quiet similar. If we jump back to Duchamp and the Surrealists, we would have to advance to the beginning of the 1950's in order to find the first referents and some of the most influential actions for contemporary artists. [...]

Although the tactics and some attitudes in contemporary artists might appear very similar to that of their predecessors, the context is no longer the same, and neither are intentions. But, then, what is the will behind the works in 'THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO'? Where are these attitudes of full voiding of meaning taking us? Nowadays, it is hard for these artists to speak openly about their intentions; nevertheless, it is easy to see where their proposals were pointing at. Although they keep pushing the envelope of what is possible with their impossible actions and projects, they are not re-igniting the debate about what can and what cannot be done in art, History has already proven, as we said, that its capacity to assimilate it all. These new actions seem to be targeted inwards, towards the art sphere itself, although some can at the same time, have a socio-political reading. But if we make the effort of reading the works in this exhibition as a whole, that reading would be very close to Duchamp's action of painting a moustache to the Mona Lisa. They are actions that directly or indirectly ridicule topics and attitudes of the art immediately preceding them, even their own referents, attempts to question the figure of the artist in contemporary society, even the understanding of art itself. What transpires, from their attitudes rather than from their actions, is a certain scepticism about the scope and outreach of art, a will to step aside from the ambitious pretensions of Modern art. [...]

One of the explanations we have found about the use of humour in art would be directly related to the attitude with which certain artists engage their work, the state of mind predisposition that drives the author to venture into a ludic-creative act, carrying out an identification of art with life; life and play. This identification has the effect that something as transcendental as the work of art can turn into something as insignificant as the result of the artist playing. We find this position interesting for two reasons: in the first place, due to its subversive character, to its not being governed by the canons of productivity which we use to evaluate individuals; secondly, because of its relational power, its great capacity of connecting to the spectator. That attitude, related to play, is what we think best identifies most of the contemporary artists that use humour in their work. In them, humour is derived from play, from the fun of breaking rules doing what one is not supposed to do, doing what seems impossible to do, and, of course, with all the pleasure of someone committing a small mischief, with no desire to provoke. [...]

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Absurd humour is a very particular kind of humour, it won't provoke laughter. When a spectator faces one of these works, the easiest reaction is to smile and raise their hands to their head. Driven by a feeling of doubt and disbelief, an incredulity at seeing that people are capable of dedicating time and effort to labours as non-productive as the ones in the exhibition, an incredulity that the art system would support them and would even reinforce their whim. We don't believe that anyone would interpret these works as a serious provocation, the comic charge of the actions renders this impossible, they are an assault of reason from the standpoint of humour.

As far as we are concerned, what we were most interested in when compiling this series of projects is everything that could reveal, as a whole, the condition of the artist nowadays, the transformations experienced by the image they project, and the image of the artist that the public manages to assimilate. We wanted to go deeper into the possible reasons that drive them to projects in which the absurd and humour are more powerful than practical reason. Now, we are sure that these actions are the reflection of a new attitude in artists, a new means to engage their creativity, and to understand art and life."

David Arlandis and Javier Marroquí

[Excerpts from the text by the curators
for the exhibition catalogue]

GENERAL INFORMATION

ABOUT THE CURATORS

In 2002, **David Arlandis** (Valencia, 1979) and **Javier Marroquí** (Dolores, Alicante, 1978) join in a collaborative team work applied to the field of cultural production and focussed on research, curatorship and critics. This year they begin with exhibition programming, among them: *Sobre una realidad ineludible. Arte y compromiso en Argentina* in MEIAC (Badajoz) and CAB (Burgos); *I Ciclo de Vídeo Internacional ALBIAC 06* (Almería), *Empieza el juego* in La Casa Encendida (Madrid), *Carte Blanche* in Le Commissariat (Paris), *Hay algo de revolucionario en todo esto* in Sala Parpalló and Centre Cultural la Mercè (Girona), *Cine Infinito* in Sala la Gallera (Valencia), *Art for Fun* in Casal Solleric (Palma), *Mapping Valencia* in MhV (Valencia), *Positive Critical Imagination* for *Edinburgh Art Festival* (Edimburgo), *Tragicomedia* (Cádiz and Sevilla), and *Gabriela Golder. Habitada* (Valencia). They are now organising a research about 'the crisis of cares', to be held in Valencia, Zagreb and Praga.

CATALOGUE

On the occasion of the show, MARCO of Vigo and MEIAC of Badajoz has published a trilingual catalogue (Galician-Spanish-English) which includes, besides a text by the curators, two essays about humour in contemporary art by David G. Torres and Mami Nataoka, texts by different authors —David Armengol, Montse Badía, David Barro, Mery Cuesta, Álvaro de los Ángeles, José Luis Pérez Pont— about each of the works in exhibition, the artist's biographies and images of the works.

INFORMATION AND VISITS

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

REQUESTS FOR GRAPHIC MATERIALS

EXHIBITION

'THINGS THAT ONLY AN ARTIST CAN DO'

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

Rúa Príncipe 54
36202 Vigo (Pontevedra). Spain

Communication & Press Department

Marta Viana Tomé
Pilar Souto Soto
Tel. +34 986 113908 / 113903
Fax +34 986 113901
marta.viana@marcovigo.com
pilar.souto@marcovigo.com

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