

EXHIBITION: **JOHN DAVIES. Sculptures and drawings since 1968**
10 March – 22 May 2005

ORGANIZED BY: IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern and Museo de
Bellas Artes, Bilbao

CURATOR: Andrew Dempsey

VENUES: Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao
18 October 2004 – 23 January 2005
IVAM 10 March – 22 May 2005

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This exhibition of John Davies (Cheshire, 1943) is the first Spanish retrospective devoted to this British sculptor. It offers a survey of his artistic development, presenting nearly 300 works, from the more realistic pieces produced in the early sixties to his most recent output. It includes a large number of works on paper by the artist, mostly drawings which have not been shown previously. For Davies, the drawing offers a certain immediacy of execution which sculpture lacks, and it is also the medium for describing a space on paper, creating a "world" in which to introduce his figures. The drawing thus acts as a complement to his sculpture, providing a broader poetic horizon where he expresses the universal solitariness of mankind. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue with illustrations of all the works exhibited, together with essays by the curator of the exhibition, Andrew Dempsey, and by Javier Viar, Director of the Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao, Timothy Hyman and Kosme de Barañano.

Davies's sculptural work concentrates on the human figure, although he has also worked intensely in the field of drawing. In 1970 he won a Sainsbury Award, and his sculptures and drawings have been included in numerous group exhibitions in Europe and the United States. His last major solo exhibition was at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester in 1996. He currently lives and works in London.

John Davies started his career in the field of painting, studying at art schools in Hull and Manchester and completing his training at the prestigious Slade School in London between 1968 and 1969. In 1972 he had his first solo exhibition, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, to which he returned three years later to present his sculptures: life-size figures with a "realistic" appearance (fitted with fibreglass eyes and wearing outdoor or work clothes and shoes), generally arranged in pairs or groups, accompanied by a series of large heads with masks and other items that distorted their features. The dramatic theatrical effect of the installation surprised the public and the London critics, who discovered the work of a realistic figurative sculptor who kept his distance from the abstract modes that predominated in British sculpture at the time.

It is possible to find links with the work of other recent figurative sculptors, such as Kienholz, Segal or Hanson, although Davies remains isolated within British sculpture, so that it is easier to find parallels with his work in the fields of painting, theatre or performance art. During the eighties his work gradually abandoned the more or less illusionist references to reality and he began to paint his sculptures grey, avoiding giving them a "natural" appearance and even incorporating drawing in them. During this period he worked on several series of small or life-size sculptures, showing self-absorbed nude figures climbing ropes or steps or hanging on trapezes as if they were circus acrobats.

His best-known works include numerous series of heads made during the eighties and nineties, ranging from small pieces to gigantic works over two metres high.