

DISPUTE & PAUSE

Art i Context

2023–2025

*If my ears could hear all the rumours in the world, I
would hear his footsteps. I hope he takes me to a place
with fewer galleries and fewer doors.*

Jorge Luis Borges, *La casa de Asterión*, 1947

The museum Project—a paradigm of the enlightened obsession with classifying, ordering, and exhibiting—has functioned, from the moment of its creation, as a device for discursive control in which narrative is irrevocably mediated by the organisation of space and the consideration of the gaze as the primary sense, from which all others emanate. Throughout the two centuries preceding the Enlightenment, the urge to collect and exhibit was channelled through cabinets of curiosities. In these spaces, objects were classified according to personal and symbolic criteria rather than scientific criteria. The objects coexist without clear hierarchies, approaching Warburg's later idea of the *archive*, and a personal narrative takes precedence over a universal narrative. This absence of a modern taxonomy turns the cabinet of curiosities into a rhizomatic structure of knowledge, in the Deleuzian sense, in which the objects on display coexist in a non-hierarchical manner, without being organised around a single centre, and in which an intimate and sensory relationship with the objects is proposed, not subject to the gaze and the desire to classify that began in the Enlightenment.

During the 19th century, museums adopted a spatial layout that guided visitors through pre-designed routes, creating a sequential, linear and cumulative experience of knowledge. Visitors were forced to move through the space in a structured and choreographed manner, conditioned by the barriers (physical or symbolic) that *protected* the objects. The emergence of modernity—in the period of friction between the 19th and 20th centuries—marked the beginning of the deconstruction of the idea of *art*, fostering a new relationship between artist, audience and artistic object that crystallised during the so-called historical avant-gardes. Paradoxically, this new relationship did not translate into the way art was exhibited, which continued to imitate 19th-century practices (with a few exceptions, always far removed from the hegemonic exhibition circuits) and remained virtually unchanged until the end of the 1960s.

The emergence of the curator in the 1960s, personified in its early stages by Harald Szeemann, represents a radical break with the established idea of the post-Enlightenment museum. Chronological order is replaced by curatorial narrative, and discursive and affective aspects begin to take precedence over historical or scientific ones,

leading to a return to the Baroque cabinet of curiosities style of display. The influence of postmodernism undermined temporal linearity and encouraged visual dialogue between works that were chronologically and stylistically distant. At that point, the figure of the curator challenged the artist's authorship of the exhibition. This dispute laid the foundations for a way of displaying art that remained unchanged until the end of the millennium, when currents of thought such as decoloniality began to question the ideas of hegemony and power in museum spaces and encouraged a return to historical linearity, albeit revisited and characterised by a desire to move away from Western centres of thought. Since then—and to this day—the figure of the *author-curator* gave way to that of the *prescriptor-curator*, who once again included historical criteria in their curatorial work, work which was oriented towards fields such as institutional criticism.

And what is happening, in parallel, with exhibition spaces? Practically nothing. At the end of the 1970s, influenced by postmodern thinking, the Museum of Modern Art gave way to the Museum of Contemporary Art. This distinction came about as a result of a supposed shift in focus from the mere exhibition of artistic objects to the development of institutionalised spaces dedicated to artistic creation and experimentation. This change, which promises a revolution in the way the public and artists relate to works of art, is reflected in the construction of superficially bold museum spaces around the world, in line with the architectural trends in vogue at the time. These places, which promise to serve as spaces for creation and exhibition, end up applying the same laws of authority and discursive control as the old museums, among other things, through the rigidity and layout of their rooms. Since the last two decades of the 20th century, the museum of contemporary art has given rise to a paradox

that develops in parallel with its architectural spectacularisation: instead of serving as a space for the conservation and safeguarding of the artistic objects on display, it has come to operate as a work of art in itself, self-legitimising and protecting itself from any external aggression. The Museum of Contemporary Art disputes the production of symbolic value by the work of art and establishes a closed framework that determines what can and cannot happen inside it. This fact brings

the museum closer to the logic of corporate spaces—as if it were a sequence from Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967)—characterised by formal rigidity and difficulty in dialogue. One possible response to this situation may be the shift towards installation art in contemporary artistic production, in which works of art increasingly constitute worlds closed in on themselves, which, through exhibition design and their intervention in the museum space, are *saved* and *protected* from the space that houses them.

This tension between container and content — which, rather than a dialogue, could be defined as a heated discussion — forms the framework within which our exhibition takes place. The works of the selected artists constitute autonomous worlds and dimensions, with a profound sense of scenography, which establish a labyrinthine conversation with and against the museum. Through strategies akin to worldbuilding, the artists open windows that connect the public with their concerns, which include a need for refuge. This need is materialised through the development of two main strategies: on the one hand, escaping reality through the construction of fictional and fantasy worlds and a speculative, intimate gaze at the past, and, on the other, proposing a direct look at reality, amplifying some of its aspects in a traditional manner or accelerating it to the point of cacophonous exhaustion.

DISPUTE & PAUSE is the latest initiative from Art i Context 2023-2025, a program that follows the production processes of a group of young artists from the Valencian context. The exhibition is the final event of the second edition of this program, which already had a first edition (2021-2023) in which the final productions of those selected revolved around what we call “their particular here and now”: a scenario that corresponded to the instability of the present and the process of abstraction from contemporary reality that framed that generation

of artists. Even then, emphasis was placed on the importance of installation as a substantial element or integral part of the discursive value of the final productions. The artists in the second edition of Art i Context—*Bella Bágüena, Pablo Bolumar, Juan de Dios Morenilla, Marco Henri, Gema Quiles, and Sandra Mar*—showed from the outset a firm intention to investigate the installation aspects of their individual production, but also a willingness to work together in configuring the exhibition space. The space prior to the exhibition has been designed as a multipurpose transit room where viewers have access to introductory texts and where the artists in the program can develop different activations. This antechamber is essential as a prelude to the exhibition, and in it the program's mediation team—coordinated by *Elena Sanmartín Hernández* and *Elena Rocamora Sotos*—has designed a device related to the collective research proposal developed throughout this second edition with D'ací allà: an exchange of knowledge and experiences with a group of teachers from different disciplines in secondary and high school education.

On an individual level, the six pieces by the artists of DISPUTE & PAUSE began to be worked on from the start of the program, based on previous interests and influences that they were sometimes able to show to the public through activities. Staging becomes the paradigm in all the proposals, which are worked on from different media and sensibilities: reflection on the everyday, the return of pictorial figuration, the evocation of the poetic, trompe l'oeil, the construction of sound narratives, relationships of human interdependence, and the discursive recontextualization of natural materials are presented as interconnected refuges. The scenographic universes and exhibition design, also developed by the artists themselves, establish a labyrinthine relationship with the museum itself. An exhibition that is configured as a space in dispute where the works engage in critical dialogue with the institution that contains them.