

Exhibition: *INSTALLATIONS AND NEW MEDIA IN THE IVAM
COLLECTION. SPACE, TIME AND THE VIEWER*
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern
26 September 2006 – 4 February 2007

Curators: Isabel Tejada and Consuelo Císcar

In collaboration with:



This exhibition, which can be seen until 4 February 2007, includes a total of 55 installations and continues the exploration and documentation of the installations in the IVAM Collection. It also analyses the context in which the works were created and presented. The show features a selection of the most representative installations and includes a documentary part to facilitate understanding of this discipline of contemporary art – a particularly ambiguous discipline which resists categorization. The exhibition does not attempt to provide fixed definitions of what an installation is, for there are hybrid works that may nevertheless cast light on the issues addressed by this project, in accordance with the intrinsic spirit of installation art, which is a way of creating art that considers the viewer and space as integral parts of the work, as its text and context. This show continues the series of exhibitions devoted to presenting the different areas of the IVAM Collection.

The IVAM has organized an educational workshop in connection with the exhibition, focusing its activity on the characteristics and elements that feature in the installations in the exhibition. The workshop will continue until the exhibition closes on 4 February 2007, with the participation of school groups of pupils aged 5 and upwards and adults and children on Sundays.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue containing essays by specialists such as Jesús Carrillo, Claire Bishop and the curator of the show, Isabel Tejada. It also includes technical and theoretical details of the installations.

One of the lines of programming established when the IVAM was founded was the exploration of practices that first appeared in art in the late sixties and developed in the seventies. This, the starting point for the present exhibition, provided the basis for the rise of new languages and media that have appeared in contemporary art since then. What we call installation art has undergone changes that cut across other expressions of contemporary art. A discussion of installations may involve references to very different things, depending whether we consider work produced in the 1970s or in the present decade. The coexistence of installations and new media – video, expanded sculptures, filmed performances and other hard-to-classify hybrids that are included in the project – provides promising ground in which to construct a narrative that takes account of the terms and operating frameworks of certain artistic practices which originated precisely as a questioning of the relationships pre-established between the different actors involved in the act or fact of art. In the seventies, when the term installation art had not yet been institutionalized, many other names were used, such as *environments*, *places* and even *sculpture*. In fact, when all these changes began to take place and there was confusion among even the most seasoned theorists of the time, there was a lack of unanimity when it came to labelling artistic activities which established a continuum between content and container. This inability to give a fixed classification – an issue raised by installation art right from the start – was one of the characteristics which, paradoxically, provided a definition based on negation: *something that is not sculpture or painting or architecture but has to do with all those categories at the same time*.

The installations and three-dimensional works that were hardest to classify in those years were enmeshed in a specific time and space. The similarity between those new types of art and theatre was directly connected with the fact that the viewer and the work of art coexisted simultaneously in the new space created by the work of art. In fact, as Richard Serra argued, the viewer became the contents of the work, whereas the work was a mere container that one could walk around in, like architecture. The work of art was not timeless, because the viewer could transform it: sometimes merely by being present, sometimes by interaction.

In the selection of works for the exhibition, various categories have been taken into account. Works that need a location – not necessarily a particular place with specific connotations, but at least certain architectural conditions without which the work could not be established. Works that create a space per se, consisting of two or more elements that construct a situation by their interaction. Works that are placed somewhere without any elements to act as intermediaries. Works that require a combination of different components to activate them – such as light, sound, smell, the colour of architecture, the movement of the viewer, etc. And also works that are the result of an action, sometimes with a clearly documentary purpose, sometimes deliberately ambiguous.

The next step involved considering the spatial context not only in its physical sense but also as a product of a social fabric full of experiences of past and present and endowed with meanings that exist prior to the work. This provided a context in which to operate, a context that became part of the work itself. Obviously, this did not happen in the same way in every case. There are works that only require certain abstract architectural conditions for their assembly – two walls with a specific height and colour, for instance; and there are works that are part of a space with connotations.

The medium of video, at least in its single-channel mode, differs from interventions in not being linked to a particular physical place. However, its initial development basically followed two lines of action with conceptual principles connected with the expansion of experience, reflecting a new kind of space. Firstly, as a medium that displayed the non-material, spatial or performative conceptual procedures and expressions that had been shaking up contemporary art since the 1960s. Secondly, works that provided a critical linguistic jolt in response to the emergence of a new political and ideological domain capable of shaping our collective imagery: the media space of television. There was an almost simultaneous development of installations with video or video installations, works that went beyond those abstract notions of space and a direct relationship with the viewer and attempted to set up specific connections with the viewer and the site, while emphasizing the inherently temporary nature of the medium.

The exhibition considers different explorations of space, the idea of a finite, contingent, experiential time and the role of the viewer who receives or perceives the work, in procedures that set out to change those relationships. The IVAM's installations provide a linking strand in which we find instances of the novel relationship between the work itself and places specifically devoted to art – the exhibition hall or the studio; or the relationship between art and the new field that emerged with the new media – media space; and the situation of artworks placed in everyday settings invaded and affected by art (in nature, city streets or architecture.)

In this exercise of intersecting aesthetics there are works that question and redefine the traditional roles of artist and viewer in an ongoing performative process, dauntlessly striving to intensify both kinds of experience. When the artworks and the display possibilities of the museum's architecture allow, the thematic areas are combined with historical criteria. Sometimes, however, the spatial circumstances and/or the opportunity of generating dialogues between individual works have led to a broadening of criteria. The exhibition does not set out to be exhaustive or to concoct a mighty narrative, but to follow one of the many possible readings that lie hidden within the collection.

The notion of the exhibition as a new experimental genre, as an artwork in itself, provides the beginning for the project. It is splendidly illustrated in *Fun House* (1956), by Hamilton, Voelcker and McHale, the architectural structure through which the visitor enters *Space, Time and the Viewer*. The cleft in the dichotomy between production spaces and exhibition spaces that *Fun House* exemplifies has a counterpart in the single-channel videos made by Bruce Nauman in 1968 and 1969, which are splendidly represented in the IVAM Collection. The “return to the studio” as a place for exploration and thought, the artist as a body that experiences its physical limits, and the visibility of the creative process to the viewer, based on the interaction of both factors, are all features that find excellent examples in the single-channel videos that Nauman made during those years. The concept of discontinuity and reinterpretation of the medium is illustrated by Nauman's return to video ten years later, and by the work of another American artist, Gary Hill.

The occupation of public spaces, architecture, media space and nature – as strategies for getting away from exhibition places – was a recurring feature in the changes that took place in Europe and the United States in the transition from the sixties to the seventies.

Those changes were experienced not only in the production of art but also in management and patronage, in the art market and the ways in which art is presented.

For instance, the IVAM Collection includes one of Richard Serra's first attempts at site-specific art, *Untitled*, one of a series of works created in 1970 which opened up interesting ways of introducing sculpture in a specific place, exploring areas such as invisibility and negative logic. Because of its technical complexity, this work has not been exhibited by the museum since it was acquired ten years ago. Now, to coincide with this project, it welcomes visitors from its temporary installation on the esplanade by the entrance to the museum.

Another American artist, Gordon Matta-Clark, is represented by works that accompanied his architectural perforations. Although the original buildings were completely demolished, many of his cuts are currently exhibited in major collections, together with works on paper, photographs and films, of which the IVAM has various examples. At about the same time, in Paris, the Catalan artist Antoni Miralda presented a performance, filmed by Benet Rosell, with the title *París. La Cumparsita* (Paris. The Little Parade), in which intervention in a social context proved extremely effective as a result of the participation of passers-by. The only traces that remain are the film and the memories of those who took part.

A new area of communication, television, emerged as an alternative to physical space, enjoying incomparable success in the shaping of the collective imagination in the second half of the 20th century. The unstoppable process of its popularization had to face a radical political protest from another new medium, video, which was more accessible, cheaper and much easier for artists to use. The seemingly invisible subliminal power and influence of television on the construction of passive individuals and the creation of a new landscape of social and cultural archetypes are the focus of videos such as Richard Serra's *Television Delivers People* and Antoni Muntadas's works. The exhibition includes a very well-known video which pioneered the artistic articulation of feminism, Dara Birnbaum's *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, ensuring a specific political discourse. The other device for producing imagery in the last century, cinema, is represented by the works of John Baldessari.

Sculpture as a place in nature found its best allies in the creators of Land Art. The show includes Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) – belonging to the Dia Foundation – which led to important works in other formats and media, and also subsequent interventions, such as *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*. These large-scale interventions produced by American Land Art contrast with Hamish Fulton's walks or Yturralde's ecological structures flying over the public gardens in the 1978 *Biennale de Venezia*; or with the interest generated by the physical, semantic and conceptual properties of various natural elements in works of art – a tendency represented by works by Roth or Ruthenbeck and, closer in time, by Gilberto Zorio or Nacho Criado.

The works created from the late 1980s onwards insistently ask the viewer to adopt an active attitude that goes beyond mere contemplation, using the viewer's involvement to produce new meanings, as Claire Bishop points out in her essay "Installation Art and Its Legacy", included in the exhibition catalogue. This is the case with most of the works in Room 7 in the IVAM: the viewer has to walk through them to activate them, as in José Antonio Orts's *Ostinato blanco-azul* (White-Blue Ostinato); or activate them by

walking round them, as in Ángeles Marco's *Deslizantes* (Sliding Pieces) or Allan McCollum's *Collection of 60 Drawings no. 7*; or go across them, or into them, as in Juan Muñoz's *Sin título (Balcones y suelo óptico)* (Untitled [Balconies and Optical Floor]), Carmen Calvo's *En el centro* (In the Centre), or Maribel Domènech's *El cuerpo, la estancia oscura* (The Body, Dark Abode); the viewer may even have to interact with some parts of the works, changing their appearance, as in Federico Guzmán's *Pizarra convexa* (Convex Blackboard), and so on. Like Alice running after the White Rabbit, the viewer has to cross a threshold that does not lead to the realm of art but seeks to blend art and life into a single world. Let's break the looking glass by entering some of these works and seeing that art is not a reflection but another interpretation, an experience.