

Selected Bibliography

- Juan Muñoz: Sculptures de 1985 à 1987.* Bordeaux: capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1987.
- Juan Muñoz.* Nîmes: Carré d'Art—Musée d'art contemporain, 1994.
- Juan Muñoz: Conversaciones.* Valencia: IVAM Centre del Carme, 1992.
- Silence Please: Stories After the Works of Juan Muñoz.* Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art and Scalo, Zurich, 1996.
- "Juan Muñoz," *Parkett* 43 (1995). Essays by Lynne Cooke, Alexandre Melo, James Lingwood, and Gavin Bryars.

Born in Madrid in 1953, Juan Muñoz had his first one-person show in 1984. In addition to exhibiting widely in Europe and elsewhere since then, he has also devised a number of radio programs and published several books containing both his own texts and found material which he has modified or edited.

Major funding for this exhibition has been provided by the Lannan Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Plácido Arango, with additional generous contributions by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and the members of the Dia Art Council.

Marina Warner will give a lecture entitled "Here Comes the Bogeyman!: Goya, the Grottesque, and Juan Muñoz" on Thursday, February 6, 1997, at 6:30 pm at Dia.

Further information about Muñoz's work is available on Dia's website:
<http://www.diacenter.org>

Texts by the Artist

- 1992
"Otto Kurz o la imagen prohibida," *Juliao Sarmiento*. Porto: Casa de Serralves.
- 1991
"Auf einem Platz," *Weitersehen (1980–1990)*. Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange and Haus Esters.
"A Stone," *Trans/Mission*. Malmö: Rooseum.
"The Dancing Sailor," *Carnegie International 1991*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art.
- 1990
Segment. Geneva: Centre d'art contemporain and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.
- 1989
"Spazio Umano: Text by Juan Muñoz," *International Magazinebook of Art and Literature* (March).
"Tres imágenes o cuatro," *Art Today*. Tokyo: Museum of Modern Art, Takamawa, Kamizawa.
- 1988
"Un objeto metálico," *Arti et Amicitiae*, (May).
- 1987
"La imagen prohibida o el juego de la rayuela," *Conde*.
"Nada es tan opaco como un espejo," *Sur Express*, no. 1 (April/May).
- 1986
"De la luminosa de los signos," *Figura*, no. 6 (Fall).
"Desde ... a ...," *Figura*, no. 5 (Spring).
"El hijo mayor de Laoconte," *Chema Cobo*. Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern.
"Richard Long: De la precisión en las distancias," *Richard Long*. Madrid: Palacio de Cristal.
"Un hombre subido a una farola," *Escultura Inglesa entre el Objeto y la Imagen*. Madrid: Palacio de Velázquez.
- 1985
"La palabra como escultura," *Figura*, no. 4 (Winter).
"The Best Sculpture is a Toy Horse," *Domus*, no. 659 (March).
- 1983
"Los Primeros—Los Últimos," in *La Imagen del Animal*. Madrid: Caja de Ahorros and La Caixa de Barcelona, 1983–84.
"Correspondencias," *5 Arquitectos, 5 Escultores*. Madrid: Palacio de las Alhajas.

JUAN MUÑOZ

A Place Called Abroad



Photo: Cathy Carver

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

September 26, 1996–June 29, 1997

548 West 22nd Street, New York City

JUAN MUÑOZ

A Place Called Abroad

Stenciled on the wall outside the gallery this title sows seeds of doubt even before the visitor enters Juan Muñoz's installation. Does "Called Abroad" mean that this place is known colloquially or familiarly as "Abroad" when, in fact, there is another, more precise or more prosaic "official" name? Whether or not this is the case, the title seems oxymoronic—for "abroad" is always somewhere else. And, while admittedly a vague, generalized somewhere else, it can at the least be identified as a place not here but distant, separate from one's familiar, habitual place of residence.

The invoking and evoking of a placeless place, of a site or locale in some way removed or deracinated, has been a constant in Muñoz's oeuvre since its beginnings in the mid-eighties. The means by which he actualizes such a situation, however, have changed considerably over the past decade. Small iron balconies and miniature staircases were among his earliest sculptures. Appended to architectural elements within the exhibition space, they set up a strange dislocation, an unease, through their diminutive scale. At the same time, they threatened to invert the situation by turning inside outside. This tension between literal site and referential place, between fact and fiction, increased when Muñoz in subsequent works transformed the exhibition site by overlaying a tiled surface onto the original floor of the room. Typically, these new floors were comprised of boldly contrasting tiles whose geometric patterns were reminiscent of both those found in Baroque palaces and those depicted in Renaissance paintings. The optical disturbance they generate served a dual effect: it disoriented the viewer at the same time as it offered the artist a novel terrain in which to situate his figures. Not only is it impossible to regard these floors as either illusion or fiction, since they function quite normally, it is also impossible to identify the context in which the inhabitants operate; mostly, they simply wait.

Labeling Muñoz's intervention at Dia sculptural installation or theater, stage set or mise en scène, is problematic. The illusion of a street, the dimensions and positioning of whose doorways and windows have been adapted from buildings in the Chelsea neighborhood, is constantly disrupted by breaks. For, where the street intersects pre-existing walls, fissures open to reveal the inner structure. And the irregular, residual spaces leading off the street have been transformed into havens for sculpture. Elaborated or modified by additional secondary architectural features, these oddly proportioned enclosures provide charged contexts for a cast of anonymous characters—young

men with depersonalized features, features that indicate their ages without betraying traces of character or other identifying marks.

Limned with an abbreviated naturalism, these figures are most convincingly real and uncannily present when glimpsed out of the corner of one's eye, spied in passing or seen askance. Given that under closer scrutiny the illusion breaks down, a certain distance is a prerequisite for optimal impact. This physical removal has a psychological counterpart in that these figures are always self-absorbed when not involved in some enigmatic exchange. They never solicit an engagement with the viewer; they elude if not repel it.

Muñoz's first sculptural figures included a number of dwarves, social marginals who in earlier times often held privileged positions, for, like fools and jesters, they could speak outside licensed channels. Ventriloquists' dummies and mannequins were also part of his early repertoire. Archetypal surrogates in that such figures lack a voice and hence an identity of their own, they had a kinship with yet another group in his oeuvre, figures divested of the possibility of independent movement since they were either rooted to one spot or condemned to eternal motion in one place. More recently, miniature figures, stoically propped in makeshift carriages constructed from shoeboxes, have been added to this lexicon. They, by contrast, are condemned to a kind of sisyphian travel, a journey without destination.

Muñoz's installation at Dia offers the framework, the props and the trappings of a narrative, without supplying the terms in which such a narrative might unfold. The fictional appurtenances are in place, but the illusion is always deliberately flawed; a suspension of disbelief is solicited and prohibited in one and the same gesture. The metanarrative is, however, clearer in that it is one that informs much of Muñoz's previous work. Art and its cognates in other or former societies possessed a power to transform or transport the viewer to other realms, other states of mind, or other imaginaries. Contemporary viewers generally distrust such forms of sleight of hand favoring instead a divided consciousness, one which enters into the illusion or fiction without forfeiting a certain self-reflexivity. What is thereby sacrificed is a capacity for imaginative transfiguration, of the kind that results from an unqualified immersion in any imaginary terrain. At the same time the magic efficacy, the power of the artwork, fetish or idol becomes qualified: tarnished or dissipated. A sense of loss is consequently

a constant in Muñoz's aesthetic—a loss often signaled by a subliminal mood of melancholy or of estranged solitariness. Yet, however fragile or flawed the vehicles for metamorphosing experience might have become, the site itself remains for this Spanish artist both a necessary foundation and the critical point of departure. Hence, never in doubt is the importance of that other place, a place whose only crucial signifier is the fact of its fundamental difference from this place—"Crossroad. Place of transit. Space inscribed in its own exile. House/Interval. Place that is negation of movement and at the same time generator of pathways."¹

L.C.

1. This evocation of the site of the *posá* is taken from Muñoz's tale, a faux-anthropological narrative. See Juan Muñoz, *Segment* (Geneva: Centre d'art Contemporain and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1990), p. 27.