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ISIDORO VALCÁRCEL MEDINA: SIN DISTANCIAS

Opening: 15.09.2022, 18:00 h to 21:00 h. Exhibition: 15.09 > 14.11.2022. Part of the Barcelona Gallery Weekend 2022
Special event: Walk-talk (in Spanish) with Isidoro Valcárcel Medina and curator Juan de Nieves: September 16, 18.00h.
Registration needed. Contact Edgar Díaz: edg@projectesd.com

Sin distancias [Without distances] revolves around the figure and career of renowned artist Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, one of the most relevant names in Spanish conceptual art. The exhibition wanders through the different times and notions in his work, that is presented "without distances", without categories, without barriers, in a rich, diverse and precise constellation of artworks that reveal the artist idiosyncratic way of doing and his peculiar attitude towards art, in an ensemble never presented before in any gallery or institutional exhibition.

The author's reluctance to gather early works in a solo show is quite known. This is why this is a specially meaningful occasion. *Sin Distancias* happens after 17 years of continued professional collaboration with Isidoro Valcárcel Medina. Since 2005, his work has been presented in a few group shows at ProjecteSD: *A few artist's books* (2005), *Forever* (2013), *Close-cropped Tales* (2015), *The Imaginary Museum* (2020) and in one solo show *Vostè mateix [Do it Yourself]* (2013). *Sin distancias* is the consequence of a nourishing and intense working process done together with the artist. The result of searching through his attic with him, revolving drawers and files, of finding and losing, of selecting and composing, of doing and undoing. And so on until the exhibition was configured, a show that we believe offers a rich vision of the work of this great artist, whose work is much broader than it may seem, given its austere nature. A good view of what José Díaz Cuyás said: "his way of escaping through time, of allowing himself to be carried along in order never to move, which is characteristic of Isidoro Valcárcel Medina's work (...), master of the most noble and difficult art of the fugue". (*)

Our deepest gratitude to Isidoro and Pilar Huete. Thank you to Juan de Nieves, José Antonio Sarmiento, José Díaz Cuyás and the authors and their texts, to whom we have turned during these months of research.

On *Sin Distancias*

The exhibition shows around twenty works that have shaped the artist's career, from very early ones to new pieces. Unexhibited or little-known works are combined with iconic ones. Works through which the fundamental notions in Valcárcel Medina's work are reflected.

In his beginnings in the field of painting, the idea of **space** was already present. *Pintura 77 [Painting 77]* and *Pintura 78 [Painting 78]* (1963-65) are two examples of rationalist paintings, which at the time were lumped together under the generic name of constructivist art. In both works, two vertically ordered coloured squares on a neutral background, that may function as a sort of page or screen, tell, according to the author, a story of space. The idea of space will run through the entire career of Valcárcel Medina. Thus, in the drawing *89 Contrahuellas y un apéndice [80 risers and an appendix]* (2002), the "squares" reappear, being here a representation of a place, all the steps that formed the staircase of his former home in the fifth floor of a "corrala" in the center of Madrid. *Otro Mundo [Another World]* (2001) is a very beautiful example of this obsessive linear and geometric representation of space, or in this case territory, in a unique and synthetic cartography of the globe. Another world. Like the one outlined in *Grafismos de frontera [Frontier graphics]* (2016). Six drawings on which a series of words that are common to both Spanish and Portuguese languages, are written just above the line between Spain and Portugal. An imaginary line between two territories that becomes even less visible by the tangle of words that blur it. Eloquent representation.

The city, the journey, the walk, or as the artist himself has called his conscious way of rambling, "the passeggiata", have been the background, setting and object of many of his works, from the 1970's to the present. *Hombres anuncio [Advertising men]* (1976) is one of his most celebrated actions, which precisely consisted of proposing a stroll through the city of Madrid as an advertising-man with an individual message written on a bulletin board that the person in charge had to carry on the shoulders. What remains of the action is the photographic documentation and a couple of texts in which the author reflects on this proposal of "mobile art". *Relojes [Clocks]* is the photographic record of the street calendars in Madrid for each of the 365 days of the year 1973. A journey through the urban space that introduces here the idea of **time**, another of the recurring notions in Valcárcel Medina's work. *Motores [Engines]* (1973) is the result of the trip from Madrid to El Escorial told with neat simplicity through the sound tape-recording of two car engines, one of small cylinder capacity and the other more powerful, travelling over the same route on two consecutive Sundays. Soundtrack of an invisible landscape that, accompanied by its "score", is also an account of time and space.

In 1974 the artist carried out the *12 ejercicios de medición sobre la ciudad de Córdoba [12 exercises in measurement performed on the city of Córdoba]*, one of the clearest examples of his desire to describe the **city**. Here the author appears, once again, as a fleeting passer-by who walks the streets collecting data, taking measurements or asking questions to pedestrians. The experience is then formalized in detailed plans and typewritten reports. Exercises intended, in short, to narrate and describe. An art of the place and the situation.

Madrid is once again the stage that the artist uses in the so-called *Obra Póstuma [Posthumous Work]* (1999-2003). Between October and December 1999, the author took, for purely monetary reasons, a job of locating properties destined for the installation of new businesses in

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various neighborhoods of the city. In 2003, having understood the artistic character of his vast urban displacement, the artist decided to add it to his inventory of artworks. The piece consists of a meticulous plan-list of the areas covered and includes an eloquent and ironic comment by the author on the work's intention.

A tireless traveller is Valcárcel Medina, once again, in *Viaje a las capitales desconocidas [Trip to the unknown capitals]* (1992). A new spatial and temporal leap to the twelve Spanish province capitals that the author did not know at the time. The urban action was formalized through the successive mailing of letters to himself, from one capital to the next. Each new trip, each new envelope posted from one city to another contained all the previous envelopes inside.

Time, urban space and measurement, one of the author's fundamental tools, continue to be present in his most recent work *Media hora en la media noche [Half an hour at midnight]* (2022). The title is explicit enough. It is a sound piece and a drawing as an audio score that records the noise of his street, in the heart of Madrid, after midnight. Soundtrack that is mixed with the author's own voice that talks about the measurement of time, the 30 minutes in question.

The **language**, the word, spoken and written is predominant in Valcárcel Medina's oeuvre. *El libro transparente [The transparent book]* (1970) has been considered one of the most original pieces of Spanish concrete poetry. Composed of 68 acetate pages on which a number of words of the Spanish language transformed by substituting the letters that make them, are added to other words that do not exist but that are not "impossible" for Castilian prosody. The transparency of the pages exerts the almost endless overlapping of characters. In 1995 the initial idea that the book should also be a sound work was fulfilled with the radio broadcast of an adaptation of it entitled *El idioma transparente [The transparent language]*, and which was produced by Radio Fontana Mix of the Faculty of Fine Arts of Cuenca. A sound interpretation for five voices of this incomprehensible linguistic collage. From this same year, 1995, is the sound piece *Cuatro Diálogos Radiofónicos [Four radio dialogues]*, a radio recording also made by the sound laboratory of the same faculty. Four texts, full of ingenious puns and repetitions that allude to the radio as a medium, and various reflections that intentionally border on absurdity and that are chained in a witty and amusing way, an exercise to enjoy the oral use of the word itself. As a counterpoint to this piece, we find *Cuatro Poemas Sonoros [Four Sound Poems]* of 1992, four graphic scores, drawings, made on fragments of texts by Pedro Salinas, García Márquez, Azorín and Alain Robbe-Grillet that all allude to sound.

The use of words to disorder them, permute their letters or recombine them is Valcárcel Medina's modus operandi in another significant but less well-known work of the 1970's, *Sin Título (Homenaje a Salvador Allende I) [Untitled (Homage to Salvador Allende I)]*. The exercise, simple and meticulous, consisted of exhausting all the possible combinations of permuting the letters of the word Allende^(**). Interestingly, the only meaningful combination is precisely this word. This work gave rise to *Sin Título (Homenaje a Salvador Allende II) [Untitled (Homage to Salvador Allende II)]*, a participatory action in which the author proposed to sign the name "Salvador Allende" to a number of people. Both works, which undoubtedly acquire a certain political dimension, are an emotional record of a specific moment in the history of the 20th century.

The dissertations, reflections and poetry of Valcárcel Medina, in written texts and in lectures, are an essential part of his artistic work. One of the author's clearest reflections on his own work can be found in *La chuleta [The student's crib]*(1991). A hand-written text in tiny characters printed on a narrow strip of paper which, like the classic device used by cheating students, is rolled up tight at top and bottom and held together with an elastic band, thus enabling the reader to turn them with one hand and read its contents secretly. The text itself consists of a general discourse on art and contains sentences such as "Art, a moral occupation by its nature". The effort required to read the entire text, and thus fully access to it, is a common feature in many works by Valcárcel Medina. The same thing happens in *Dentro de las Normas [Within the Rules]* (2017): a dissertation on the DIN A standards and, based on this convention on the measurements and cuts of paper, on the standards of art. Once again, reading the text is an uncomfortable or almost impossible task, since the work is built with paper cutouts of different sizes, which are superimposed, all of them held by a single point and arranged in a pendular fashion. (***) *Patronajes para obras de arte [Patterns for works of art]* (2004), is a simple box that contains 34 untidy cards with short texts about possible works of art. Disordered ideas that cannot be read if the visitor does not move around the cards inside the box. Isidoro Valcárcel Medina tells, but hides at the same time.

The author dedicated five years to writing another possible History, not told but real, compiled in book form in his work *2000 d. by J.C. [2000 A.D.]* (2001). A colossal exercise, the task of writing twenty centuries of history through bland, inconsequential events, through which we are reminded of the importance of small things. Each of the two thousand pages of the book refers to one year, and the artist rescues in each of the stories unknown facts and characters that were left in the background, making the anonymous close. Time, once again, suspended and open to new occurrences.

Sin distancias begins and ends with two drawings of two men walking, one from right to left and the other in the opposite direction. It is the work *Homo politicus. Homo simplicissimus* from 2001. Another sharp contribution that we are going to let the audience interpret for themselves, without fear.

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(¹) Díaz Cuyás, José: *Ir y Venir en Ir y Venir de Valcárcel Medina*, 2002, page 9

(^{**}) The Word Allende means “beyond” in Spanish. The full text is complete at the viewer’s disposal.

(^{***}) The full text is available for the audience.

(Note: a dossier with further information on each of the works shown is made available to visitors to the exhibition).

On Isidoro Valcárcel Medina

Isidoro Valcárcel Medina is a key artist of conceptual art in Spain. His work has been characterized by breaking with the most conventional art schemes. Indifferent to trends, he focuses on creating situations, interventions, actions or projects, beyond the artistic object, which account for his committed attitude and distanced from the commercial aspects of art. The artist has become a referent in the development of new discourses in artistic practice.

Born in Murcia in 1937, he moved to Madrid at the age of nineteen, where he studied Architecture and Fine Arts. He began his artistic work painting, influenced by Informalism; his only exhibition within this trend was held in 1962 at the Lorca gallery in Madrid. Subsequently, his work was included within the framework of objective, constructivist and rational art. In 1967 he was selected for the First Constructivist Art Salon. After a stay in New York, in 1968 he came into contact with minimalism to later evolved towards conceptual practises. In 1972 he participated at the Encuentros de Pamplona. In addition to the exhibition dedicated to him by the Fundació Tàpies in 2002, we highlight the exhibition held at the Reina Sofía Museum in 2009. The artist has been awarded the Spain’s National Prize for Plastic Arts in 2007, the Gold Medal for Merit in Fine Arts in 2014 and the prestigious Premio Velázquez in 2015.

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