



# STORIES OF MATERIAL LIFE

2 april 2011 / 4 september 2011

## **1. The Helga de Alvear Collection**

This collection is the result of acquisitions made over the past forty years which not only configure a map of the collector's concerns and interests but also possess, in the great breadth of her choices, an enormous potential for understanding recent developments in art.

The result is a collection that is in a permanent state of construction. It includes almost 2000 pieces. In the breadth of the choices that the collection contains, there is clear evidence of an openness towards very varied cultural and creative contexts, making diversified curatorial and expository strategies possible within the context of the institution that is the Fundación Helga de Alvear.

## **2. *Stories of Material Life***

The central axis of this exhibition involves an attempt to find one of the most marked routes along which art developed throughout the twentieth century, with particular emphasis on post-war contexts, via the encounter between artistic production and the materiality of the quotidian. If we were to trace a meridian between the idea of modern life taken from Baudelaire (with its note of instability, mutability, and contingency), the artist as a collector of social types-which constitutes a typology that has recurred in various forms in art since modernism- and the idea of the connection between art and life that permeated the second wave of avant-garde movements, we would find a constant interest in the materiality of relations that possesses diverse forms of expression.

## **3. The coordinates crossed in the exhibition**

It is on the basis of this diversity that this exhibition is constructed, starting from the principle that the materiality to which the artistic universe alludes takes in several instances of the real:

On the one hand, **there is an emphasis on material relations of production**, on the circuits around which goods and labour are circulated, with particular attention being paid to the several variants of the political that shape the work of many artists, such as Allan Sekula, João Louro, Fernando Bryce or Adriana Varejão. In a literal sense, the space of material relations of production brings the world of the social and the political into the realm of the artistic (and therefore into what is, by nature, fictional), whether through Marxism's appropriation of modernity-and Marx was a contemporary of Flaubert and Courbet- or through the micro-fictions of the quotidian that have marked out of the path of the bio-political since Guy Debord in the 1950s. Thus, the idea of materiality, considered in connection to the social, possesses a peculiar medium in the photographic, to the extent that, as Jeff Wall states, photography is the device that most directly corresponds to the utopia of the subsumption of the art in the world, therefore making us forget about the metamorphosis that the world undergoes for the camera.

On the other hand, **the presence of the materiality of relations with quotidian objects**, with the gestures that make up our existence and shape our bodies, as found in Tony Oursler's drawings, Thomas Ruff's images, Julião Sarmento's sculptures and in the works by Elmgreen & Dragset, assemble what we could call a materiality of mnemonic relations with the world and with its bodies.

Finally, it is **the materiality of the construction and matter of the world as the shaper of spatial and physical relations** that define the possibility of present life in the work of Ângela de la Cruz, José Pedro Croft, Dan Graham, Thomas Schütte, or in the vital moment that is the life's work of Gordon Matta-Clark, which, in a certain sense, constitutes the centre from which the physical relations invoked by the exhibition emanate.

However, these instances of physical relations also extended to other paths, although they may be marked by **the subjectivity of personal or conceptual relations**, as in the work of Helena Almeida (in the rare appearance of Artur Rosa in her images), Lawrence Weiner, and the

materiality of John Baldessari's cinematic gesture, to cite just a few of the artists on display.

In the first instance, therefore, this exhibition concerns the continuum between social relations of production, the subjective relations established between subjects in the creation of a field of intersubjectivity and the physical relations with space that configure the possibility of collective experience. In a world, it is about relations of immanence.

In a certain sense, *Stories of Material Life* represents an attempt to map the various metamorphoses of realism in art, taking the sensitive matter of art as the shared ground that takes shape in relations between bodies, between spaces, and between the powers that make up the fictions that we call reality.

#### **4. The case of Gordon Matta-Clark**

The physical centre of the exhibition is made up of a remarkable series of works by Gordon Matta-clark, all of which are drawings and photographs on paper. Of the constellation of artists who emerged from the so-called minimalist generation, Gordon Matta-Clark and the *Anarchitecture* project (in the various senses that the term acquired in his texts and works) bring together a passion for the materiality of the city allied to a critical power which, in all respects, is defining.

In combining these types of drawings and photographs, a cartography of Gordon Matta-Clark's work has been created in the cross-references that it establishes in relation to the question of performativity and performance, the physicality of collective memory evident in architecture and its remains, the poetics of the social, the relationship with the body and absence and, finally, the cinematic character of space. As Henri Lefèvre states, the body segregates space and Matta-Clark's work is one of the most complex manifestations of this capacity for secretion and of the physical performance of the body that is simultaneously real and metaphorical, operative and afunctional.

## 5. Finally

The exhibition is defined on the basis of this ambivalence between the invocation of the real and metaphorical compulsion, on the basis of this relationship of recognition and defamiliarization. As seen in the erased bodies of Baldessari's images; or in the collapsing of the canvas – the matrix of painting since the Renaissance- in the case of Ángela de la Cruz; or in Thomas Schütte's residential models; or Susan Collis precious remains; or the subtle memory of the body in Gabriel Orozco; or the theatricalisation of the political in Stan Douglas, to cite a few examples.

Ultimately, the attempt is to follow the form of this pathos (as Aby Warburg used to say) in order to find within it- in the space between the images, the objects, the marks, the traces - the materiality of a performance which, through its conviviality, establishes a field to be shared. With us, because the materiality of life is the secreted, corporeal and physical place where the strangeness of meaning can lie in wait.

DELFIN SARDO



José Pedro Croft. *Untitled*, 2003. Iron, mirror and glass. Photo: Joaquín Cortés

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### opening hours

2 April to 31 May, Tuesday to Saturday: 10:00-14:00 / 17:00-20:00  
1 June to 4 September, Tuesday to Saturday: 10:00-14:00 / 18:00-21:00  
Sunday: 10:00-14:30  
Closed every Monday, except 2 and 30 May and 15 August

### guided visits

Tuesday to Saturday: 10:00-13:00  
Groups maximum of 30 people  
Free admission | To get a guided visit, please phone (10 days in advanced)

### general guided visits

7 April, 5 May, 9 June and 7 July, 18:00

### thematic guided visits

28 April, 26 May, 30 June and 28 July, 18:00

### free admission