

documenta 7

1982
una visió de
la pintura europea
del moment

DOCUMENTA 7

1982. A VIEW EUROPEAN PAINTING OF THE MOMENT

The seventh edition of the Documenta was held in the German city of Kassel from 19 June to 28 September 1982 and organised under the direction of Rudi Fuchs, with the backing of a selection committee made up of Coosje van Bruggen, Germano Celant, Johannes Gachnang and Gerhard Storck. The French journal *Art Press*, in an issue devoted to taking stock of that summer of '82, packed with major international exhibitions, included a short and to-the-point summary of the artists taking part: "A total of 173 artists, of whom 51 were American, 26 Italian, 12 Dutch, 40 German, 9 British, 9 Swiss, 6 French, 1 Spanish, 1 Belgian, 1 Yugoslav, 1 Polish, 6 Austrian, 3 Canadian, etc. (25 women in total)."¹ While this information may seem rather banal, it reveals some of the characteristic aspects of that year's Documenta, which underline the interest of reuniting some of the works presented on that occasion. The selected Spanish artist was Miquel Barceló, a complete unknown on the international art scene at the time, chosen by Rudi Fuchs himself who discovered the artist's paintings at the exhibition *Nuevas Figuraciones*, organised by La Fundació "la Caixa" in Madrid in late 1981. The numerical list also illustrates an attempt to offset the predominance of North American art with a broad cross section of European artists and the German artists' desire to reconsider their origins to get away from the North American influence.

One of the most central criteria to this particular Documenta was to give priority to the actual works of art, reasserting their actuality and freshness, despite belonging to artists who were from different generations and often quite distant. In some cases, the works of a particular artist were not presented all together, but scattered around so that each new encounter would potentiate various aspects inherent in the selected works. This decision has had far-reaching effects for subsequent approaches on the part of exhibitions and museums; despite possible difficulties for

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the spectator, it allows new interpretations of the works, ranging from a formalistic presentation to a thematic or conceptual approach.

The cultural references which Rudi Fuchs stood by were taken wholly from a European scope: Rimbaud, Hölderlin, Goethe, Eliot, Wittgenstein, Delacroix, Picasso, Munch... all were called on to defend a multi-culturalism which ranged from Russian culture, passing through central Europe with Germany and Italy as outstanding focuses, to reach as far as Spain, as a border zone between different cultures. This is the geographical and cultural framework for this exhibition, which is a condensed attempt to re-construct a certain vision of European painting of the early eighties, mixing different generations and options, bringing out the works which time has proved to be singular and once again demonstrate that painting “preserves the freedom of thought, and is its crowning expression”, as Rudi Fuchs said at the time.

GLÒRIA PICAZO

¹“Accrocher documenta”, Art Press International, n. 62, September 1992, pp. 28-29

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We considered, of course, giving the exhibition a title. A story should have a title so one knows what to expect. Then, a title would isolate the exhibition from the ordinary, would give it a character all of its own. But we did not find one. Certain possibilities were discussed, *bateau ivre* for instance, and were rejected the moment they emerged. We wanted precision but not the kind of inevitable definition that comes with it. —The problem of the title must be the problem of the exhibition, or the problem of the period in which the exhibition is taking place. We can go to Berlin and talk about painting; we can go to London and talk about rolling hills; we can go to New York and talk about change; we can go to Paris and talk about theory; we can go to Rome and talk about desire; and in Amsterdam we talk about the horizon, and in Vienna we sense the East. These conversations however are fragments of the dream we want to construct or reconstruct. They flow together in this exhibition; they meet on the single river; but on this river all the ships carry different sails.

So the name of this slow regatta is a prosaic one: *documenta 7*. Not a bad name because it suggests an attractive tradition of taste and discrimination. It is no doubt an honourable name. Therefore it may be followed by a subtitle as in those novels of long ago: *In which our heroes after a long and strenuous voyage through sinister valleys and dark forests finally arrive in the English Garden, and at the gate of a splendid palace*. At least such a subtitle reflects our desire for a clear order and a quiet atmosphere. —*Wie vereinigen wir alle diese Widersprüche und finden einen Leitfaden zu ferneren Beobachtungen?* Goethe, in his great little essay on the history of granite, shows the way. Seldom were mind and eye combined in such poetic precision of observation —such amazing tranquility.

We did everything to avoid a nervous exhibition: an exhibition, that is, caught up (a trapped animal) in the petty wars of style and manner. The times are nervous enough already. To us it seemed important to disentangle art from the diverse pressures and social perversions it has to bear.

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—There are, for instance, young artists and there are older artists. The difference between them is not necessarily one of quality; but there is certainly a difference in experience. The older artist knows more and he should regard that superior knowledge as something precious— and not confuse it with the splendid rashness of youth. To desire only the New is pitiful. That state of mind and heart breeds nervousness in the present and it easily distorts history. It tends to cut us off, most tragically, from the past and, as the New always seems to come in waves, it perverts our sense of the individual.— After all the artist is one of the last practitioners of distinct individuality. The individual mind is his/her tool *and* material. The artist seeks a dangerous adventure, but his route is within the culture which produced him. Thus, he is never completely alone. An individual is not someone who is alone. The artist's mind and eye are shaped by those before him, and by other contemporaries. The artist as individual is part of the tradition of all. This great unity between culture and individual, these necessary links from individual to individual —that, maybe, is our theme in the exhibition, the elusive object of our search. We have been weaving a tapestry. The simile is particularly proper since making an exhibition, and this one in particular, is not an intellectual task. Much more, it is a craft. Thus, because we did not want a nervous exhibition but one which would honour the dignity of art, we had to create conditions of tranquility.

Many exhibitions are brutal because of merciless architecture. Careless architectural structure can make the display of art painfully chaotic. Once inside the museum a work of art needs to settle down and come at rest like a ship after a voyage.

We must then take time and listen to various accounts of discoveries, to various dreams. Rough architecture is too brutal for those sensitive communications. Contemporary art is now about 75 years old. It started when James Joyce left Dublin, when Brancusi arrived in Paris, when Picasso discovered the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Modern art is too old to be banished into an abandoned warehouse. It should be treated with respect.

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Here, then, begins our exhibition; here is the euphoria of Hölderlin, the quiet logic of T. S. Eliot, the unfinished dream of Coleridge.

—When the French traveller who discovered the Niagara Falls returned to New York, none of his sophisticated friends believed his fantastic story. What is your proof, they asked. *My proof*, he said, *is that I have seen it.*

R. H. Fuchs

(Introduction to vol.1 of Documenta 7 catalogue)

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MIQUEL BARCELÓ

Nu pujant escales

[Naked man climbing steps]

1981

Oil on canvas, pigment and latex

130 x 195 cm

Courtesy Galeria Estrany-De la Mota

GEORG BASELITZ

Mädchen von Olmo [Girl of Olmo]

1981

Oil on canvas

250 x 250 cm

Collection

LohmannHofmann, courtesy Hachmeister Galerie, Munich

Adieu [Goodby]

1982

Oil on canvas

250 x 300,5 cm

Tate Gallery, London

SANDRO CHIA

Spring

1981-1982

Oil on canvas

287 x 411,5 cm

Gian Enzo Sperone, New York

JIRI GEORG DOKOUPIL

Lachendes Mädchen mit Ohringen

[Smiling girl with earrings]

295 x 295 cm

Ein Mann sich hinterm Ohr kratzend

[A man scratching himself behind his ear]

350 x 100 cm

Ein erkältetes Mädchen mit Schuppen

[A girl who's caught a cold with dandruff]

295 x 295 cm

1982

Synthetic resin on rough cotton cloth

Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich

MARKUS LÜPERTZ

Der Triumph [The triumph]

1980

Oil on canvas

280 x 560 cm

Galerie Michael Werner, Cologne and New York

A. R. PENCK

Standard-West K

1982

Synthetic resin on canvas

300 x 200 cm

Galerie Michael Werner, Cologne and New York

ARNULF RAINER

Fingerfarbfest [Fast colour fingerprints]

1981

Oil on cardboard

73 x 102 cm

Galerie Ulysses, Vienna

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Skier Cicle
1981
Oil on cardboard
73 x 102 cm
Galerie Ulysses, Vienna

Black Hand Series
1981
Oil on cardboard
73 x 102 cm
Galerie Ulysses, Vienna

Black Hand Series
1981
Oil on cardboard
73 x 102 cm
Galerie Ulysses, Vienna

Fingerfarbfest [Fast colour
fingerprints]
1981
Oil on cardboard
73 x 102 cm
Galerie Lelong Zurich, Paris
and New York

EXHIBITION NOTES

1.

Documenta 7 was held in the German city of Kassel in summer 1982. One of the selected artists that year was Miquel Barceló. This exhibition brings together a series of works which were presented at that edition of Documenta to form a framework of reference: European painting of the time.

In this gallery we present the works of Miquel Barceló, Markus Lüpertz and Georg Baselitz.

Nu pujant escales (Naked man climbing stairs) is one of the works which helped to make Miquel Barceló (1957) known internationally at that year's Documenta. This makes it a forerunner of the works we find at the start of the exhibition *Miquel Barceló 1987-1997*, and a link between the two exhibitions.

In this work Barceló opts for a particular figurative style. It has been seen as a parody of Duchamp's work, *Naked man coming downstairs*, in which the artist reflects on the decomposition of painting in the movement. Here, however, Barceló's intention is quite different, as he concentrates on giving force and expressiveness to the central figure by his use of a full palette of colours and the character's particular physiognomy.

In the eighties, Markus Lüpertz (1941) became one of the exponents of the new German painting inspired by expressionism. In the large-format painting *The Triumph*, we see how the artist's interest is concentrated above all in the gesture, leaving the expressive possibilities of colour further in the background.

Georg Baselitz (1938) has always felt closer to figurative than to abstract language. After a period when his figures completely occupied his paintings, in 1969 he decided to paint his characters upside-down, in an attempt to go beyond the narrative anecdote to highlight formal and chromatic values.

In the Communication Space there is information and documentation about these two temporary exhibitions: *Documenta 7* and *Miquel Barceló 1987-1997*. Catalogues, informative dossiers, documentary videos, a selection of CDs to give an idea of the musical context that accompanied the creation in painting of the time and a CD-Rom about the history of the first nine Documentas are items which the Museum offers visitors to allow them to place each of the exhibitions in context and give them a comprehensive background.

2.

The exhibition continues in this gallery with paintings which, like the previous set, were shown in 1982 in Kassel.

The works *Unalterable Color Finger Prints* and *Black Hand Series* by Arnulf Rainer (1928) allow us to glimpse the influence of the surrealist legacy and North American abstract expressionism. His interest in work on the canvas as a physical action creates an end product in the form of a series of paintings that demonstrate the process above all: they are the action of finger painting.

Jiri Georg Dokoupil (1954) produces a parody of the religious representations of the crucifixion in this triptych. He uses a heterodox style which combines a blend of the most diverse influences: from abstraction to surrealism, with references to comic art, symbolism and graffiti.

Like Dokoupil, A.R. Penck (1939) also forms part of what was called new German expressionism. With these works Penck remains true to his characteristic style based on signs with a certain archaic tone, affirming an iconographic vocabulary which places him half way between figuration and abstraction.

In *Spring*, Sandro Chia (1946), considered a leading figure of the Italian trans-avantgarde, observes a kind of celebration of painting. As regards the choice of subject and its resolution, this painting displays the influence of Blake, Dante-Gabriel Rossetti and Moreau. But to this clear narrative approach Chia adds a whole abstract context to ultimately produce a work in which figuration and abstraction are also present.

Finally, we have *Girl of Olmo*, by Georg Baselitz (1938), shown separately from the other painting by this same artist, by way of an intimation of the singular formula brought to bear at that year's Documenta; the curator, Rudi Fuchs, placed the works of one artist next to those of other artists, thereby extending the possible interpretations of each of them.