

Juan Muñoz

Double Bind & Around

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HangarBicocca

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Cover

Juan Muñoz, *Double Bind*, 2001 (detail)
Tate Modern, London, 2001
Photo © Attilio Maranzano
Courtesy The Estate of Juan Muñoz, Madrid

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Juan Muñoz

Double Bind & Around

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curated by Vicente Todolí

HangarBicocca



Introduction

Juan Muñoz (1953–2001) was one of the leading artists in contemporary sculpture during the last two decades of the twentieth century. His work reintroduced the human figure to the centre of the architectonic space after the long hiatus during which the avant-gardes excluded almost all representation of man from the language of sculpture.

The artist gave sculpture new narrative possibilities by reinterpreting the tradition of Classical and Baroque statuary through the prism of the art movements of the 1960s and 70s – conceptual art, Minimalism and Arte Povera. His works and compositions set the human figure in the middle of an ambiguous relationship between the space of the work and the public, contributing to creating a sense of alienation in the viewer.

Muñoz's œuvre has its origin in a personal and encyclopaedic universe of references that encompass literature, poetry, architecture, cinema, philosophy and music. His fascination with illusory characteristics of card games and card tricks was central to the creation of works pervaded by a strong sense of ambivalence, in which the boundary between reality and illusion becomes ever narrower, creating the space for sinister, disquieting images imbued with strong psychological tension.

During the twenty-year period of his artistic activity, Muñoz, who liked to describe himself as a storyteller, chose sculpture as his preferred medium, though he often took an interest in drawing, writing, performance and sound, in some cases creating works conceived to be broadcast on the radio.



Portrait of the artist, 2001. Photo by Ben Johnson.

The artist

Juan Muñoz was born in Madrid in 1953. The second of seven brothers, he was expelled from school at the age of twelve for rebellious behaviour. His schooling continued in different institutes as well as with private lessons that he and his brother Vicente received from Santiago Amón, a poet and art critic at the daily paper *El País* and founder of the newspaper *Nueva Forma* (published from 1966 to 1975). Amón – who during the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) was obliged to teach Latin at a school in Madrid to maintain his keep – had a profound influence on Muñoz's education, introducing him to studies of modern literature and the avant-garde.

Muñoz moved to London in October 1970 where he remained for a short time before travelling around Europe, including Sweden and Italy, before returning to London. Through his frequent visits to the National Gallery he was able to deepen his knowledge and understanding of the history of art. Thanks to a study grant, he attended classes at the Central School of Art and Design (1976–1977), followed by a course on print-making at the Croydon College of Design and Technology (1978–1979). In 1980, still in London, he met the Spanish artist Cristina Iglesias, who would become his wife.

During this period his work was mostly based on performances, such as impromptu actions in urban settings and photographic documentation, but progressively he moved in the



Spiral Staircase (inverted), 1984–1999. Iron; cm 48 x 18 x 18.
Photo by Jean-Luc Lacroix, © Musée de Grenoble

direction of the researches of Richard Long, Tony Cragg and Barry Flanagan, artists interested in moving beyond the canons of traditional sculpture.

Having been awarded a prestigious Fulbright Fellowship, in 1981 Muñoz attended the Pratt Graphic Center in New York and became the artist-in-residence at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center. His time in New York was fundamental to his art: Muñoz got to know Richard Serra, one of the leading figures in Post-Minimalism, a movement in the late 1960s that placed emphasis on the physical process of the production of a work and on the essential qualities of the materials. On his return to Madrid in 1982, buoyed by this new direction, he organized “Correspondencias: 5 arquitectos, 5 escultores”¹ at the Palacio de las Alhajas. The exhibition focused on the relationship between sculpture and architecture through his essay in the catalogue – *Notas afines a tres* [Notes on Three] – reflected on the centrality of the viewer in the dynamics of the perception of an artwork.

Writing was an important element in Muñoz’s œuvre. In addition to essays and art criticism,² he used text and the written word as an integral part of his practice in a desire to develop the premise by which a work of art has the almost literal capacity to “speak”. His writings combine science, ethnography and myth, and present facts and events that lie halfway between documentary accounts and narrative fiction, not falling entirely into the bounds of reality.

Two of Muñoz’s major literary references were T.S. Eliot (1888–1965), in particular *The Wasteland* (1922) – the inspiration for his



Installation view, “Juan Muñoz”, Gallery Joost Declercq, Ghent, 1986.
Photo by Piet Ysable

own works of the same name – and Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), who prompted Muñoz’s reflections on memory in his collection of short stories *Ficciones* (1944).

The history of figurative representation was another of his interests. The exhibition “La imagen del animal: arte prehistórico, arte contemporáneo” at the Casa del Monte in Madrid presented images of rock paintings from the cave in Altamira (Spain) alongside works by contemporary artists such as Mario Merz, Joseph Beuys and Jannis Kounellis – choices that reveal his interest in non-conventional materials and the relationship with the environment experimented by Arte Povera. In the exhibition, a work by Muñoz titled *Portrait* (1983) was taken from the cast of the feet of a garden sculpture; it was also present in his first solo exhibition at the Galería Fernando Vujande (Madrid,

November 1984) which was at the time one of the focal points in the international contemporary art scene in Spain. The exhibition space in the gallery was dominated by the work *El General Miaja Buscando el Río Guadiana* (1984),³ composed of four metal sculptures like balconies placed on columns. These architectural features, which are much smaller than in reality, are empty and have no actual function other than to suggest a direct relationship with the urban environment by turning the interior of the gallery into a street or square where visitors are both observers and, hypothetically, observed from the balconies. The same exhibition included one of Juan Muñoz's most important works – *Spiral Staircase* (1984) – formed by a small spiralling metal structure fixed to the wall. About this, the artist said, «It was the first time that I could see something I had made as an independent object. It was the first piece I remember having a sense of its own identity, and because it was independent, I could also think of it as being mine».⁴

His interest in the destabilization of perception, which was present in his early works and his next solo exhibition at the Galerie Joost Declercq in Ghent (Belgium) in 1986, took on more complex psychological forms and dimensions with the introduction of the figure in *The Wasteland* (1986). This work was composed of a floor made with tiles arranged in a coloured geometric pattern – reminiscent of the reflected images and illusionism of the Baroque style in the seventeenth century – and a small shelf on which a bronze reproduction of a ventriloquist's dummy was seated.

In subsequent years, the range of figures included in Muñoz's work increased: ballerinas, acrobats and dwarves came to occupy the spaces like distant and destabilizing presences.



The Prompter, 1988. Wood, iron, bronze, papier-mâché, linoleum; variable dimensions.
Photo by Peter Cox

Composed of a raised flat surface decorated with a regular geometric pattern, *The Prompter* (1988) seems to be an empty stage; a drum standing on one rim and leaning against the far wall is in direct relation with a dwarf standing inside a structure that looks like a prompter's box in theatres and opera houses. Like the ventriloquist's dummy, the dwarf – seemingly represented as a prompter facing an empty stage – is denied all chance of exchange and communication with the viewer. The figure has affinities with *Diego de Acedo, El Primo* (1644), a painting by Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) in which a court dwarf is portrayed dressed elegantly in a dark suit leafing through a book.

During his artistic career, Muñoz focused on the physical and emotional distance that separates the viewer from the figure,

which he referred to through the use of architectural elements that imply a human presence, such as stairs, balconies and banisters. Human presence itself was later included in different forms in ambiguous and unsettling scenes, for example, in the series *Hanging Figure*,⁵ in which the figures are shown in improbable poses as they swing in the air like acrobats.

At the start of the 1990s, his reflections on movement and different forms of interaction between the figures became increasingly explicit. In 1989–1991 he produced a series of works based on ballerinas. The project alluded to the dancers portrayed at the end of the nineteenth century by Edgar Degas (1834–1917). The upper half of the figures is a bust and head with facial features, while the bottom half is substituted by a sphere that seems to anchor the figures solidly to the ground. This way Muñoz created structures whose form implies possible movement.

Developed from the 1990s, the series *Conversation Piece* includes some of Muñoz's most recognizable works, based on sculptural groups of anonymous figures assembled in equally generic spaces, like rooms and courtyards. In this case too, the figures have spherical structures instead of legs. Each one is in a different pose and seems intently focused as it converses, observes or listens to facts and events that remain unheard and incomprehensible to the viewer. The artist commented on these works, saying «They are looking inwards, and that looking inwards automatically excludes the receiver, the person in front. The most successful statues give the impression that they are humming inside even though you can't hear them».⁶

Exhibited in bronze or resin, over the years the figures of *Conversation Piece* assume more detailed characterizations by means of greater attention given to poses, gestures and expressiveness of their faces.

The sense of loss and isolation experienced by viewers faced by these works is taken further in *Plaza (Square)*, which was presented at the Palacio de Velázquez in Madrid in 1996. The work consists of twenty-seven resin figures slightly smaller than life-size, whose facial features are faintly Asian and expressions seemingly derisive. Visitors can only view the figures standing in the middle of the room from a raised view point. Careful study of the dynamics between the elements of the work and the display space allowed Muñoz to create a situation with a powerful psychological impact, filled with what the curator Lynne Cooke called "anxious immobility".⁷

Although many of his works are dominated by silence, both sound and the tension between what is audible and what remains irremediably imperceptible are pivotal in his work. During the 1970s, Muñoz began intensively experimenting with sound, which was included in many of his works: in the installation *Waiting for Jerry* (1991) the theme music of the cartoon programme *Tom and Jerry* was played in an empty room, seemingly in ironic relation to light shining through a mousehole in the far wall of the exhibition space. In *Stuttering Piece* (1993), two small resin figures sit facing a wall as a sound recording obsessively plays snatches of conversations without any narrative development. The artist also created different sound works in collaboration with musicians and composers of international standing, including Alberto Iglesias (with whom he produced his first



Conversation Piece, 1996. Resin and steel cable; variable dimensions, cm 164 x 80 x 80 (each figure approx.) Photo by Luis Asín

sound work in 1986 for the Venice Biennale) and Gavin Bryars. His meeting with the English composer led to *A Man in a Room*, *Gambling* (1992/1997), a work originally conceived to be broadcast on BBC radio shortly before the midnight shipping weather forecast. It is composed of a series of audio tracks in which the voice of the artist describes card tricks against a musical background composed by Bryars.

Research into the relationship between architectural space and the individual, which underlays his early sculptural pieces, returned decisively in Muñoz's last works, which included certain large-scale projects. For the installation *A Place Called Abroad* (1996), he turned the industrial setting of the DIA Center for the Arts in New York into an ambiguous and unsettling city

street, and in *Double Bind*, his last and most important installation, conceived in 2001 for the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern, London, he staged a complex interplay of visual rhythms based on the relationship between reality and illusion, distortion and artifice. Featuring a series of dark scenarios and striking architectural features, *Double Bind* is composed of three levels and two lifts in continual movement, recreating an atmosphere typical of an underground car park.

The exhibition

The exhibition “Double Bind & Around” retraces the career of Juan Muñoz through fifteen of his most significant installations. Among the works shown are *The Wasteland*, two groups of the series *Conversation Piece*, six works from *Hanging Figure* series and the group *Many Times*, composed of fifty figures.

The focus of the exhibition is *Double Bind*, the artist's most imposing installation, conceived in 2001 for the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern in London and never exhibited since. The work is formed by an architectural structure measuring more than 1500 square metres in surface area and including more than twenty sculptures.

The exhibition alters in structure and perception the surroundings space, merging perspectival stairways and creating a sense of disorientation in the viewer. This feeling is increased by the absolute silence pervading the exhibition despite the presence of sculptural groups which, by means of their arrangement and gestural nature, are suggestive of conversation and narration.

The Wasteland, 1986. Bronze, linoleum and steel; variable dimensions.
Photo by Peter Cox



1 **The Wasteland (1986)**

2 **Waste Land (1986)**

Both works, installed side-by-side in the HangarBicocca exhibition space, feature a ventriloquist's dummy and a large floor in a colourful geometric pattern. Transcending the concept of repetition and objecthood that lies at the heart of Minimalism, the modular surface of the floor calls to mind the optical and spectacular illusions characteristic of the Baroque. The dummy in *The Wasteland* is placed on a metal shelf with feet that seem to hang in the emptiness, whereas in *Waste Land* the figure is seated on a small wall.

Muñoz plays with spatial coordinates and illusory expedients to induce consideration of the exhibition space, the presence of the viewer and the distance between the viewer and the dummy, thereby creating a psychological tension between the two. Whereas on one hand the viewer is attracted by the optical design of the floor, on the other the presence of the figure creates an alienating condition that emphasizes the distance between the viewer and the object.

The titles of the two works make explicit reference to T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, written between 1915 and 1922, and closely tied to the sense of estrangement and destruction caused by World War I.

The ventriloquist's dummy was the first anthropomorphic figure to be included in Muñoz's work. To the artist, the dummy was a "substitute" for the human figure in a state of permanent expectation. He was fascinated by the relationship with speech and

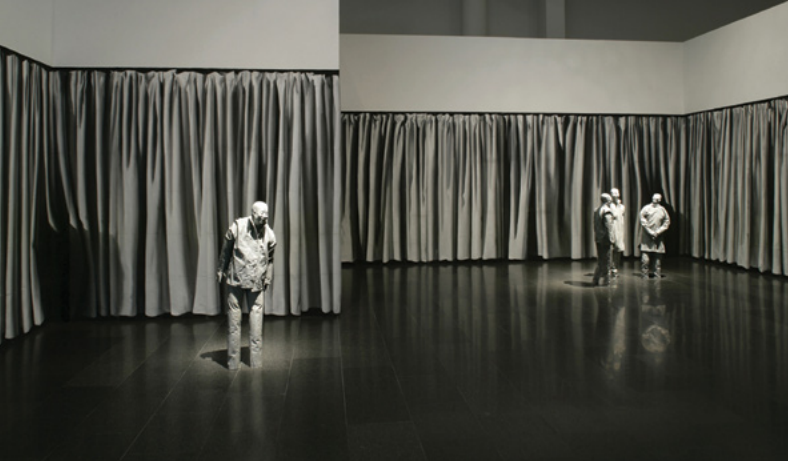
narration implicit in this figure: «a ventriloquist is always a storyteller. But a ventriloquist's dummy without the ventriloquist also becomes a storyteller. He sits there, waiting for you in order to talk. He still doesn't speak, but its identity endows him with some capacity to tell a story».⁸ The artist's fascination with this ambiguous entity may be traced to the *Portrait of Henri Michel-Lévy in His Study* (1878) by Edgar Degas, which Juan Muñoz had the chance to see in the Gulbenkian Collection in Lisbon, in which a man is portrayed with a dummy.

Originally, these two works were composed using patterned flooring created with paint or coloured ceramic tiles. It was only later that Muñoz used linoleum, taking advantage of the product's mass production.

3 **Conversation Piece (1996)**

Conversation Piece is composed of a group of five figures made from resin and polyester. As for the other works in the series, the lower part of the bodies is formed by spherical shells that, in terms of their bulk and surface, look like bags of sand. Overall, the figures are seen interacting with one another. The silent conversation between the two figures at the centre of the composition is the fulcrum around which the other figures gravitate. A third figure seems to be leaning towards the centre of the action but is visibly held back by a metal cable held by a fourth figure. Lastly, a fifth figure follows the scene slightly apart.

The figures in the work relate to one another, creating a complex spatial relationship that excludes any kind of emotional



The Nature of Visual Illusion, 1994–1997. Acrylic on canvas and polyester resin; variable dimensions. MACBA Collection, MACBA Foundation. Private longterm loan, © The Estate of Juan Muñoz, 2015. Photo by Tony Coll

involvement with the viewer. «They don't coexist in the same place as the viewer. They are smaller than real figures. There is something about their appearance that makes them different, and this difference in effect excludes the viewer from the space they are occupying».⁹

4 *The Nature of Visual Illusion* (1994–1997)

The Nature of Visual Illusion is one of Juan Muñoz's most enigmatic sculptural compositions. The work is composed of a painted background of large monochrome curtains, and four almost identical figures with seemingly Asian features. The figures interact physically and psychologically with one another

in a complex set of balances and distances. Apart from the central group, in which three figures seem involved in mysterious conversation, a fourth figure watches the scene with a mocking expression on his face.

The space in which the work takes place is rooted in the relationship between reality and illusion. The viewer is deceived by the *trompe-l'œil* created by the painting of a fictitious three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. The device is a clear reference to the Baroque, one of the major references in the work of Juan Muñoz.

In addition to playing with the architectural aspects of the exhibition space, the almost theatrical presence of the curtains suggests the existence of a hidden and inaccessible space that increases sense of isolation experienced by the viewer when faced by a recognizable but unintelligible situation.

5 *Hanging Figure:*

***Hanging Figure* (1997)**

***Hanging Figures* (1997)**

***Con la corda alla bocca* (1997)**

***Two figures one laughing at one hanging* (2000)**

***Figure Hanging from One Foot* (2001)**

***Hombre Colgado de la Boca* (2001)**

Besides his investigation into architectural elements, optical effects, and the illusion seen in works like *The Wasteland* and *The Nature of Visual Illusion*, Muñoz's works confronted their viewers with questions related to looking, being looked at and looking at oneself.



Con la corda alla bocca, 1997. Resin, motor polyester, oil; cm 148 x 60 x 30.
Exhibition at GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano, 1997. Photo ©Attilio Maranzano;
courtesy The Estate of Juan Muñoz, Madrid; GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano /
Beijing / Les Moulins; Fundación Botín, Santander

With *Hanging Figure* Juan Muñoz introduced a new element into how an artwork should be perceived: verticality. As he said himself, «You can talk about verticality in formal terms but also in symbolic terms. The verticality of hanging figures [...] was a way of dealing with the gigantic distortion that happens when you look up».¹⁰

Hung from the ceiling of the exhibition space, his hanging figures are bodies in contorted or precarious postures. Suspended in the air on metal cables that issue directly from their mouth, or hung head-down on a cord attached to an ankle, the figures call to mind the bodies executed in the cycle

Los Desastres de la Guerra (1810–1820) by Francisco Goya (1746–1828).

The series is formed by solitary figures – as in *Con la corda alla bocca* (1997) [With a rope in the mouth] or *Figure Hanging from One Foot* (2001) – but also from pairs of figures that have a more intense relationship with the space and viewers. The bodies in *Hanging Figures* (1997) turn incessantly, while in *Two figures one laughing at one hanging* (2000) there are two figures, one on the floor and the other hung from the ceiling.

Lastly, the pose of the figures seems to relate to Edgar Degas's painting *Mademoiselle La La at the Cirque Fernando* (1879). This painting shows a female acrobat hanging in the air on a cord held between her teeth. The scene is depicted with a bold perspective from below and displays the French artist's research into representations of the body in movement.

6 Living in a Shoebox (For Diego) (1994)

The work is composed of two miniature figures inside a shoebox that moves uninterruptedly on the rails of a model railway. The track is a closed circuit fixed in the air above the heads of the public. Visitors thus see the work from below and follow the route taken by the two figures trapped in their claustrophobic space as they “travel” on their unending but destinationless journey.

In this humorous and provocative work Juan Muñoz reflects on the implications between movement and sculpture, focusing on the repetitive and alienating aspects that distinguish the instal-

lation's mechanical rhythm. Despite the continual movement, the viewer is watching an unchanging situation that has no opportunity for development. As Muñoz commented, «I think between stillness and movement, I try to find a place for my figures».¹¹

The constant relationship between motion and inertia, impulse and stasis, brings to mind *Endgame* (1957) by the writer and playwright Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), one of the leading authors in the theatre of the absurd. In his play, the two characters Nagg and Nell are described in a paradoxical situation: they are obliged to live in two rubbish bins and in an undefined time dimension, in which every day is identical, to the point where each gesture and event becomes almost ritual in their existence.

Muñoz created six versions of this work, which differ in form, path and size. The first was titled after his gallerist Konrad Fischer; this version, *Living in a Shoebox (For Diego)*, presented in 1996 in the exhibition "Juan Muñoz. Monologues and Dialogues" (Palacio de Velázquez, Madrid), was dedicated to his son Diego.

7 Ventriloquist Looking at a Double Interior (1988–2000)

The work is composed of the cast of a ventriloquist's dummy sitting on a small wooden wall looking at two drawings hung side-by-side in front of it. The drawings are made with white chalk on a black fabric used in the manufacture of raincoats. Both drawings show the almost identical interior of an apartment seen from opposing viewpoints: the drawing on the left shows the front view of the sofa seen in the foreground of both works, while the one on the right shows the rear view.

This work marked the start of the *Raincoat Drawings*, a series of some forty works made using the same technique and materials, in which Muñoz drew ordinary objects and pieces of furniture, like seats, beds and sofas, inside domestic interiors without any human presence. Halfway between reality and dream, these interiors offer a biographical side of the artist, about which he commented, «When I was a kid living at home, I used to come back to the house every day. Occasionally – I don't know why – my mother changed the furniture around between rooms. So you came in and opened the door of your room and found that your room was no longer your room – it was your brother's. [...] So I grew up with this experience of dislocation. You feel uncomfortable, yet it's extremely normal. I suppose that this relationship between normal and discomfiting is part of the territory of this work».¹²

In *Ventriloquist Looking at a Double Interior* the ventriloquist's dummy takes on a major role in the dynamics relating to the narration and sound. The mouth of the dummy opens and closes in an almost imperceptible mechanical rhythm without making any sound. This simple movement increases the sense of alienation emanating from the figure which, detached from its surrounding context, continues indefatigably with its interior monologue.

The first version of this work was presented at the group show at the Maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam in 1988. Muñoz later created two new drawings for the work and added movement to the dummy's mouth in preparation for his solo show at the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. in 2001.

8 *Conversation Piece, Dublin (1994)*

Developed at the start of the 1990s, the series *Conversation Piece* is formed by different sculptural groups of anonymous human figures who defy all classification in terms of gender or period. The title refers to the genre of paintings that originated in the Netherlands and was very popular in eighteenth-century England, in which groups of people were represented conversing or carrying out daily family activities.

One of the most impressive and complex compositions, in terms of the number of figures involved, is *Conversation Piece, Dublin*. Numbering twenty-two figures,¹³ it was first exhibited in the outer courtyard at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (1994).

In place of legs, the figures have irregular spherical structures that are out of proportion to their torsos. They are shown in a variety of poses, including those suggesting dynamism and melancholy, which seem to suggest personal conversations taking place that remain unheard by the viewer. These characters occupy the space but do not interact with the public: caught between movement and motionlessness, they seem indifferent to the presence of the viewers: «It's always been said that statues are blind [...] the acceptance of this condition of blindness is important to the pieces», said Muñoz.¹⁴



Conversation Piece, Dublin, 1994. Cloth, resin and sand; variable dimensions, cm 155 x 80 x 80 (each figure aprox.). IMMA, Dublin, 1994. Photo by Kristien Daem

9 *Double Bind (2001)*

Reconstructed for the first time after more than fourteen years, the structure of *Double Bind*, presented in 2001 at Tate Modern in London, has been adapted for the industrial spaces at HangarBicocca, maintaining the elements and proportions of the original project. The work is fully three bays long, two aisles wide and occupies the full height of the exhibition space for an overall area of 1500 square metres.



Double Bind, 2001. Fiberglass, metal, polyester resin pigmented and wood;
variable dimensions. Tate Modern, London, 2001. Photo © Attilio Maranzano

On three levels, that divide the entire area of the exhibition structure vertically, the work features two lifts that link the different floors in perpetual motion without carrying any passenger. A stairway gives viewers access to a balcony from where they can look down on the work, with its vast flat surface painted with optical geometric patterns. Some of the motifs contain shafts that link the lowest section of the structure to the upper one. The illumination of this area emphasizes the visual ambiguity in the work, which features both real and illusory empty spaces.

The ground floor resembles the dark and alienating atmosphere of an underground car park, and is imbued with a pervasive sense of control and surveillance. As viewers walk through the space, they discover the existence of another level between the two floors, which they deduce from holes in the surface that looms above the structure. The figures, seemingly absorbed or engrossed, are placed in sinister settings that feature grills and locked windows, which seem not to belong to any time or place. «For me, perhaps it's this lack of identity that makes them so interesting. But they are still emotionally loaded, even if they are anonymous [...] they are spaces of transition, of passage, to be used and then abandoned».¹⁵

As in earlier works, including *The Wasteland* and *The Nature of Visual Illusion*, *Double Bind* is founded on the relationship between visibility and invisibility, the real and the imaginary, and on the ambiguity of the boundary between architectural and pictorial space. In the artist's opinion, «I'm not interested in scenography. It is sculpture that includes sculptures, and several viewpoints. This kind of anonymous space, a sort of extended

underground like a car park, is very familiar to us all. It is a space of our time [...] these kinds of architectural spaces are very recent. They are a condition of our modernity».¹⁶

The title of the work refers to the theory of the "double bind" proposed by anthropologist and philosopher Gregory Bateson and developed by the school of psychology of Palo Alto in the late 1950s. The theory concerns communication contradictions emitted by certain individuals, which bring confusion to the distinction between discourse and real intentions perceived by the receiver of the message.

With *Double Bind*, Juan Muñoz achieved maximum complexity in the representation of spatial ambiguity and expressive ambivalence that, for more than twenty years, was a distinctive feature of all his production.

10 Many Times (1999)

Composed of many anonymous figures with Asian facial features, *Many Times* is one of the largest of Muñoz's sculptural groups. It was conceived by the artist to be exhibited either in groups of fifty or one hundred figures, depending on the exhibition site. None of the figures has feet, they are slightly smaller than life-size and, although they are all different, they have a strong general resemblance. Their heads are derived from a single mould modelled on the features of a 19th-century Art Nouveau ceramic bust.

Each seems to challenge the viewer's gaze directly. Portrayed in a variety of poses and attitudes, the figures form a tight and alienating audience: whereas they seem to interact together, they also appear autonomous and independent of their context.

Operating on the viewer's psychological dynamics, one of the central elements in this work is our confrontation with the Other. Muñoz commented on the work, saying «The spectator becomes very much like the object to be looked at, and perhaps the viewer has become the one who is on view».¹⁷ Deep in the crowd, the individual viewer is obliged to confront a personal feeling of solitude and loss faced by what we perceive as strange and "different" from ourselves.

Muñoz varied the arrangements of the figures for different exhibitions. For example, at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark (2000), they were placed on the raised section of the floor that ran around the edge of the room, looking towards the centre of the space where the viewers stood, while for the show at the Art Institute of Chicago (2001–2002), they were positioned on a ramp so they could be observed on two levels.



Many Times, 1999 (detail). Polyester resin; variable dimensions.
K21 Kunstammlung, Dusseldorf, 2006. Photo by Kristien Daem

Biography

The work of Juan Muñoz (1953–2001) was presented at three editions of the Venice Biennale (1986, 1993, 1997) and in two editions of Documenta (1992, 2002). His first solo exhibition in a museum (“Juan Muñoz: Sculptures de 1985 à 1987”) was held in 1987 at the CAPC Musée d’Art Contemporain di Bordeaux, which was followed by more solo shows at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (1991), the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM) in Valencia (1992), the IMMA in Dublin (1994) and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk (Denmark, 2000). In 2000 he won the Spanish award “Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas” as a recognition of his career. The following year he presented *Double Bind* in the Turbine Hall as part of the Unilever Series at Tate Modern. Following his death, important international institutions organized retrospectives of his work, among which: the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2001), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2002), the Art Institute of Chicago (2002), the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2003), the Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble (2007), the Tate Modern, London (2008) and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2009).

Double Bind, 2001. Fiberglass, metal, polyester resin pigmented and wood; Variable dimensions. Tate Modern, London, 2001. Photo © Attilio Maranzano

Notes

- 1 Muñoz invited the following architects to take part: Emilio Ambasz, Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry, Leon Krier and Robert Venturi; and the sculptors Eduardo Chillida, Mario Merz, Joel Shapiro, Charles Simonds and Richard Serra.
- 2 Various critical essays written by Juan Muñoz have been published in the Spanish magazine "Figura".
- 3 The title of the work refers to General Miaja (José Miaja Menant, 1878–1958), a central figure in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). A brigadier general who remained loyal to the Republican government, he organized the defence of Madrid in 1936 to repel the Nationalist troops under Franco. A military observation tower in front of Muñoz's house was the starting point for this work.
- 4 Juan Muñoz – James Lingwood, "A Conversation, September 1996", in *Juan Muñoz. monologos y dialogos*, Chicago University Press, 2001, p. 39
- 5 The work had its inspiration in the painting *Mademoiselle La La at the Cirque Fernando* (1879) by Edgar Degas.
- 6 Juan Muñoz – James Lingwood, op. cit., p.39
- 7 *Juan Muñoz*, exh. cat., DIA Center of the Arts, New York 1999, p. 9
- 8 Juan Muñoz – James Lingwood, op. cit., p. 34
- 9 Juan Muñoz in "An interview with Juan Muñoz by Paul Schimmel", in *Juan Muñoz. Sculptures et Dessins, Actes Sud / Musée de Grenoble*, 2007, p. 30
- 10 In Juan Muñoz, *Juan Muñoz. Double Bind at Tate Modern*, Tate Publishing, 2001, p. 68
- 11 *Ibidem*, p. 70
- 12 Juan Muñoz, "A Conversation, New York, 22 January 1995", interview with James Lingwood, "Parkett", no. 43, January 1995, p. 45
- 13 Although the original work had twenty-two figures, *Conversation Piece, Dublin* now includes twenty-one figures.
- 14 Juan Muñoz – James Lingwood, op. cit., p. 158
- 15 Juan Muñoz, *Juan Muñoz. Double Bind at Tate Modern*, cit., p. 72
- 16 *Ibidem*, p. 71
- 17 Juan Muñoz – James Lingwood, op.cit., p.34

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HangarBicocca is an institution dedicated to contemporary art that offers an exhibition programme featuring Italian and international artists, accompanied by a series of live events, encounters with artists and teaching labs open to schools and the general public. The project, the brainchild of the Pirelli company, is the result of a process that has led to the reconversion of a vast industrial production facility into a space dedicated to art, inaugurated in 2004 with the realization of Anselm Kiefer's *I Sette Palazzi Celesti*, the artist's most important site-specific artwork. Beginning in 2012, HangarBicocca has presented to the general public exhibitions entirely conceived and produced for its spaces – the Shed, Navate and Cubo – alternating works by renowned artists like Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, Mike Kelley, Dieter Roth, Cildo Meireles and Joan Jonas with others by younger artists who have already established an international reputation, including Tomás Saraceno, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Ragnar Kjartansson, Micol Assaël and João Maria Gusmão & Pedro Paiva. Open to the city and its environs, HangarBicocca is an internationally-oriented project that reflects Pirelli's corporate culture based on values like research and innovation, fostering cultural diversity and concern for the welfare and well-being of the local community.

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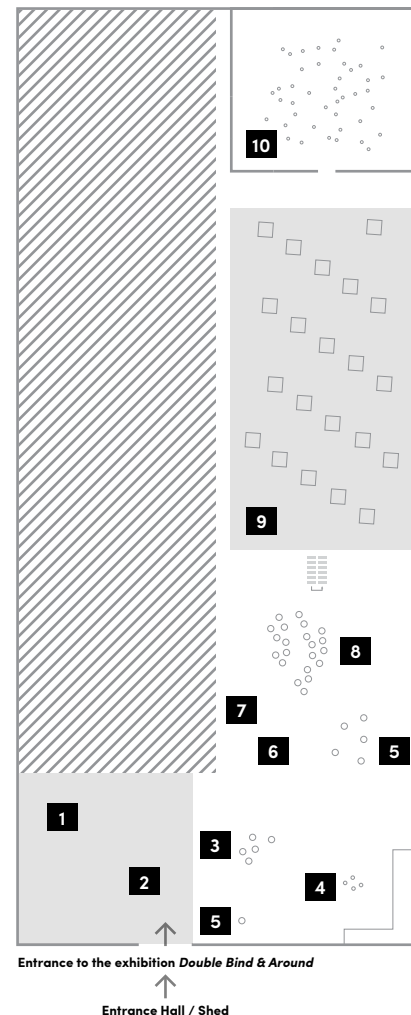
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- 1** *The Wasteland* (1986)
- 2** *Waste Land* (1986)
- 3** *Conversation Piece* (1996)
- 4** *The Nature of Visual Illusion* (1994–1997)
- 5** **Hanging Figure:**
Hanging Figure (1997)
Hanging Figures (1997)
Con la corda alla bocca (1997)
Two figures one laughing at one hanging (2000)
Figure Hanging from One Foot (2001)
Hombre Colgado de la Boca (2001)
- 6** *Living in a Shoebox (For Diego)* (1994)
- 7** *Ventriloquist Looking at a Double Interior* (1988–2000)
- 8** *Conversation Piece, Dublin* (1994)
- 9** *Double Bind* (2001)
- 10** *Many Times* (1999)



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