

COLLECTION XVII: CHARLOTTE MOTH



Charlotte Moth's exhibition is a response to an invitation CA2M issues to artists to work with the two collections housed at the museum, belonging to the Region of Madrid and to Fundación ARCO. Her approach to the project at CA2M is based on the physical conditions of the third floor and the staircase that winds its way through the building, a "creature" designed by Celia Vinuesa, the architect who designed the museum in 2008, as "the centre's first sculpture and the only one permanently in it". Moth is renowned for her particular sensitivity to space, to architecture, to the actual exhibition site, its physicality and specificities. The artist responds to the material qualities of the building and its exhibition space, focusing primarily on three of the works from the collections and their possible interconnections: two parts of a theatre backdrop painted by Leonor Fini in the 1950s commissioned by Antonio el Bailarín, an *Untitled* gouache from 1989 by Sol LeWitt, and the series *Deutsche Museen* [German Museums], a photographic investigation of contemporary art museums in Germany undertaken by Elmgreen & Dragset in 2005. Moth has also created specific new works to address these conversations. Her associative methodology proposes nuances to art history and renewed contexts for perception, mutation and projection.

The backdrops painted by Leonor Fini, which will be unrolled for the first time since entering the museum's collection, were commissioned by Antonio el Bailarín —whom Fini had met through Jean Genet, a common friend— for the 1956 International Festival of Granada and remained in his possession at his home in Madrid. Fini, an Argentine-Italian artist who spent most of her working life in France, met the Surrealist circles and is famous for her paintings of hybrid creatures veering between cats, sphinxes, and androgynous human beings. Her backdrops, in the *Millefleur* style, inspired by the celebrated series of mediaeval tapestries *The Lady and the Unicorn* at the Musée de Cluny in Paris, offer an entry point into a world of illusion and a space of potential. In a preparatory sketch reproduced in the 1996 auction catalogue, the

two backdrops on view in the exhibition flanked an imaginary space depicted with the classic perspective of a single vanishing point and a mysterious, alluring black background in the centre. Another backdrop by Fini is on display at the exhibition *Latinoamérica en las colecciones del CA2M y la Fundación Arco*, at Alcalá 31, Madrid (26 February — 21 April 2019).

Another of the works from the collection that Moth has centred on is *Deutsche Museen* by Elmgreen & Dragset, comprising collected images of various empty spaces. This series of photogravures belongs to a wider project in which the artists employ different methods to question architectural spaces conceived for art exhibitions. The series of photographs of eight empty museums in Germany emphasises the non-neutrality of the "white cube". Created in 2005, the same year the artist duo installed their emblematic *Prada Marfa* —another kind of "white cube" which is at once sculpture, building and supposed store— in the desert in Texas, the prints reveal a plethora of individual features and colours within a similar framework and institutional ideology which is supposed to be invisible. The New York-based Irish artist and critic Brian O'Doherty famously wrote about the artificiality of these art environments in his series of essays compiled in *Inside the White Cube* in 1976. Moth's interventions in the space at CA2M respond to the immaculateness of this "white cube", and consist of *Adding Light*, by flooding the halls with warm and cold artificial light, and *Letting Light In*, by destroying a partition wall in the exhibition so that natural light can enter from the building's glass façade. The mise en scene the artist constructs in this public space addresses the often imperceptible art of display and the constructed conditions for visualisation in exhibitions. Here the concept of the "white cube" has undeniable parallels with stage design.

On the contrary, the black & white photographs by Charlotte Moth in this show are portraits of homely, intimate spaces where the presence of artworks and private collections evokes another kind of exhibition —living with art from the comfort of an armchair suggests a different rhythm and intensity that might seem unusual for an exhibition—. On a visit to the Prado Museum, Moth contemplated *Still Life with Artichokes, Flowers and Glass Vessels*, a work painted by Juan van der Hamen y León in the early seventeenth century. The painstaking formal arrangement of the composition, using various pedestal structures and a black backdrop against which a fleeting reality is depicted, resonates with the decor for a performance painted by Fini. *Millefleur* and *Tree of Life*, both works by Moth, interrupt the flow that incites the spectator's body and eye to actively participate in the visual experience.

The third piece of the collection with which Moth has worked is an *Untitled* gouache by Sol LeWitt. The geometric forms and colours radiate from a low central point in a manner used for certain of his wall drawings. He refers to the gouaches as having their own organic development and logic and explains that “the wall drawings have ideas that can be transmitted to others to realize. Only I can do the gouaches.” Renowned as one of the arch conceptual artists, Sol LeWitt here admits he allows himself to veer from absolute rationalism while remaining attached to a rigorous abstract spectrum. In an essay by Trevor Fairbrother, it is reported that when asked in 1982 why he had used two shades of grey in the same work, Sol LeWitt answered: “it wasn’t absolutely necessary, but some inner urge (aesthetic frivolity, I suppose) caused me to do it.” Sol LeWitt’s friendly exchanges with Brian O’Doherty and his wife, the art historian Barbara Novak are documented. Interestingly both artists made vivid wallpaintings in their respective Italian homes in Spoleto and Todi.

In this exhibition, Moth also presents a slide show of a series of 80 close-up photographs of the mural painted by the twins Manuel and Vicente Sánchez Algora in 1976 in the Town Hall of Móstoles: a frieze commemorating the transition from traditional rural life to contemporary industrial development. This quasi-propagandist allegorical decor situates this building in a specific time and space. Considering this context, Moth’s projected fragments displace the context to here and now.

For the exhibition the artist created the film *Still Life in the White Cube*, where the afore-mentioned stairs at CA2M is given special prominence. The spectacle of natural and artificial feathers, hair and foliage we can see in the film connects with Leonor Fini’s interest in performance, animality and transformation. Her painterly practice evolved at all times in parallel with her involvement in the worlds of theatre, fashion and cinema. Charlotte Moth’s sculptural and cinematographic deployment fuses the various dialogues that gave rise to the exhibition. Set alongside sonic flamenco sequences, Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* meets Henri Matisse’s cut-outs, the Cheshire cat from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Brian O’Doherty’s novel *The Crossdresser’s Secret*, Derek Jarman’s early films and Hélio Oiticica’s “wearables”.

Caroline Hancock, curator

Charlotte Moth

Charlotte Moth was born in 1978 in Carshalton (UK). She has lived in Paris since 2008 and teaches at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Nantes. In 2017, she was one of four nominees for the Duchamp Prize, presented at the Centre Pompidou, Paris. This is her first project in Spain.

Her major solo shows to date include: MIT–List Visual Arts Center, Boston (2017); Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein; Parc Saint-Léger, Pougues-les-eaux

(2016); Tate Britain, Archive Room, London; Esker Foundation, Calgary (2015); Temporary Gallery, Cologne, De Vleeshal, Middelburg and Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten, Marl (2014); Centre d’art contemporain, Geneva (2012); Serralves Foundation, Porto; Musée départemental d’art contemporain de Rochechouart (2011); Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg; Bloomberg Space, London (2010). She is preparing a new project for Fig Futures, Karst, Plymouth and the Pannier Market, curated by Ben Borthwick, March 2019.

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Image: Charlotte Moth. Still from *Still Life in the White Cube*, 16mm film transferred to digital, colour, sound, 8 min, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Marcelle Alix, Paris

Curator: Caroline Hancock

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The exhibition will close from 4 March to 26 April during the works for the third phase of *Acupuncture. The Architecture of CA2M in Transition*



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