

## Exponer la exposición (The Exhibition on Display)

Patricia Mayayo ([patricia.mayayo@uam.es](mailto:patricia.mayayo@uam.es))

*Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*

Translated by Lola García Abarca

---

***Mil bestias que rugen. Dispositivos de exposición para una modernidad crítica* [A thousand beasts roar: Display devices for a critical modernity]. Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (curator: Olga Fernández López), 20 October 2017 – 4 March 2018**

If there is one word that defines *A thousand beasts roar: Display devices for a critical modernity* curated by Olga Fernández López for the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, it would be, without a doubt, subtlety. This exhibition demands a slow and contemplative visit, because only slowly can we perceive the delicate web of relationships that connect certain works to others and take in all the information provided by exhibition labels – so dense they are almost a preview of the exhibition catalogue. Nevertheless, it is still possible to let oneself be carried away by the exhibit itself: the beauty of many of the selected works, the magical atmosphere of the CAAC building part of the old Cartuja Monastery and the carefully staged pieces invite spectators to walk among the works and contemplate each element.

The exhibition's theme has a self-reflexive approach that is not readily evident: this is an exhibition that considers the display format itself. Exhibitions are not mere containers of works but devices used for building and transmitting discourses. *A thousand beasts roar* helps us understand the double path taken by the exhibition throughout the 20th century: on the one hand, exhibitions have represented the most powerful tool in the dissemination of the hegemonic ideals of modernity; on the other hand, they have been used by many artists to challenge those very same ideals, outlining the contours of a critical modernity.

Nevertheless, this exhibition should not be taken as a history of exhibitions: its curator does not suggest a chronological visit but one that focuses on three overriding themes through which we perceive a tension between critical and dominant narratives. The first part, "Displaying the colonial unconscious" focuses on collecting and exhibition strategies whose origins lay in 19th century colonialism. The admiration felt by avant-garde artists for "tribal" or "primitive" art was nourished by a series of European fantasies of the "other", imagined from a romantic and exoticizing perspective. "Displaying the colonial unconscious" brings together a series of pieces that question the way non-Western art is displayed, *Unsettled Objects. Pitt Rivers Museum (1968-1971)* by Lothar Baumgarten, a photographic essay consisting of photographs of the cabinets on display at the Pitt Rivers Anthropological Museum in Oxford; *Fetish (2016)* by Amie Siegel and *The Trick Brain (2012)* by Ed Atkins, which evoke two emblematic scenes of the colonial imaginary: the collections of Sigmund Freud and André Breton; and the installation entitled *El Museo del Ostracismo* [Museum of Ostracism] (2017), in which Peruvian artist Sandra Gamarra reflects upon the exiled condition of pieces appropriated by colonizers.

The second part of the exhibition, "Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy" examines the role of exhibitions in Cold War Europe: *Documenta 1 and 2 in Kassel*, portrayed in a collection of photographs taken by René Burri and Hans Haacke, which is the clearest expression of a new order that promised to convert abstract art, conceived as an aestheticized and depoliticized version of the language of the avant-garde, into a banner for the values of capitalist democracies. As a counterpoint to this myth embodied by the early editions of *Documenta*, "Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy" presents a series of projects that threaten the canonical narrative of modernity: for example, in *Folder 93*, Russian artist Vladislav Shapovalov explores the archives of photographic and filmic exhibitions produced by the Soviet Union to be shown in the Capitalist Bloc during the Cold War; in *Cat 3.1.5. Famous Exhibitions (2017)* Marcel van Eeden offers pencil renderings of the photographs from some of the exhibitions of the period; and Isaías Griñolo, in his installation titled *España profunda* [Deep Spain] (2017), recreates the role of cultural diplomacy in the context of Francoist Spain.

The last part of the exhibition, titled "The Copy on Display", examines the impact of mechanical reproduction of images on the history of exhibitions after the end of the Second World War. As can be seen in some of the works included in this last section, the concept of exhibition amply transcends its usual definition as a collection of original works of art, giving way to new exhibition models and new ways of mediation between art and the spectator. Taking as her point of departure a book of photographs of the sculptures of Basque sculptor Chillida published by David Finn at the end of the 1990s, Falke Pisano (*Chillida, Forms & Feelings, 2006*) reclaims the photo-book as a new type of exhibition experience, different to that of an exhibition deployed in space; in his project *Mausoleos* [Mausoleums] (2012-present), Oriol Vilanova offers a collection of old postcards depicting the interiors of museums from different eras; and Cristina Garrido (*An Unholy Alliance, 2016-17*) questions the influence of art magazines in the current art system, by comparing the number of pages they devote to advertising to those assigned to debate and information.