

Jordi Colomer in Conversation with William Jeffett
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Since the mid-1980s Jordi Colomer (Barcelona, 1962) has been recognised as one of the most important sculptors of his generation working in Spain. Since his production of *Simo* (1998), he has increasingly been working with the medium of video. His productions include *Eldorado* (1998), *pianito* (1999), *A,B,C, etc.* (1999), *La répétition (The Rehearsal)* (1999), and the animated video *Alfabet* (2001). Some of these videos were produced in France, where the artist is increasingly active, and later this year his video work will be presented in St Nazaire (Brittany), Villa Arson (Nice), Galerie Michel Rein (Paris) and La Galerie (Paris).

Trained in Art History and Architecture, Colomer often addresses the subject of how urbanism impacts on human behaviour. In this way he offers at once an exploration of the ubiquitous presence of modernism in urban environment and a critique of its failings. Concerned with theory in much of his work, his earlier sculptures can be understood in terms of a deconstructive form of constructivism. Colomer also introduces the human element and a concern with narrative and fiction. What are the limited choices we are presented with in our increasingly structured society, and how do we react to these choices? Alongside the enormity of the questions posed, there is a comic dimension. In his new video, Colomer seems to mix the high culture of Malevitch's 'architecton' with the low culture of Cantinflas's comic film *El Bombero atómico*. Here the utopian figure of Russian modernism meets the absurdity of the legendary Mexican comedian. Such a conflict, indeed, sums up Colomer's aleatory methodology, resulting in a an at once serious and comic effect.

WJ: Jordi, you are known as a sculptor and your recent works are videos. How did you come to move toward video from sculpture, and in what way do you understand video as sculpture?

JC: I have always thought of sculpture as the centre of my work. The problem is that sculpture has a name that is smaller than the territory which sculpture occupies. There is an obsessive interest in all of my work both in the accumulation and the dematerialisation of the object. Of course, film was the best tool to work with these fragile concepts as materials. And also because you can choose the precise point of view.

WJ: You trained as an architect and your work often makes reference to architecture. To what extent is there an architectural dimension in your work?

JC: Architecture is omnipresent in Barcelona. Politics translates itself into architectural gestures. As I am curious, I started studying architecture, because I was interested in putting myself on the side of the production of architecture as a practice. I remember one day in the School of Architecture when we were drawing a plan for a block with hundreds of apartments. At one moment I was very tired and focused on the bathtub of one of these apartments. And I had a kind of vision that there was someone bathing in this bathtub, and that this person had their own life. But with the tools of

architecture it was not possible to see the true life of this person. On the other hand, there is the idea of Walter Benjamin who spoke of architecture and film as the arts in which the spectator or the user is inside of the work. In the end, I believe all of this is a question of scale: whether the thing is larger or smaller than the persons themselves and not only in material terms.

WJ: I have seen your newest video in which a woman is seen climbing along the ledge of a block of apartments. Behind her grows an enormous city which is then dematerialised. There are two video projections. In one the woman climbs in a window while a woman looks on from another apartment. In the other, as she tries to enter the apartment, the same woman falls. The effect is comic.

JC: The scene is a classic situation in silent comic cinema, but also in action cinema, including Matrix. We know there is always some type of trick. To film this video we had to construct an enormous facade, a kind of false architecture, which in the end is no more than sculpture, but the action of the character and her effort are real. The video shows the two possibilities of this fiction. Enter the apartment window or fall from a height of 50 stories.

WJ: One of your first videos, titled Simo, deals in part with how people disrupt architecture and also with how architecture imposes an almost oppressive structure on people. This seems to be both dystopia and utopia at the same time. In the video, the protagonist is a female dwarf who lives in an empty white room. She obsessively fills the room with box after box of jars of jam and with new shoes in their shoe boxes. In the end she is filling space more than anything, and this seems to be a kind of fear of a void motivated by an irrational desire to consume and accumulate. Such a neurosis seems to undermine the utopia of architecture.

JC: There is a story by Adolph Loos titled 'The Poor Rich Man' in which a millionaire at the time of the Vienna Secession commissioned an architect to construct his house and also to bring him 'art' for the house. The architect decided a place for each object. One day the architect visited him at the house. The owner of the house, wearing his house slippers, opened the door and the architect, surprised and furious, asked him, 'Why are you wearing these house slippers?' The owner, in a satisfied tone, said to the architect, 'You designed the slippers, so I am wearing the right ones!' And the architect said, 'I designed them, but only for use in the bedroom, not for receiving people in the entrance hall!' The moral of the story is about the point where architecture enters the life of people, and this point is a limit which is very difficult to determine.

Dr William Jeffett is Curator of Exhibitions at the Salvador Dalí Museum in St Petersburg, Florida.