



SUSANA SOLANO

NEW WORK

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

SUSANA SOLANO: NEW WORK

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"PRISONERS OF SPACE ITSELF"
THREE SCULPTURES BY SUSANA SOLANO

Born in Barcelona in 1946, Susana Solano was first a painter, turning to sculpture in 1980 when she exhibited canvas hangings that marked her transition into three-dimensional art. Over the last decade her work has grown in scale and complexity as she has developed a sculptural vocabulary that is entirely her own. Because Solano makes unadorned, relatively simple metal forms, her sculpture has often been linked to minimalism, and her work is like certain of the best minimal and postminimal pieces in that it gives an intense, mysterious, and unsettling charge to the space around it. Solano's work differs from minimalism, however, in important ways: it is always made by hand by the sculptor herself (although she sometimes works with an assistant), and it inevitably carries associations with other objects and experiences.¹ Despite its austerity of both form and materials, Solano's work is defined by complex meanings that derive from the artist's own memory. What follows is a reading of three of her works by a single viewer. Although obviously based on the possibilities raised by the way the sculptures actually look as well as the suggestions contained in their titles, the works themselves are more deliberately allusive and more complex than it has been possible to suggest here.

Aquí yace la paradoja (Here Lies the Paradox), 1990-91, is at once a cage and a confession booth. Yet the slot that should permit the penitent to communicate with the priest, though present, is out of reach at the top of the sculpture, and in place of the narrow penitential bench one would expect to find attached to one of the sides of the structure there is instead a low table that nearly fills the available space. More important, however, is the fact that the sculpture has no entrance and no exit, and because Solano's work is always scaled to the human body, our natural desire to go inside it is entirely frustrated. Not only is physical entry impossible, but visual penetration is both offered, by the wire mesh that covers the lower half of the work, and denied, by the iron sheets that surround it at eye level. Thus we encounter the piece on several levels, imagining ourselves enclosed within its mysterious space, while being physically excluded from entering it. The implied experience of being inside the structure is complicated as well. Our lower body would be exposed to the gaze of whoever was present, yet our vision would be obstructed on all sides, producing a feeling of extreme vulnerability. Were one to make a confession in such a structure, there would be no priest to listen and give absolution, but rather one's guilt could be heard by unseen and unknown observers. Furthermore, the structure resembles not only a confessional but also a telephone booth, as well as the small, cagelike enclosures in which prisoners are sometimes kept during trials in southern Europe.² Thus, the work's inherent and possible readings are multiplied.

Arcangel Gabriel (Archangel Gabriel), 1989, which was made for a skylit space at the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, similar to its present location in San Francisco, seems to announce by its title the day of judgment, just as the inwardly sloping sides of its exterior structure, which lead the eye to the light and space above, suggest resurrection. Suspended from this structure are two shallow shelves, held up at each end by metal



Arcangel Gabriel (Archangel Gabriel), 1989



El teu nom (Your Name), 1987

Cover: *Aquí yace la paradoja* (Here Lies the Paradox), 1990-91

rods, and separated by wire mesh. Initially, this recalls the area in prisons in which inmates are permitted to receive visitors, where communication is possible but touching or passing objects is prevented. Given the title, these narrow, lined spaces also suggest two coffins, the inhabitants of which, perhaps a woman and a man, would be inaccessible to each other until they ascend skyward at the moment of resurrection. Yet the meaning of the work must be not only theological but actual as well. One notices, after a while, that these shelves are not so much containers as suspended drawers, and that the reference to death is more direct—even clinical—since such open drawers are like the structures that hold corpses in a mortuary as they await embalming. One wonders—although knowing the answer in some not quite conscious way—what the large structure from which these mortuary trays are suspended is, only to find that it greatly resembles the playground constructions that hold children's swings. What Solano has done is to suggest, and somehow even to embody, the presence in the midst of childhood of the corresponding and necessary ending of life, as well as the rituals and activities surrounding that moment, together with the idea of ascending upward toward the light—the possibility, in short, of resurrection.

El teu nom (Your Name), 1987, is less direct. A sheet of lead is gracefully and symmetrically draped over a large iron supporting structure in what at first seems to be a reference to water—a small waterfall, perhaps, or a wave. As we move around the sculpture, however, what at first appears to be an evocation of fluid motion comes to resemble a long length of fabric, carefully arranged as if for a ceremonial purpose. Although the work is not as specific as Arcangel Gabriel, the extended length of what looks like material—a marvelous transformation to achieve of a substance as heavy as lead—suggests the long, straight swath of a bridal train. If that is the case, then the wedding implied would be a difficult rite indeed for the bride, and the marriage surely would seem a heavy burden. But it is entirely possible that other meanings are intended, and in any case the spectacle of lead metamorphosed into water or fabric, the delicate stuff of a dress, is wonderful in itself.

That in only three abstract sculptures Solano could call forth the experience of childhood, marriage, confession, death, and resurrection is a remarkable achievement. Metaphorical in its workings, her sculpture not only evokes the essence of human life, it manifests it in structures of extraordinary honesty and precision. Her subject is life, not art, and she brings to it the gravity it deserves.

John Caldwell

Curator of Painting and Sculpture

1. Phyllis Rosenzweig, *Directions: Susana Solano* (exh. brochure), (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1989–90).

2. Solano often uses words related to prisons in writing about her work, for example: “. . . like prisoners of space itself . . . like cages without space between iron bars. . .” Susana Solano, “Un Texto de Susana Solano,” *Spazio Umano/Human Space* 2 (April 1987): 43; cited in Rosenzweig, op. cit.

SUSANA SOLANO

Born in Barcelona, Spain, 1946

Lives and works near Barcelona

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1980

Susana Solano: Esculturas i Dibuixos, Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona

1983

Galeria Ciento, Barcelona

1986

Susana Solano: Esculturas 1984/86, Galeria Fernando Vijande, Madrid

Galeria Charpa, Valencia

1987

Senzo Uccelli, Galeria Montenegro, Madrid

ARCO '87, Galeria Montenegro, Madrid

Susana Solano Esculturas, Galeria Maeght, Barcelona

Galerie des Arènes-Chapelle des Jésuites, Nîmes, France

Susana Solano: Sculptures de 1981 à 1987, C. A. P. C. Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, France

Galerie Maeght-Montrouge, Paris

Galleria Giorgio Persano, Turin, Italy

1988

Ploça del jac de la pilota, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, Holland

Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

1989

Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany

Encreuar, La Máquina Española and Galeria Oliva Arauna, Madrid

Directions: Susana Solano, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

1990

Mala Galerija, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia

Dibujos, Galeria Luis Revenga, Madrid

Grabados y Monotipos, Galeria Linea, Madrid

Acotación, Fattoria di Celle/Spazi d'Arte, Santomato di Pistoia, Italy

Acotación-2, Galleria Giorgio Persano, Milan

Art Cologne, Galeria Luis Adelantado, Cologne

1991

Galerie Daniel Lelong, Paris

SELECTED GROUP

EXHIBITIONS

1984

En tres dimensiones, Fundación Caixa de Pensiones, Madrid

1985

Henry Moore Grand Prix Exhibition, The Utsukushi-Ga-Hara Open Air Museum, Tokyo

1986

Three Spanish Artists: Susana Solano, José María Sicilia and Miquel Navarro, Serpentine Gallery, London

Correspondentie Europa/Correspondence Europe, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Pintores y Escultores Españoles 1981–1986,

Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid, and Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Jouy-en-Josas, France

1987

Documenta 8, Kassel, West Germany

Skulptur Projekte in Münster 1987, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany

XIX Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

Cinq Siècles d'Art Espagnol—Dynamiques et Interrogations, ARC/Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

1988

De Varia Commensuración: Jorge Oteiza/Susana Solano, XLIII Venice Biennale, Spanish Pavilion, Venice, Italy

Carnegie International, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

Epoca Nueva: Painting and Sculpture from Spain, Chicago Public Library Cultural Center; Akron Art Museum; Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University, Dallas; Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida

Dialogue with Space: Alice Aycock, Magdalena Jetelova, Susana Solano, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Susana Solano, Sol LeWitt, Marta Cervera Gallery, New York

1989

Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Martin Puryear, Susana Solano, Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

L'Escultura catalana d'avantguarda, Centro d'Arte Santa Monica, Departament de Cultura de la Generalitat de Barcelona

Die Spanische Kunst in der Sammlung der Fundació Caixa de Pensions, Städtische Kunsthalle, Mannheim; Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf

1990

Acquisitions 1989, Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris

Terskel Threshold, Museet for Samtidskunst/The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo
Barcelona Avant-Garde, Yokohama Museum, Yokohama, Japan

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—. "Susana Solano: Ambigüedad, ironía, agresividad." *Diario 16*, May 6, 1990.

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Cantor, Judy. "Susana Solano: La Máquina Española, Galeria Oliva Arauna, Madrid." *Artnews* 89, no. 2 (February 1990): 168.

Ferrándiz, Luisa. "Susana Solano, Oliva Arauna, La Máquina Española, Madrid." *Artscribe International*, no. 79 (January/February 1990): 94.

Francblin, Catherine. "Susana Solano: quelque chose qu'on appelle l'art" (interview). *Art Press*, no. 140 (October 1989): 47–49.

—. "Les sculptures-pièges de Susana Solano." *Artstudia*, no. 14. (Autumn 1989).

Gambrell, Jamey. "Five from Spain." *Art in America* 75, no. 9 (September 1987): 160–71.

—. "Susana Solano." In *Carnegie International* (exh. cat.), 136–37. Pittsburgh: The Carnegie Museum of Art, 1988.

García, Aurora. "Susana Solano." In *Correspondentie Europa/Correspondence Europe* (exh. cat. in Dutch and English), 62–69. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1986.

—. "Susana Solano" (exh. cat.). Maastricht, Holland: Bonnefantenmuseum, 1989.

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Heartney, Eleanor. "Susana Solano, Sol LeWitt: Marta Cerveza." *Artnews* 88, no. 3 (March 1989): 171.

Huici, Fernando. "Reflections on 'Susana Solano.'" In *Susana Solano* (exh. cat.). Chicago: Donald Young Gallery, 1989.

Kent, Sarah. "Three Spaniards: Serpentine Gallery." *The Times* (London), April 9, 1986.

Koether, Jutta, and Diedrich Diedrichsen. "Jutta and Diedrich Go to Spain." *Artscribe International*, no. 59 (September/October 1986): 56–61.

Mahoney, Robert, et al. "New York in Review." *Arts Magazine* 63, no. 4 (December 1988): 108.

Mélo, Alexandre. "Jorge Oteiza, Susana Solano: Spanish Pavilion [Venice Biennale]." *Flash Art*, no. 142 (October 1988): 107.

Messler, Norbert. "Susana Solano: Städtisches Museum Abteiberg." *Artforum* 28, no. 5 (January 1990): 155.

Moure, Gloria. "An Encounter with a Secret: The Sculpture of Susana Solano." *Artforum* 26, no. 1 (September 1987): 100–103.

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Rose, Barbara. "Susana Solano: Modernist Sculpture in a New Idiom." In *Three Spanish Artists* (exh. cat.). London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986.

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CHECKLIST

El teu nom (Your Name)

1987

iron and lead
38 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 135 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 68 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (98 x 345 x 174 cm)
Private collection, Barcelona

Arcangel Gabriel (Archangel Gabriel)

1989

iron
105 x 107 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 131 in. (267 x 273 x 333 cm)
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Aquí yace la paradoja (Here Lies the Paradox)

1990–91

iron
88 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (224 x 108 x 108 cm)
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

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