

# ESTER PARTEGÀS: MINOR ARCHITECTURE

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Curatorial text. Bea Espejo

This exhibition by Ester Partegàs, jointly designed for the Museo Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid and Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, provides a comprehensive review of her work over the last three decades. Far from a retrospective approach, it proposes a circular journey in which works are intertwined, opening a porous, permeable dialogue between them. The artist's maxim, that she cannot stand still on the creative level, serves as a metaphor for the *tone* pursued by the exhibit: an itinerary full of gesture and swing, balance and resistance, twists and turns, comings and goings.

The exhibition takes a close look at the idea of minor history, small gestures, minimal actions, bastard traditions, limited audiences, or chance encounters with certain cultural materials. Likewise, with a layout reminiscent of a large archaeological site, the show seeks to generate that space of tension found in her works, whether through the play of scales or through contradictions. A tension that is, in turn, the artist's space of vital and philosophical inquiry. A free, pleasant and speculative space that allows her to question what we assume to be real.

Several essays accompany the basis of this curating project. One of these by Jill Stoner, *Towards a Minor Architecture*, takes the word *minor* from the book by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari about the literature of Franz Kafka in order not to talk so much about established power or knowledge, but rather the power of bodies and things. Inhabiting the minor, according to Stoner, means working in a here and now born out of direct experimentation, which involves crossing certain territories and confronting the intensities that exist there. Ultimately, it means accepting an unstable knowledge, without certainties, and above all not fearing failure, the starting point for the artist's practice, speaking from a visceral sense of the vulnerable as a foundation.

Moreover, this *architecture without architects* finds another important pillar in Bernard Rudofsky's essay and exhibition (MoMA, 1964) in homage to vernacular architecture without a pedigree, architecture produced by primitive and spontaneous activity, the art of building as a universal phenomenon, another of the fundamental ideas in Ester Partegàs' work, which she in turn connects with the marginal, the *imaginal* and the feminine.

*Constructing* is in fact one of the key terms in her work. For this artist, construction is an action that can be inhabited, physically and/or mentally; a broad, porous term that serves to think the space where any object relates to everything around it. *Host* (2024) is a good example of all this. As she herself explains, "Society determines which bodies are penetrable and enters them without hesitation. It constructs them and destroys them. A tunnel is a passage, a journey outwards or inwards. *Host* is also a snail, one that carries on its back a home that is heavy but at the same time empty. The bricks, worn."

Works from the "Laundry Baskets" series, like *Twilight*, *Two Moons and Knots* (2024), as well as other, previous ones like *Line and Part (Laundry Baskets)* (2023), created mainly

during her stay at the United States Academy in Rome and talking about care and the small things of everyday life, establish a link with the “In U\_wall Sculptures” series (2023).

Actions like falling, embracing, attacking, sustaining, giving or pushing appear like somatic behaviours of architectural structures in which Ester Partegàs imagines possible silenced stories. She does this by inverting the anonymity and powerlessness of ordinary or discarded objects, one step away from becoming rubbish. Pieces of laundry baskets turned into caves that speak both of collapse and liberation, and small lattices attempting to delimit an exterior space that always refers back to the interior.

This inside-outside symbiosis characterises *The Passerby* (2015). This work recreates the labyrinthine layout of a street market using translucent polyurethane surfaces moulded straight from ordinary plastic tarpaulins. They might be tarpaulins, but they could also be sheets hung out to dry, taken straight from the laundry basket. The tarpaulins are joined together with coloured tape, just like in the bread drawings from the series “knead, penetrate, let go” (2022–2023), and the audience is forced to move between the tarpaulins, interacting with the brilliant distortions produced by the folds and textures. This unstable architecture, almost in equilibrium, is also present in the pieces of bread that become places of refuge through the graphite drawings that she attaches, stacks and connects just as a house is built: by stacking bricks.

The pizza boxes in *Nothing* (2010) are piled up, a frozen totem recalling urban waste. The works *Eclipse* (2007–2009), *Barricades* (2004–2007), *Overcast* (2010), *Meteorites* (2004) and *Civilization is overrated* (2004) also orbit from different places towards this idea of what is forgotten and/or discarded and just a step away from being rubbish, the feeling conveyed by the installation *to from from at across to in from. The centerless feeling* (2001): an airport frozen in time, full of the residue of the bustle of all this coming and going to and from.

Throughout this journey, some works will serve as conceptual pillars, organising the space, while others (not necessarily smaller in size) will punctuate it, like accents and commas in a written text. An exhibition that will function as a large sculpture installation, where dialogue with the venue will play a specific role. While in her early works Ester Partegàs looked at boards, containers, slogans, wastebaskets, labels, barcodes and magazine headlines, today she looks at baskets, tombs, bridges, thermal baths, milestones, crypts and pockets. Like animal architecture, her constructions today are inward-looking, somewhere between a hiding place and a refuge, and they bring together those bodily gestures that have not been appreciated or that lack a worthy architectural tradition.

Since the beginning of her career, Ester Partegàs has seemed to think of us from that “minor” place that involves other kinds of forces, often uncontrollable, yet always decisive in her composition and use of space. Sometimes, these spaces are close to supermarket checkouts or shops, questioning the idea of impulse and necessity. Other times, they are close to the idea of consumption and everything it implies: dissatisfaction, anxiety, emptiness, ambition, envy, disappointment or dependency. And still other times, they are domestic places that we construct with our bodies and that order what we understand as civilisation: baskets, windows, rooms, houses or caves.

Emotional, anti-heroic and often invisible spaces, through which the artist reflects on ways of inhabiting, the networks in which we evolve, the circuits through which we move and, especially, the economic, social and political formulations that circumscribe human territories. A vital, cyclical and possible space, which has to do, to paraphrase Clarice Lispector, with *the revelation of a world*.

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