

# Soledad Sevilla

## Written on the Celestial Bodies

Specifically designed with Madrid's Palacio de Cristal (Crystal Palace) in mind, in terms of poetics and construction and dialogue with the spectator, *Written on the Celestial Bodies* is one of the Soledad Sevilla's most noteworthy projects. Every one of her installations contains an internal poetic logic that makes it unique, and deals with a specific theme through a direct dialogue with space and light. Although common paths and processes of visual and plastic exploration can be distinguished among her pictorial series – as for example through her use of geometry, grids or themes related to aspects of cultural memory (the *Meninas*, bulls, the Alhambra, Rubens's paintings of the Apostles) – a certain “complementariness” between her various installations can be said to exist. When considered together, they constitute complex research into the perceptual conditions of the senses. Each project highlights the tension of thought and rationality when both are applied to experimentation with inner sensitivity.

## Soledad Sevilla

Written on the Celestial Bodies



Digital model of the installation *Written on the Celestial Bodies*, Palacio de Cristal, 2011

In 1994 Soledad Sevilla presented a retrospective in the Palacio de Velázquez (Velázquez Palace) not far from the Palacio de Cristal and also in the Retiro Park. It featured various installations laid out in the towers of the building as a succession of rooms focusing on elements of nature (water, fire, smoke) and posing paradoxes for the senses. In *La habitación de la lluvia* (The Rain Room) water became rain

frozen in time; in *La que recita la poesía es ella (Fuego)* [The One Reciting the Poem is Her (Fire)] fire became semi-darkness and shadow; and in *La que recita la poesía es ella (Humo)* [The One Reciting the Poem is Her (Smoke)], in order to make it visible, smoke was transmuted into light. In *Que su cante me lastima* (Her Singing Hurts Me) air, on the other hand, was expressed as a suggestion, as if previously incapacitated or immobilised; here a wire mesh extending up the walls from floor to ceiling trapped, as if in a net and in full flight, hundreds of stuffed birds with outspread wings. The exhibition's layout delimited ways of seeing and perceiving; that "complementariness" between painting and installation was again set up and a certain need for privacy for each installation was underlined.

Since then Soledad Sevilla's installations have become more "public", or at least endowed with an intimacy that needs to be shared and should be approached in groups and openly in large public spaces. In recent years her installations and interventions in public spaces have guided the spectator into experiences more corporeal than visual, stressing monumentality while paradoxically reducing resources and spectacular effects to a bare minimum. Such is the case of *El esqueleto* (The Skeleton, 2004), a map of Barcelona hanging inside Sant Pau Hospital whose shadow is projected onto the floor, or *Temporada de lágrimas* (Season of Tears, 2003), installed in the atrium of the Caixa Forum in the Catalan capital. This was also the

approach of her installation *1904-1992*, in the Vélez-Blanco Castle, where monumentality was determined by the dimensions of the castle and the spectacular effect was due to the use of the late-afternoon sun – whose fading light allowed the projection of the lost Renaissance courtyard to emerge from the deepening gloom like the image of a ghost or a waking dream.

In the Palacio de Cristal, monumentality is also determined by the colossal dimensions of the old glasshouse. Inside, a reconstruction of the walls and roofs takes the form of a model or inner “skin” of the building through an aluminium structure and translucent polycarbonate panels of deep midnight

blue in which – like stars arranged randomly so as not to resemble any known constellation – punctuation marks, exclamations and accents from written language float. This model involved a complex preparatory design process in which the artist worked in close collaboration with a team of technical experts and engineers. The Palacio de Cristal’s glass walls turn it into a kind of porous box.



Digital model of the installation *Written on the Celestial Bodies*, Palacio de Cristal, 2011

In this installation the “palace-greenhouse” contains another building that acts as a small-scale model or copy. Meanwhile the sky gives the impression of being both inside and out: the daytime sky with the sun and clouds on the outside and an imaginary reconstruction of a night sky with the building’s basic forms on the inside. The glass panes open onto the sky while enclosed within is our mental universe: language – or rather a universe of signs breathing life and the sound of speech into writing. Punctuation marks act like a constellation of sound tools and serve to introduce expression into language: exclamation and question marks, full stops and commas (which also exist to help us catch our breath) for silences and pauses, brackets for speaking

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softly or in asides, accents to give words volume and music, asterisks and hyphens to direct or situate collateral thoughts...

The Crystal Palace thus becomes a mental astronomical observatory for an inner universe with the installation explained through a poetic and spatial paradox somewhere between interior and exterior, seeing and perceiving, speaking and writing. The ancients viewed the celestial world as an unchanging, perfect universe. Today we know that it is a space full of constant changes and “written in the sky” can now involve other variables where the poetic and digital virtuality intertwine.

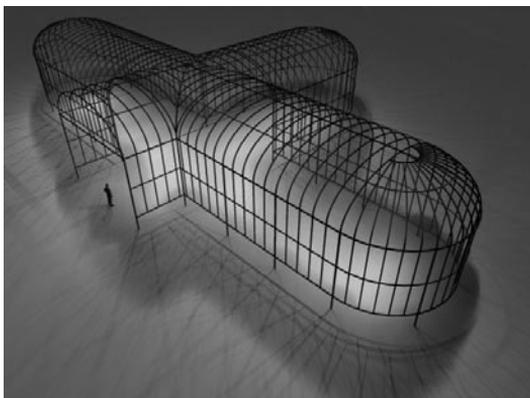
What was once a glasshouse designed to protect delicate tropical plants from Madrid’s harsh and at times extreme continental climate is today transformed into a space for reflection on the language of signs, underlining their fragility in the absence of words and a need to communicate and share.

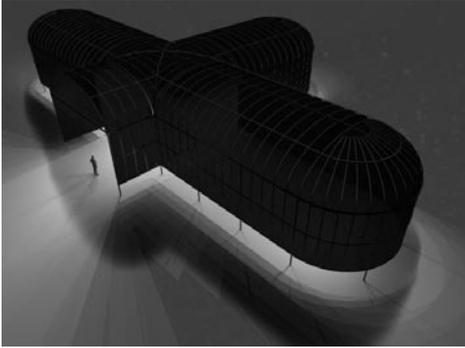
### Biography

Soledad Sevilla (Valencia 1944) embarked on her career as an artist in the late 1960s, showing special interest in a serial, geometric form of painting. Between 1969 and 1971 she took part in the various *Seminario de Generación Automática de Formas Plásticas* (Seminar on the Automatic Generation of Plastic

Forms) at the Complutense University’s Computer Centre in Madrid, an innovative experience in which artists, engineers, architects and programmers used computers as tools for their various projects. Her production from this period is unlike that of other artists of her generation in that geometrical order combines analytical rigour of form and line with hand-painted

Digital model of the installation *Written on the Celestial Bodies*, Palacio de Cristal, 2011





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strokes, thus endowing her work with slight imprecisions by way of almost imperceptible gestures tending to “personalise” or “humanise” the serial process. In the 1980s she applied geometry to her canvases through networks of lines or grids, turning it into a tool for spatial and formal analysis. Over these grids she evoked pictorial space in *Meninas* (1981-1983), perceptual reverie through

the courts of *La Alhambra* (1984-1986), and the tension of the bullring (1988). It was in the early 80s when she also began developing atmospheric projects and installations closely connected to painting, resulting in an extremely productive source of feedback – as demonstrated by the installations *Fons et Origo* (1987), based on the Alhambra, *Nos fuimos a Cayambe* (We Went to Cayambe), executed with bullfighting capes, or the *En ruinas* (In Ruins) series of paintings, a spin-off of her 1904-1992 project. In the latter, at dusk on two consecutive days images were projected in the courtyard of Vélez-Blanco Castle (Almería) of the building’s original arches and Renaissance loggia, whose stones (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) were sold off one by one to an antiquarian at the beginning of the 20th century. This intervention by the artist fleetingly revived the castle’s lost splendour.

Soledad Sevilla’s installations, which can be considered as pioneers in Spain, reveal how evocation, intuition or perception are important as challenges. In her more recent pictorial work she has brought together photography and painting in diptychs – as in the 2006 *Apóstoles menores* (Lesser Apostles) series, inspired by Rubens’s Apostles in the Museo del Prado or in *El Rompido* (2008) – in the process opening up new spaces of vibration and visual research.

**Museo Nacional  
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía**

**Sabatini building**

Santa Isabel, 52

**Nouvel building**

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**Museum hours**

Monday to Saturday

from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Sundays

from 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Closed Tuesdays

Galleries close 15 minutes

prior to Museum closing

**[www.museoreinasofia.es](http://www.museoreinasofia.es)**

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10 November 2011 – 29 April 2012

**Palacio de Cristal**

Parque del Retiro

**Palacio de Cristal hours**

October through March

Everyday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Closed Tuesdays

**Text:** Santiago Olmo

**Images**

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**Activities**

Conference

11 November, 7:30 p.m.

Nouvel building, Auditorium 200

**Discussion: Soledad Sevilla**

Soledad Sevilla and Santiago Olmo  
in conversation

This exhibition coincides with the  
“Festival Miradas de Mujeres” (Mujeres en  
las Artes Visuales)

