

Exhibition May 17 – October 14, 2018

Parque del Retiro, Palacio de Cristal

Nairy Baghramian

Breathing Spell



Dwindler Low Tide, 2017

Breathing Spell, the title of the first solo exhibition in Spain for Nairy Baghramian, describes the moment when living organisms shut off their vital flows and enter a state known as latent life: functions are temporarily suspended, precisely and paradoxically in order to ensure life's continuity. Baghramian has created a project specific to the Crystal Palace in which she invites viewers to stop and question the functions of sculpture, architecture and installation, and by extension the Reina Sofia Museum as an institution.

Baghramian's work focuses on things that are usually hidden, camouflaged or embedded in the architecture of a building; practical objects that are vital to the functioning and organic life of any building in use. She alludes to mechanisms that are traditionally kept in the shadows, safely protected behind walls, panels or plaster. By presenting them detached from their circuits and separated from their flows (of energy, air, water, vital fluids), they appear dysfunctional, like an artificial limb disconnected from the body that gives it purpose. Removed from any living entity, they become mere objects, sinister and disturbing in their lack of context. They carry a certain auxiliary aesthetic by being pointless on their own, but bringing coherence to the structure as a whole.

Fragments of piping, ducts, fire hoses and capacitors here represent all that is secondary in architecture, the strictly functional; things that are intrinsically linked to the purpose they serve and neither correspond to or symbolise any underlying discourse. If minimalism began with the premise 'what you see is what you

see,' Baghramian is perhaps saying 'what you don't usually see is what you now see'. It's a maxim that might be applied to, for example, the Pompidou Centre in Paris, designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. It's precisely the opposite of what Rem Koolhaas, referring to modern architecture, termed 'lobotomised architecture': buildings that separate form and function, whereby the purity of surface lines inversely reflects the furious activity inside.

Baghramian's sculptured installations thus occupy a liminal space between the building's innards, its intimacy, and its exterior surface, its epidermis; between its façade and the internal walls that hide its organs that shouldn't be seen. The Crystal Palace seems the ideal place for such reflections, located at an intermediary point where the urban grounds of Retiro Park meet the institution of the museum; where a natural environment meets the officially protected; where natural light mixes with light filtered through glass and metal. In other words, the sort of intermediary point where breathing spells



are found, where air becomes momentarily trapped in an interstitial and ambiguous space.

At the same time, *Breathing Spell* establishes a critical dialogue with several modernist elements: surrealism at its most organic and visceral; the work of Francis Picabia and his interest in dysfunctional mechanisms; the initial constructivism of El Lissitzky; and minimalism, above all else. Baghranian's work takes US minimalism as a starting point, but instead of seeking absorption in the work itself, she invites the viewer to complete the narrative conceived in fragmentary form.

Presented like a question, as a moment of pause or a deep breath, the exhibition is also a place to linger and reflect on artistic practices, on the spaces that protect and contain art works and provide them with their architectural context, on the very institutions that house them.



Breathing Spell, 2017

Dwindler Downpipe, 2017

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Main venue

Sabatini Building

Santa Isabel, 52

Nouvel Building

Ronda de Atocha s/n
28012 Madrid

Tel: (+34) 91 774 10 00

Opening hours

Monday to Saturday
and public holidays
from 10 am to 9 pm

Sundays

from 10 am to 2.15 pm
the entire Museum is open
from 2.15 pm to 7 pm
are open Collection 1
and one temporary exhibition
(check website)

Closed on Tuesdays

Exhibition rooms in all venues
will be cleared 15 minutes
before closing time.

www.museoreinasofia.es

Parque del Retiro venues

Palacio de Cristal

Palacio de Velázquez

Opening Hours

Everyday
April to September
from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
October
from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
November to March
from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

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