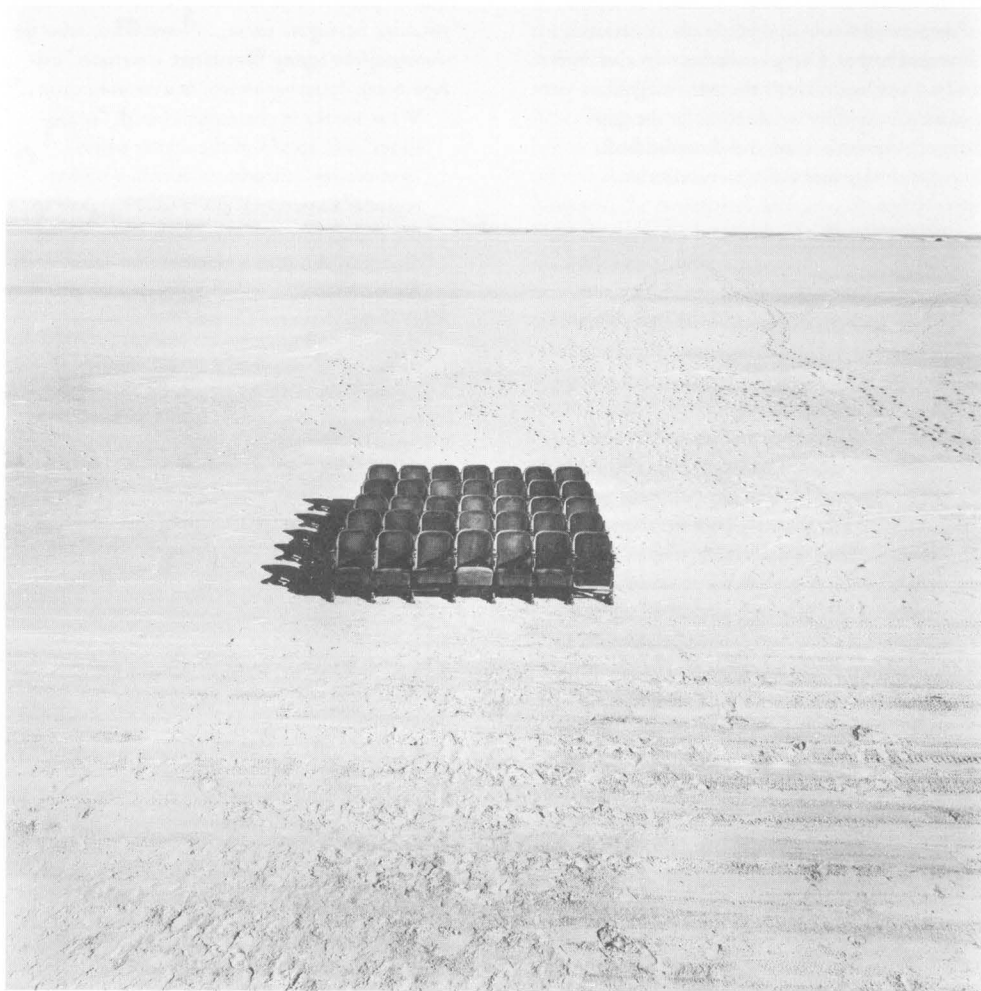


PINTURA I REPRESENTACIÓ *Perejaume*

Broadway Window Installation The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York May 11 - August 18, 1991



Perejaume, *Pintura i Representació*, 1989, Cibachrome. Delta de l'Ebre, armchairs from the Palau de la Música Catalana. Photo: courtesy of Galeria Joan Prats, Barcelona and New York.

From ethnography and natural history to art and science, not to mention such wonders of human ingenuity as spoons and shoes, several variations have evolved on the museum theme, first established, as we know it, in late eighteenth-century Europe. Through these evolutions and despite attempts at reformulation, the function of museums has remained largely unchanged. Museums collect, manage, and put objects on display—whether they may be paintings, wax figures, botanical specimens, or other strange and wonderful curiosities. The museum establishes and presupposes a relationship between its visitors, the objects contained within it, and the institution itself—represented spatially by its architecture and organizationally by the people who put things on display. At an art museum, as we understand it, that experience revolves around the exhibition of “aesthetic” objects, objects of “beauty” designed to give pleasure and instruction to the viewer.

The nature of museums and, more broadly, of art itself is addressed in a succinct and beguiling manner by Perejaume's project *Pintura i Representació*. Rows of theater seats are installed in a window which faces a busy thoroughfare, at the threshold between outside and inside. An entrance leads to the seats, allowing visitors to sit in the window, so that they become at once spectators of the street action and a spectacle for the passersby, in the same movement that the passersby also become doubly observer and observed. Who is looking at whom and from what position? Perejaume's installation/theater takes as its subject the condition of spectatorship and display that is at the heart of the museum experience. Inverting and then confusing established and normally rigid categories, the audience becomes the display and vice versa, in a recursive movement that flips back on itself as soon as we think we have it straight. By way of a kind of conceptual *double entendre*, the project calls attention to the fact that “to its own contents, the museum is purely an index, an attention vector, a finger pointed at whatever is on display.”¹

Implicit in this structure is “the museum's need for the actual presence of the objects it calls to notice. Emptied of things to exhibit, the museum

could not function.²² Perejaume's project maintains this scheme but performs a sly displacement, as it substitutes the audience and, in turn, the changing panorama of the street for the display. In the process, it reconfigures the museum's boundaries through dynamic engagement with the activity of the thoroughfare. If a museum's usual task is to select from a multiplicity of things, exercising a discriminating organizational principle in order to gather artifacts outside of it for display inside, Perejaume's project turns our attention to what is on the exterior, to the heterogeneity that is funnelled into the museum. In so doing, *Pintura i Representació* brings into relief the museum's function not simply as a neutral site of display but as container, interpreter, and frame, with all the inherent limitations and partialities.

The title of the piece hints at the larger question at play. Translated from the artist's native Catalan as "painting and representation," it points beyond the museum site to the role of art generally, which always posits for Perejaume an ambiguous relationship between outside and inside, between the "real" and its representation. The issue is explored, in particular, through the theme of nature and landscape which recurs in Perejaume's wide-ranging body of work, distinctive for its lyrical use of conceptual strategies. In one typical piece, the artist constructs a large, ornate, gold frame, its four sides ragged and craggy rather than straight, for display on a gallery floor. Near the sculpture, a photograph reveals that the frame takes its peculiar shape from the natural contours of a mountaintop where it was originally installed. "A landscape is the sculpture of a postcard,"²³ writes Perejaume, transposing the way in which nature is usually conceived in relation to pictorial form, that is, to art itself. His poetic metaphor suggests that landscape is not just a geographical terrain, but is always a visual convention as well. Perejaume's recurrent use of empty frames calls attention to what is inevitably left outside of that convention, to "a myriad of unpainted, unpaintable paintings, unknowable landscapes."²⁴ In the same way, *Pintura i Representació* positions the viewer in order to delineate the museum as a framing device and to indicate what is left outside, in the "real" world.

Next to the entrance leading to the window, Perejaume has installed a photograph which shows five rows of theater seats in the middle of a large and sunny dirt field. No clue is provided as to the intended audience and the spectacle to be viewed in this *plein air* theater. But the mere existence of the seats already designates a potential viewing position, just as those who enter the museum's window will inhabit a position and animate a dialogue between viewer and viewed, art and audience, spectator and spectacle.

Alice Yang, *Assistant Curator*

1. Daniel Soutif, "Pictures and an Exhibition," *Artforum* 29, no. 6 (March 1991), p. 85.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
3. Quoted in Jamey Gambrell, *Perejaume: Pintures, Escultures, Installacions, Videos 1986-1987* (Barcelona: Galeria Joan Prats, 1987), np.
4. *Ibid.*, np.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

PEREJAUME was born in 1957 in Barcelona, where he continues to live and work. In 1990, he was one of the artists chosen to represent Spain in the Aperto section of the Venice Biennale. This is his first solo museum project in the U.S.

KAZUO KATASE was born in Japan in 1947. He has lived and worked in Germany since 1975 and has exhibited widely in Western Europe.

CHRISTINE DAVIS is a Canadian artist based in Toronto and Paris. CHRISTOPHER DOYLE and JON TOWER both live and work in New York City. CRISTINA EMMANUEL is an artist of Greek-Puerto Rican background who resides in San Francisco. ANGEL SUAREZ-ROSADO, born in Puerto Rico, currently lives and works in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania.

The individual views expressed in the exhibitions and publications are not necessarily those of the Museum.

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The New Museum
OF CONTEMPORARY ART

583 Broadway New York, New York 10012
(212) 219-1222