

November 2010
For immediate release

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

Marta Minujín. Works 1959-1989

25 November 2010 - 7 February 2011

Gallery 5 (2nd floor), gallery 3 and terrace (1st floor)

Guest curator: Victoria Noorthoorn

Opening: Thursday 25th November, 7 PM

Special Press Opening: Thursday 25th November, 5:30 PM

Malba – Fundación Costantini presents a retrospective exhibition of Argentine artist Marta Minujín featuring more than 100 works focused on her historical production from the sixties, seventies and eighties. Curated by Victoria Noorthoorn, the exhibition invites viewers to witness the complexity and scope of the production of an artist who, the curator suggests, “*is all about freedom, excess, self-involvement, celebration, and pure creativity and, contrary to what we might imagine, is also about precision, rigor, endurance, generosity and critical spirit. She is a self-manager of artistic projects the likes of which Argentina has never before seen*”. And further, “*the aim of this exhibition is to assert the critical nature of Minujín’s work and emphasize her ongoing relevance. It presents a Minujín we are not entirely familiar with due to the historical lack of analytic exhibitions of her work in Argentina*”.

Organized chronologically, the exhibition includes her early paintings and Informalist works from 1959 to 1961; participatory environments from 1964 and 1965; experiments with the mass media carried out in 1966; works based on her hippie experiences in the late sixties; fictional operas from 1972; critical projects related to the political situation in Latin America from the late seventies; and projects involving mass participation and the destruction of myths produced in the eighties.

The exhibition design, with its curved panels, is suggestive of Minujín’s labyrinths. It presents artworks from private and public collections, twenty film projections, the reconstruction and recreation of historical works, and several important documents from the artist’s prolific archive.

Many of Minujín’s most paradigmatic works are represented in this exhibition, including *La destrucción* (The Destruction, 1963), *iRevuélquese y viva!* (Wallow Around and Live!, 1964), *La Menesunda* (Mayhem, 1965), *El Batacazo* (The Long Shot, 1965), *Simultaneidad en Simultaneidad* (Simultaneity in Simultaneity, 1966), *Importación-Exportación* (Import-Export, 1968), *Kidnapping* (1973), *The Soft Gallery* (1973), *Imago Flowing* (1974), *La academia del fracaso* (The Academy of Failure, 1975), *Comunicando con tierra* (Communicating with Earth, 1976), *El Obelisco de pan dulce* (The Obelisk in Sweet Bread, 1979), *El Partenón de libros* (The Parthenon of Books, 1983) —made from books that had been confiscated during the military dictatorship— *Operación Perfume* (Operation Perfume, 1987) and many others. Malba also presents a selection of sculptures produced by the artist during the last 20 years is also on exhibit on the museum’s terrace.

The exhibition presents Minujín in dialogue with her time, with the national and international events taking place at different moments in her career and with the artistic communities with which she worked, whether in Argentina or elsewhere. It reflects the way that her production set forth a dialogue with the diverse movements of the sixties,

and specifically with New Realism, Pop Art, and Conceptual Art, as well as with the investigations around performance, happenings, video-art, new technologies, mass media, and action art, among others. Minujín responds to these events time again.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Malba has published a 300-page bilingual (Spanish-English) catalogue with full-color reproductions of the works on display. The catalogue also includes an introduction by Eduardo F. Costantini, founder and president of Malba; a curatorial essay by Victoria Noorthoorn (*The Vertigo of Creation*), as well as several essays written by a group of researchers: a *Biography*, by Javier Villa; a *Bibliography*, by Cristina Blanco, a section on specific *Artworks*, with texts by Jimena Ferreiro Pella; the *International Art Timeline*, by Victoria Giraudo; and a *Documents* section, with a selection of historical texts.

The research and curatorial proposal

This exhibition invites the viewer to take another look at emblematic projects by Minujín, heeding aspects perhaps previously unnoticed, while also presenting lesser known works and projects. According to the curator, the exhibition does not aspire to cover her entire production, but rather *"to give rise to a more flexible vision of it so that the viewer and the reader might begin to discover hitherto unthinkable dimensions of Minujín's work"*.

Accordingly, the primary sources of information for the research –both for the exhibition and the catalogue– were the (few) existing works by Minujín and, most importantly, the artist's archive. Thanks to photographic recordings and other documentation, it was possible to recover information about dynamic works –objects, constructions, lounges and actions– largely conceived to be experienced by a viewer.

In this exhibition and catalogue, Victoria Noorthoorn stresses three salient characteristics: *"The artist's ability to constantly redefine artistic categories, thus resisting all categorization; the various ways in which she conceives of her practice on a world scale; and her fundamental conviction of the need to affirm, at every instant, a total freedom of thought and expression. Together, these variables resulted in a body of work that challenged the status quo of a conservative society, as well as established artistic conventions and exhibition formats, and the accepted narratives of our local historiography. In sum, Minujín has critically addressed the various contexts in which her work was produced, even signaling and denouncing diverse political realities"*.

The first paintings

The exhibition begins with two oil paintings from Minujín's early pseudo-Futurist period, when she was just 18 years old: ***Las 4 Estaciones de Vivaldi*** [Vivaldi's Four Seasons] (c. 1959–1960) and ***Música acuática de Haendel*** [Haendel's Aquatic Music] (1960). Inspired by musical extracts, these works were born of her attempt to represent movement.

In the following years, her vertiginous production reflected her tireless search to find her place in art. By adding relief to her paintings, first subtly through the addition of small cardboard elements, and later more overtly through the incorporation of entire standard cardboard boxes, she produced three-dimensional works which she covered entirely with black pyroxylin shellac. *"At this precise juncture, two interlinked concerns that would mark her development appeared: first, an interest in exploring real space and, as a result, an interest in producing a body of work whose meaning is constructed on the basis of the viewer's experience"*, explains the curator.

The mattresses

In 1962, Minujín began to work with used mattresses and, at the Impasse Ronsin in Paris, she organized **La destrucción** (*The Destruction*, 1963), where she invited fellow artists to intervene on her works, and to destroy them. Minujín then set all of them on fire. Simultaneously, she began to create her own mattresses by painting pieces of mattresses cloth in strident colors and then sewing them together. Noorthoorn explains that it is at the juncture of these two activities —the cathartic action at the Impasse Ronsin and the use of strident colors in her studio work— that Minujín first became aware of the potential of *spectacle*, another crucial component to her work and, indeed, to art from that time.

The exhibition presents the documentary records of both *La destrucción* —which Minujín calls her first happening— and her multicolor mattresses, both historical and recent. It also includes a reconstruction of one of the mattresses that the artist prepared for *La destrucción: Untitled*, 1962-2010.

The happenings: spectacle and media attraction

In the mid-sixties, Minujín produced several works that demonstrate her interest in extreme provocation, and contributing to instilling, together with other prominent artists, the happening genre in Argentina: **Eróticos en Technicolor** [Erotics in Technicolor] and **iRevuélquese y viva!** [Wallow Around and Live!], which were presented at the 1964 edition of the Premio Nacional Instituto Torcuato Di Tella; **La campana de cristal** [The Crystal Bell, on Channel 7, in late 1964]; **La Menesunda** [Mayhem], created in conjunction with Rubén Santantonín; **Suceso plástico** [Visual Event] in Montevideo, on July 25, 1965; and **El Batacazo** [The Long Shot], presented at the 1965 edition of the Premio Internacional Instituto Di Tella and then in New York, in February of 1966. These actions evidence the artist's interest in spectacle, media attention and the affirmation of freedom in the face of conventions.

"Minujín's presence in the media —which she herself has constructed over the years— has created a superficial image of both the artist and her work, and that has on occasion obscured the density and the complexity of her proposals. Nonetheless, the media attention that Minujín has received thanks to her charisma and contagious enthusiasm might have been a defense mechanism against the reigning cultural, institutional as well as political contexts at various moments in Argentina", states the curator.

Malba presents a reconstruction of *iRevuélquese y viva!* (an environment with chromed mattresses and wood), which Minujín created for the exhibition *Recordando al Di Tella* (*Remembering Di Tella*, Fundación San Telmo, 1985). In this work, Minujín investigated the possibilities offered by the use of the mattress. The exhibition also contains a reconstruction of her work **The Soft Gallery** (1973) with 200 new mattresses donated by Piero bedding company. All of these mattresses will later be donated to the Make-A-Wisk Foundation. Created in conjunction with Rubén Santantonín, the multi-sensorial environment *La Menesunda* [Mayhem] is also presented through film recordings, archival documents and the recreation of one of the sixteen original situations: the couple in bed. In the section dedicated to *El Batacazo*, the original environment is evoked by means of neon lights and projections of archival recordings.

Works on the mass media

In the late sixties, Minujín explored the intersection of art and the mass media on the basis of Marshall McLuhan's theories. In 1965, along with artists Allan Kaprow (USA) and Wolff Vostell (Germany), she conceived of the work *Three Country Happening*, a happening that would be presented at the same moment in each artist's place of

residence (Buenos Aires in the case of Minujín, New York in the case of Kaprow and Berlin in the case of Vostell). The artists would then reproduce the happenings created by the other two in their respective home cities. In Buenos Aires, Minujín enacted her happening *Simultaneidad en simultaneidad* [Simultaneity in Simultaneity], and followed the instructions of the other two artists, producing the fiction of simultaneity. The original records of that piece will be shown in this exhibition.

The use of the media and closed information circuits was also present in her works **Minuphone** (1967) and **Minucode** (1968). In *Minuphone*, Minujín created a telephone booth like the ones in the streets of New York, but in her version visitors were surprised by random special effects that created an unusual experience that the artist described as "non-alienated". At this exhibition, visitors will be able to go into the original booth.

A "social environment" in film, *Minucode* was presented at the Center for Inter-American Relations (now the Americas Society) in New York. It showed recordings of four cocktail parties attended by economists, politicians, and figures from the worlds of fashion and the arts who had answered to an open call that Minujín had published in several American newspapers.

"Minujín was interested in carrying out a sociological study on the effect of the mass media on a determined society, while also analyzing a tool key to her artistic strategy (and, I would venture to say, her artistic survival): the power of fame understood as a media strategy that makes it possible, performatively and on the level of facts, to change people's reality", explains the curator. At the exhibition in Malba, an environment with four of these films is presented.

The hippie years

In June of 1968, Marta Minujín presented **Importación-Exportación** [Import-Export] at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, with performers and colored lights, smoke, slides, films, music, fragrances, posters and a shop with hippie products imported from New York. Minujín had proposed the idea of "importing hippie culture" from New York and, later, exporting Buenos Aires culture to the United States, though that second phase of the project never came to pass.

"At the Institute, the work was structured around four galleries in which the viewer could delve into the music of Jimi Hendrix and Manal, breathe in sandalwood incense and even dance with the performers who moved to the beat of Hare Krishna. Visitors could go to a number of hippie boutiques and create their own psychedelic projections on the basis of films painted by Minujín on sheets of acrylic. All of this reflected Minujín's trip-like state; she was, at that time, very removed from the political events taking place in Buenos Aires and the world", says the curator Victoria Noorthoorn.

In this exhibition, a hippie lounge is recreated with original newspapers and magazines, outfits designed and worn by Marta Minujín during those years, film recordings, music and a psychedelic floor painted by the artist similar to the one originally presented at the Instituto Di Tella.

Performances

In the early seventies, in the context of the protests against the Vietnam war in New York and Washington, on the one hand, and the repression in Argentina, on the other, Minujín carried out her next major actions, both of which involved performers: **Kidnapping**, a combination of a happening and a fictional kidnapping, and **Imago Flowing**, a combination of an opera and a happening.

Minujín then returned to Buenos Aires, where she found a country in turmoil. The artist produced a series of works that addressed Latin American reality. Among them, ***La academia del fracaso*** (The Academy of Failure, 1975), which formulated a reflection on the inherently liberating possibilities of failure. To that end, the exhibition included a *triumphalist platform* where visitors could receive all sorts of cheers and then be vaccinated by a nurse against success. The vaccination was verified by a certificate that read "International certificate of vaccination against triumphalism". Viewers then met a second nurse "whose mission was to give the 'induction into the delirium of poverties'". Viewers could also attend lectures given by individual deemed failures.

This exhibition presents a journey around those performances from the seventies, with films, photographs and documents.

Latin American actions

In the seventies, Latin America was in the midst of one of the worst periods in its history: most of the countries in the region were under dictatorships and hence subject to widespread repression and violence. Starting in 1976, Minujín focused on the regional situation, producing several works that aimed to propose some alternatives to that context, while also affirming the importance of social ties and subjectivity. Among the most important works from this period are ***Comunicando con tierra*** [Communicating with Earth] and ***Autogeografía*** [Autogeography] (1976), presented at CayC, and ***Espi-Art*** [Spy-Art], at the Birger gallery in Buenos Aires in 1977.

Another work that dealt with the Latin American situation was ***El pago de la deuda externa con choclos*** [Paying the Foreign Debt with Ears of Corn], carried out by Minujín and Andy Warhol in 1985, after the return of democracy in Argentina. In this action, Minujín symbolically "paid" Warhol the Argentine foreign debt with ears of corn. The work was a photo-performance during which twelve photographs recording the exchange were taken. At Malba, three of those photographs will be shown.

Works involving mass participation

In 1978, Minujín was invited to the I Latin American Biennial of São Paulo at Parque Ibirapuera. In keeping with her concern about the political context, "Minujín constructed an obelisk of the same dimensions as the one in Buenos Aires, but reclining; it was possible to walk through this obelisk. With this action, the artist attempted to "displace a myth from one country to the next, altering the law of gravity by turning the vertical into the horizontal, and producing an oblique consciousness of the Obelisk as a symbol. It is not hard to discern the criticism that the artist was levelling against the situation in Argentina at the time, specifically against the military regime, which was verticalist to the extreme", says the curator.

With ***El Obelisco acostado*** [The Obelisk Lying Down], Minujín embarked on an immense body of works that would occupy her for several years. These projects were the results of her research into the demystification and the fall of universal as well as national myths. The material form of such works included drawings on paper, plaster and bronze sculptures, and monumental participatory projects.

The culmination of this body of work in which art was conceived as a way of strengthening social ties took place in December of 1983, one week after the return of democracy in Argentina (December 10). The work in question was the monumental and ambitious project ***El Partenón de libros*** [The Parthenon of Books], a structure in the shape of the Parthenon whose surface was covered with 20,000 books —many of which

ad been confiscated during the dictatorship—. The event ended with the distribution of the books to the expectant crowd and public libraries in the city.

This retrospective exhibition closes with the film records of that important action and of two other works involving mass participation which Minujín organized on 9 de Julio Avenue, **Operación perfume** [Operation Perfume], from 1987, and **Rayuelarte**, from 2009.

CV

Marta Minujín was born in Buenos Aires, where she lives and works, in 1941. She started making art at the age of twelve. She studied at the Escuela de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano while sitting in on classes at other art academies. Along with Alberto Greco, Jorge de la Vega, Pablo Suárez and others, she was involved in the heated local art scene from early on. She exhibited Informalist works at the Lirolay gallery in 1961. She has been granted a large number of fellowships, the first of which allowed her to reside in Paris in 1961. While there, she came into contact with Informalist artists and later with members of *Nouveau Réalisme* movement, as well as the critic Pierre Restany, whom she met in 1963. During her year in Paris, she created *La destrucción* [The Destruction], an action in which she destroyed her own artworks with the help of Christo, Lourdes Castro and Jean-Jacques Lebel, among others, whom she had invited to participate. Back in Buenos Aires, she was awarded the Premio Nacional Instituto Torcuato Di Tella 1964 for *iRevuélquese y viva!* [Wallow Around and Live!] (1964). In May of 1965, she and Rubén Santantonín presented *La Menesunda* [Mayhem] at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (ITDT). That year, she also participated in the Premio Internacional Torcuato Di Tella 1965 with *El Batacazo* [The Long Shot], which she later took to New York. In February of 1966, she presented that work at the Bianchini Gallery, one of whose owners was Leo Castelli. That is where she came into contact with the North American avant-garde; she met Andy Warhol, Allan Kaprow and others. While she was in New York, her work began to focus on the mass media; she worked on *Simultaneidad en simultaneidad* [Simultaneity in Simultaneity] (1966) a *Three Country Happening* planned in conjunction with Kaprow and Wolf Vostell. That piece involved an action to be carried out simultaneously in Buenos Aires, Berlin and New York. While not physically present, she participated in the *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS), an event in London that brought together artists and poets from the world over. That same year, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for the project *Minuphone*, which was actually produced in 1967 and presented at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York. In 1968, she presented *Minucode* at the Center for Inter-American Relations, also in New York. At the invitation of Jorge Romero Brest, she presented a work on the hippie movement entitled *Importación Exportación* [Import Export] at the Di Tella in Buenos Aires. In the 1970s, she divided her time between the United States and Argentina. She created an important series of happenings in New York and Washington, works like *Sound Happening* (1972), *Interpenning* (MoMA, 1972), *Kidnapping* (MoMA, 1973), *Four Presents* (Stefanotty Gallery, NY, 1974) and *Imago Flowing* (Central Park, NY, 1974), and others. In 1975, she presented *La academia del fracaso* [The Academy of Failure] at the CAyC (Centro de Arte y Comunicación) in Buenos Aires. In the following years, she created works that delved into Latin American consciousness, pieces such as *Comunicando con tierra* [Communicating with Earth] (CAYC, 1976) and *Arte agrícola en acción* [Agricultural Art in Action] (San Pablo, Mexico City and Buenos Aires, 1977-1979). At the end of the 1970s, she developed projects involving mass participation such as *El Obelisco acostado* [The Obelisk Lying Down] (San Pablo, 1978), *El Obelisco de pan dulce* [The Obelisk in Sweet Bread] (Buenos Aires, 1979), *La torre de pan de James Joyce* [The James Joyce Tower in Bread] (Dublin, 1980), *Carlos Gardel de fuego* [Carlos Gardel on

Fire] (Medellin, 1981), and *El Partenón de libros* [The Parthenon of Books] (Buenos Aires, 1983), a celebration of the first Christmas after the restoration of democracy in Argentina. All of these projects questioned the rigid nature of major myths, a problematic that she would address in her sculpture from the 1980s. In 1999, Jorge Glusberg curated the first anthological exhibition of her work, which was held at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. In recent years, her work has been exhibited in cities like New York, Stuttgart, Vienna, Los Angeles, Paris and Sao Paulo in the context of major international exhibitions and events. During 2010, her works were included in the following exhibitions:

Marta Minujín: Minucode. Americas Society, New York. From March 2 to June 12, 2010.

Imán: Nueva York. Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires. From July 24 to September 30, 2010.

Marta Minujín. Minucodes. Instalación filmica y environment social. Reconstrucción histórica de 1968. Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla. September 30, 2010.

The 29th São Paulo Biennial. Parque Ibirapuera, São Paulo. From September 25 to December 12, 2010.

Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968. The Brooklyn Museum, New York. From October 15, 2010, to January 9, 2011.

CV

Victoria Noorthoorn is an independent curator based in Buenos Aires. She received an M. A. in Art History from the University of Buenos Aires, and an M. A. in Curatorial Studies from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, New York. She has acted as Projects Coordinator of the International Program at MoMA, New York; Assistant Curator of Contemporary Exhibitions at The Drawing Center, New York; and Curator of Malba-Fundación Costantini in Buenos Aires. Since early 2004, she has worked on a freelance basis on various curatorial projects in Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Sao Paulo, Porto Alegre, Cali, Galicia and New York. She conceived and installed the permanent collection of the new branch of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Neuquén (2004); she was the Chief Curator of the *29th Pontevedra Art Biennial* (2006), in Spain; she co-curated the retrospective exhibition of Ricardo Garabito at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Buenos Aires (2007); she collaborated in the presentation of Argentine artist León Ferrari at the 52nd Venice Biennale –later recipient of a Golden Lion award (2007); and curated *Beginning With A Bang! From Confrontation to Intimacy. An Exhibition of Argentine Contemporary Artists 1960 / 2007* at the Americas Society, New York, among other projects. During 2008 she co-curated the *41 National Salon* in Cali, Colombia, an event that included 17 exhibitions by local curators and three major international exhibitions: *The Image in Question; Presentation and Representation; and Participation and Poetics*. Along with Chilean artist and curator Camilo Yáñez, she won the international competition to the Artistic Direction of the *7th Mercosur Biennial*, which took place in 2009 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Noorthoorn is currently preparing the next *11ème Biennale de Lyon*, to open in September 2011.

Related activities

A conversation between the artist and the curator

With Marta Minujín and Victoria Noorthoorn

Monday 29th November, 6 PM. Auditorium. Free admission.

Tickets will be given out one hour before the event begins.

Guided tours in Spanish

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