

Muntadas in 700 words

The Spanish artist Antoni Muntadas (born in Barcelona in 1942) has lived and worked in New York since 1971. He is known for his research projects examining the influence of media and the image in a country or period's political and social context, such as the relationship between the public and private or the political image created through architecture or censorship. He works with various types of media such as photography, film and artists' books, as well as public advertisements and interventions in a city's architecture. He has received several awards for his work, among others from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Spanish National Award for the Plastic Arts in 2009 (premio Velázquez de las Artes Plásticas). He has also worked for decades as a visiting professor at several educational institutions all over the world. He currently has a permanent teaching post at MIT in Cambridge, in the hope of establishing a dialogue between professionals from different sectors.

After Muntadas' first solo exhibitions in Barcelona and New York in the early Seventies, he exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1976, and then travelled directly to Antwerp for his solo exhibition at the ICC. Thirty-five years later, two of the three key works from this exhibition were finally included in the M HKA's collection along with a few other recent acquisitions to provide a more complete picture of the complexity of the oeuvre.

Besides the M HKA, Muntadas' work features in art collections all over the world, from the MOMA in New York to the Reina Sofia in Madrid. He exhibited his work for a second time at the 51st Venice Art Biennale in 2005 and was present at the VI and X editions of Documenta in Kassel (1977 and 1997), the Whitney Biennial of American Art (1991) and more recently at the NCCA in Moscow (2012).

Antoni Muntadas grew up in Spain under the Franco regime. He began his career as a painter, but soon decided that if he wanted to stand out as an artist at the centre of society the art of painting was too passive for him. So he first began with experiments that initially focused on exploring the world of the senses. However, his actions soon became increasingly inspired by the worldly and the political. In 1972 he made the front page of a newspaper showing Franco in a close-up slowly sink into water and recorded it on Super 8 film (*La Vanguardia, Vilanova de la Roca, 1972*).

Despite his move to New York in 1971 he retained close ties with Spain. Between 1973 and 1975 he was a member of the Grup de Treball, an artistic group from Catalonia that mainly protested against the oppressive Spanish regime in political actions, words and music. Muntadas departed from the group after Franco's death in 1975, but was left with a lifelong debt to society. He considers the continuous social research that characterises each of his works to be his duty as an artist, as he is convinced that artistic creativity must coincide with the reality we live in. As a socio-cultural researcher he wants to try and translate and clarify the codes in the stream of images we receive every day so that he himself becomes a catalyst. He does this in several long-running projects, often in collaboration with researchers from other branches such as anthropology or linguistics. One of his largest and longest running projects is the *On Translation series*, a collection of projects which, in spite of their different dates, geographic locations and subjects, all began with an interest in finding out how information is filtered and interpreted through a separate event, location or system such as a museum or an interview, or even a round of applause or the banking system. His long-running sub-project *On Translation: Warning*, is a collection of architectural interventions and prints with the slogan *Warning: perception requires involvement*. A sentence that is intended to warn us about the invisible mechanisms hidden behind the production and reception of media, politics, advertising and other interventions in our daily life, but also calls for personal participation and involvement.

The many projects related to power and politics culminate in his research about stadiums, which he also calls 'places of spectacle'. The control that such places exert over their audience has been used for centuries by politicians and other charismatic leaders to arouse a feeling of relaxation in people while all the time their shackles are being tightened. Muntadas exposes these mechanisms by documenting and photographing them.

As always he makes a conscious decision not to preach, but leaves it to the art critic and other intellectual writers to further explore and explain the projects he initiates. In his opinion each generation of artists must also bring forth a generation of writers and critics so that the meaning of production is not lost in translation over time, but is expanded. To encourage and make further criticism and research possible he often opens up the archives of his research projects through presentations or books so that his presentation and conclusions don't have to stand alone, after sometimes having collected material on one specific issue for ten years.