

Raising Awareness

Moritz Kung

If art has an aim or function, then it is to make us aware of something: beauty (*l'art pour l'art*), conflicts (personal or political), contradictions (formal or ideological), circumstances (spatial or social), interconnections (cultural or historical) and ultimately, perhaps, universality. An artist might formulate this with grand gestures or a humble voice. However, if art has an aim—and I admit this isn't necessarily a precondition—or a meaning—and there is undoubtedly quite a bit of art that has none at all—then we might not be aware of its existence, at least initially. Having arrived at this point, by leaps and bounds and shortcuts galore, one might ask why such a thing as art even exists. Well, the answer is in the title: to raise awareness.

By becoming aware of something (often seemingly insignificant), we become more aware of a greater whole. Art, the artwork or the art form is, so to speak, a vehicle within a process of perceiving, seeing, learning, understanding, interpreting, contextualising... in short, the production of meaning. But this doesn't mean that we instantly understand art, or recognise art as such. On the contrary, becoming aware of (an artwork or an art form) primarily implies something more fundamental: becoming engaged. So, how does one become engaged with art?

One might think that this is a draining and wearisome process, and it certainly is, for nothing is given. But allow me to posit a teasing, generous and illustrative case study that may shed light on the underlying intentions of Mariona Moncunill's still-young oeuvre. Some years ago in Antwerp, the Welsh artist Cerith Wyn Evans—known, among other things, for his neon light texts—presented a nine-meter-long sentence in a narrow glass-covered passageway, set in mirrored letters which only became legible when reflected on the glass surface. This sentence, taken from an essay written by Stephen Pfohl on the works of French theoretician and filmmaker Guy Debord, read, "Permit yourself to drift from what you are reading at this very moment into another situation... Imagine a situation that, in all likelihood, you've never been in."

Here we find three tactics related to awareness and engagement: a) the sentence itself functions as a polite request to shake off certain conventions in order to open the door to new and as-yet-unknown codes or imaginative territories; b) the meaning of the work is revealed only through a third component, the transparency of the glass; and c) the artist implies his own awareness by using a text by another author. The works and methodology of Mariona Moncunill seem to follow a similar path.

So far she has, in an unspectacular yet consistent way, repeatedly shown and pointed out "incidents" that are related to everyday circumstances in specific spatial contexts. Lately, her works offer direct proof of her own awareness, as we see in several cases:

- A documentary film by way of being an "institutional critique", featuring the disassembly of an existing white cube spatial display for so-called emerging artists and its temporary conversion into a sculpture (*Requalificació del cub* [Reclassification of the Cube], Espai Cub – La Capella, Barcelona, 2009);

- A cardboard construction kit for assembling a three-dimensional model of the Pirenarium theme park's historic main building, as an attempt to raise awareness of local heritage (*La reducció de las*

dimensiones físicas resulta en una multiplicación de las propiedades ideológicas, [The reduction of physical dimensions results in a multiplication of ideological properties], Provincial Council of Huesca, 2012);

- A series of photographs and a catalogue on the subject of employee canteens, kitchens or lounges at seven cultural institutions in Barcelona, with a layout, texts and images arranged to closely resemble a typical interior design magazine, in order to work out the employer's policy (*Menjadors* [Dining Rooms], Miró Foundation – Espai 13, Barcelona, 2012);

- A set of museological interventions showing artwork labels, audio guides, guided tours, catalogues, invitations, information sheets and signage elements, all of which articulate certain narratives by explaining aspects of the artist's position on her own practice (*Un statement* [A Statement], Galeria sis, Sabadell, 2012);

In contrast to these restrained yet efficient interventions, the result of her latest production, *Text on Snow on the Botanical Garden*, seems quite prolific: 220 photographs, 90 drawings, a performative act and a video documentary. However, the work remains true to the artist's modus operandi: raising awareness. What the piece is about—as often happens in her work—is clearly explained in the title: the small labels displaying information about the collected flora in a botanical garden are photographed when covered with snow and therefore temporarily invisible.

With her inimitable observations of the environment, her pertinent investigations and her visual strategies, Mariona Moncunill has become a significant agent in a prominent group of Spanish conceptual woman artists—Lara Almarcegui, Luz Broto, Esther Ferrer, Dora Garcia, Mainer López, Itziar Okariz, Alex Reynolds, Montserrat Soto—who in recent years have impressively enriched and broadened the contemporary art landscape of this country.